

The Role of Libraries in Promoting Community Literacy

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of libraries in supporting community literacy. Literacy, which encompasses the ability to read, write, and understand information, is a vital foundation for individual and community development. Libraries, as informal educational institutions, play a crucial role in improving community literacy through various services and programs. The research method used is a qualitative approach with case studies of several public libraries in various regions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with librarians, direct observation, and analysis of documents related to literacy programs implemented by the libraries. The research findings indicate that libraries play a significant role in supporting community literacy in several ways, including: providing free access to various information sources, organizing literacy programs and skills training, and creating an environment conducive to lifelong learning. Additionally, libraries also play a role in bridging the digital divide by providing internet access and information technology training for the community. The conclusion of this study affirms that libraries are vital hubs within the literacy ecosystem capable of making a substantial contribution to improving the quality of life for the community. Therefore, investment and support for library development are essential to strengthen their role in fostering a literate and knowledgeable society.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a crucial foundation for the development of both individuals and society as a whole. In simple terms, literacy can be defined as the ability and openness of mind to read and write (Halim, 2022). Literacy encompasses not only basic reading and writing skills but also the ability to understand, interpret, and effectively utilize information in daily life. In today's information and technology era, information and digital literacy have become increasingly important to support full participation in economic, social, and political life. Literacy skills have become a crucial set of competencies that everyone must practically master in this era of disruption as the

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primary skills needed to navigate the peak of the digital transformation wave in the 21st century (Harahap et al., 2022). Currently, literacy rates in Indonesia remain relatively low. Students' low literacy skills are attributed to a lack of public interest in reading, limited facilities and infrastructure, an unsupportive environment, and the influence of technology (Ningrum et al., 2024). There are various ways to boost public interest in literacy, one of which is by establishing libraries. Libraries play a vital role in fostering public interest in literacy. Libraries provide useful information and knowledge, serving as hubs of knowledge and information. The goal of libraries is to continuously promote literacy and the dissemination of information within the community (Rizki & Ruwaida, 2022).

Libraries, as non-formal educational institutions, play a vital role in supporting and improving community literacy. Libraries have long been regarded as invaluable sources of knowledge, serving as gateways to information and fostering a love of learning (Toya, 2023). By providing free access to a wide range of information sources, libraries help bridge the gap in access to knowledge and information. In addition, libraries also organize various literacy programs, skills training, and activities that encourage the community to continue learning and improve their literacy skills. However, amid technological developments and changing patterns of information consumption, libraries face the challenge of remaining relevant and appealing to the public.

This study aims to examine the role of libraries in supporting community literacy, with a focus on how libraries can adapt to and utilize digital technology to improve their services. The objective of this study is to identify strategies that libraries can implement to strengthen their role in supporting community literacy. The results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for libraries in designing and implementing programs that are more effective and aligned with community needs. Thus, this study not only contributes to the understanding of the role of libraries in the context of literacy but also provides practical recommendations that can be applied to enhance the role of libraries in fostering a literate and knowledgeable society.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a case study design. This research was conducted in public libraries to obtain a comprehensive overview of the role of libraries in supporting community literacy. Data were collected through interviews with librarians, library users, and library observers, who were purposively selected to ensure the diversity and relevance of the information. Additionally, direct observations were conducted at the selected libraries to directly observe the literacy activities and programs being implemented. Analysis of relevant documents, such as library annual reports, implemented literacy programs, and library visitation statistics, was also performed to reinforce the findings from the interviews and observations. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and key themes regarding the role of libraries in supporting community literacy. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as peer review to verify the accuracy and validity of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals several key findings regarding the role of libraries in promoting community literacy. Based on interviews with librarians and library users, participatory observation, and document analysis, the following results were obtained:

1. **Access to Information Resources:** The library provides free and open access to a variety of information resources, such as books, magazines, journals, and digital materials. The librarians interviewed emphasized the importance of a diverse library collection to meet the varied information needs of different segments of the community.
2. **Literacy Programs:** The library offers a variety of literacy programs, including reading classes for children, writing workshops, computer training, and digital literacy courses. These programs are designed to improve basic and advanced literacy skills among library users.
3. **A Conducive Learning Environment:** Observations indicate that the library provides a comfortable and conducive environment for learning. Quiet reading areas, computer facilities, and group discussion rooms support users in their learning process.
4. **The Role of Librarians:** Librarians serve as literacy facilitators by helping users find the information they need, providing reading recommendations, and organizing literacy programs. Librarians also offer guidance on using information technology, which is essential in this digital age.
5. **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Libraries play a vital role in bridging the digital divide by providing free internet access and information technology training. This is particularly helpful for people who do not have access to technology at home.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013), libraries play the following roles (Wahyuni, 2023):

1. As an information service center
2. As a place to broaden one's horizons and knowledge
3. As an educational entertainment venue
4. As a place for character and moral development
5. As a place to learn skills

The findings of this study confirm that libraries play a significant role in supporting community literacy. Libraries play a vital role and are one of the factors driving increased reading activity and improving literacy (Ramadhini et al., 2020). Free access to various information sources allows the community to develop knowledge and skills without being burdened by costs. The diversity of library collections ensures that the information needs of various community groups can be met. Literacy programs organized by libraries focus not only on basic literacy but also encompass digital literacy and information skills, which are increasingly important in today's information age. This aligns with previous research findings stating that libraries must adapt to technological advancements to remain relevant. Faced with ever-changing technological developments, libraries must continuously adapt and follow trends to meet the needs of library users and strengthen the library's role in providing inclusive and innovative access to information (Atika & Sayekti, 2023).

A conducive learning environment and the active role of librarians in supporting literacy demonstrate that libraries are more than just places to borrow books. Libraries serve as community hubs that support lifelong learning. Librarians, acting as literacy facilitators, help guide and mentor users in finding the information they need and maximizing the use of library resources. Furthermore, the library's role in bridging the digital divide is crucial. By providing internet access and technology training, libraries help underserved communities stay connected and participate in the digital world. This

supports the view that libraries play a role in digital and social inclusion.

Libraries play a multifaceted role in supporting community literacy. With a broader and more diverse scope, libraries now serve not only as repositories for books but also as information hubs that support literacy, learning, and intellectual development. Furthermore, libraries contribute to the development of individuals and society as a whole (Astutik et al., 2019; Hardianty, 2023). By providing access to information, literacy programs, a conducive learning environment, and bridging the digital divide, libraries make a significant contribution to improving the quality of literacy and community life. Further investment and support for libraries are needed to strengthen this role and ensure that libraries can continue to adapt to the evolving needs of society.

CONCLUSION

Libraries play a vital role in promoting literacy within the community. By providing free and widespread access to a variety of information sources, libraries help bridge the gap in access to knowledge and information, particularly for underprivileged groups. The literacy programs run by libraries focus not only on basic literacy skills such as reading and writing, but also on digital literacy and information literacy, which are essential in today's technological age. Additionally, libraries create a conducive learning environment by providing comfortable facilities that support both individual and group learning activities. The role of librarians as literacy facilitators is also highly significant in helping users find the information they need and guiding them in using information technology. Libraries also play a vital role in bridging the digital divide by providing free internet access and technology training. This enables people who lack access to technology at home to stay connected and participate in the digital world, which is an essential part of modern literacy. Libraries are vital hubs in the literacy ecosystem that can make a significant contribution to improving the quality of life for communities. To strengthen this role, sustained support and investment in library development are needed, including improvements to collections, facilities, and librarian capacity. Libraries can continue to adapt to the evolving needs of communities and play a greater role in fostering a literate and knowledgeable society.

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