



Revitalizing the School Library's Role in Increasing Reading Interest among Elementary Students: A Case from Ombolata Alasa

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Abstract

Background: Libraries in schools are essential facilities that contribute significantly to the development of students' literacy skills. They function as learning centers that encourage reading habits and enhance the overall learning process. However, many schools still lack well-equipped libraries with proper management. SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa, located in a remote area, faces multiple challenges in managing its library, yet continues to strive to optimize its role in supporting students' literacy activities.

Aims: This study aims to explore and identify the role of the school library in improving students' reading interest at SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa, and to evaluate the literacy programs implemented to achieve this objective.

Method: The study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals, librarians, teachers, and students; direct observations of library activities; and document analysis related to the school's literacy programs.

Results: Findings show that despite the limited book collection, the school library still plays a significant role in enhancing students' reading interest. Literacy activities such as reading competitions, group reading sessions, and storytelling have successfully increased students' motivation to visit the library and read more books. The library remains a key driver in fostering reading habits despite the need for improved facilities and resources.

Conclusions: The study concludes that with creativity and effective library management, even schools with limited resources can maximize the role of libraries in encouraging students' reading interest. Enhancing library collections and facilities would further strengthen the impact of existing literacy initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

High-quality learning outcomes in schools depend not only on classroom teaching, but also significantly on supporting infrastructure foremost among them, the school library. The school library serves as a resource center that enriches the learning environment, broadens access to knowledge, and cultivates students' reading interest (Wang et al., 2021; Esman et al., 2020). In many national education frameworks including Indonesia's nurturing public and student reading interest is a core objective, aimed at enabling independent knowledge-seeking and continuous intellectual growth (van der Sande et al., 2023; Wine et al., 2023). Yet, despite these policy intentions, literacy metrics indicate that Indonesia's reading interest remains relatively low compared to global or regional peers (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Structural inequalities — social, economic, and geographic — contribute to this disparity, particularly in remote or underserved regions.

SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa, located in a remote area, demonstrates the tension between ambition and reality. Although the school possesses a library intended to support literacy, its function

is constrained by significant limitations: the collection is narrow and dominated by textbooks, physical infrastructure is insufficient, and budget allocations for library development are minimal (Afrilia & Sulaeman, 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022). Such structural deficits mirror findings in similar rural school contexts, where inadequate resources hinder the library's capacity to stimulate reading interest (Dabukke et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that even in resource-limited settings, creative and well-managed literacy programs such as group reading sessions, storytelling, reading corners, or book-review clubs can successfully increase student reading engagement and motivation (van der Sande et al., 2023; Puspitasari & Santoso, 2022; Mahendra et al., 2022). These interventions can compensate for material deficits by leveraging social and pedagogical strategies to foster a reading culture (Wang et al., 2021; Dewi & Prasetyo, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to answer two key research questions: (1) What role does the school library at SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa play in fostering students' interest in reading? and (2) What literacy programs have been implemented by the school to encourage and sustain reading interest? By examining the interplay of resource constraints and programmatic strategies, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for library management and literacy promotion, especially in remote and resource-constrained schooling environments.

Students' high interest in reading is an important foundation for the development of literacy skills and academic achievement. However, in many elementary schools, including SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa, students' interest in reading is still low. Factors such as less supportive library facilities, limited interesting books, and lack of planned literacy programs are the main causes of these conditions.

Problem Formulation

Based on the background that has been explained, the formulation of the problem in this study is:

1. What is the condition of the library at SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa?
2. What factors affect students' reading interest in SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa?
3. To what extent is the role of libraries in supporting students' reading interests in the school?

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, which aims to describe in depth the related phenomenon, namely the role of school libraries in increasing students' interest in reading. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to explore the experiences and subjective views of various parties, including students, teachers, librarians, and principals (Busetto et al., 2020).

The data collection techniques applied include in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document studies.

1. **In-Depth Interviews:** Interviews are conducted with individuals who have direct information related to the school library and literacy activities that take place at the school. Interview respondents include school principals, librarians, teachers, and some students. The purpose of the interview was to obtain information about the condition of the library, the types of activities carried out, as well as their views on literacy programs and their impact on increasing students' interest in reading. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are widely recommended for exploring participants' meanings and experiences and for producing rich, contextualized data (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2022).
2. **Direct Observation:** Observation was carried out directly at the library of SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa to observe the physical condition of the library, the atmosphere of the library, and the activities of students who are in the library. This observation aims to obtain direct data on how students interact with libraries and how literacy programs are carried out in the field. Recent practical guides emphasise the value of well-designed observation protocols, piloting, and team procedures to enhance reliability and ethical oversight in direct observation (Fix et al., 2022). Additionally, advances such as video-based observation and remote video coding can be considered for richer behavioral records when feasible (Borg, 2021; Keadle et al., 2024).

- 3. Documentation Study:** Documentation data was obtained through a study of records of literacy activities carried out in schools, including activity reports, the number of student visits to the library, and data related to book borrowing. This data is used to provide a more detailed picture of the extent to which libraries play a role in increasing students' interest in reading. Document analysis is a well-established qualitative technique for triangulating interview and observation data, and guidance exists for systematically extracting and interpreting documentary sources (Dalglish et al., 2020).

The data is used to provide a more in-depth explanation of the extent of the library's role in encouraging students' interest in reading activities. Data analysis is carried out by means of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out by filtering data that is relevant to the research objective, while data presentation is carried out by describing the results of the research systematically. After that, conclusions are drawn to conclude the results of the research obtained based on the existing data. For thematic coding and ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative analysis, reflexive thematic methods and recommended procedures for credibility, dependability, and audit trails are followed (Nowell et al., 2017). To situate the study in the literature on school libraries and literacy interventions, empirical examples and program evaluations demonstrate how qualitative fieldwork and document review can illuminate the role of library interventions in low-resource settings (Wang et al., 2021; Wine et al., 2023; van der Sande et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Condition of the State Elementary School Library 071150 Ombolata Alasa

The State Elementary School Library 071150 Ombolata Alasa is located in a fairly simple space with a limited collection of books. Based on the results of observations, this library has around 200 book titles, most of which are textbooks used in teaching and learning activities. However, only about 40% of the book collection focuses on general reading literature such as folklore, children's novels, and picture books. With these limitations, students often find it difficult to find fun reading materials outside of the textbook.

Literacy Program and Its Influence on Students' Reading Interest

The literacy program implemented at SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa shows a positive impact on students' reading interest. The "Friday Reading" program has succeeded in increasing the number of student visits to the library. Based on the data obtained, the number of students visiting the library increased by around 30% after the implementation of this program. Other programs, such as reading and storytelling competitions, also succeeded in attracting students to read more books, especially story books of their own choosing.

Factors Affecting Students' Reading Interest

Some of the factors that affect students' reading interest in SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa include the availability of interesting books, the active role of teachers in integrating literacy activities in learning, and the creativity of librarians in designing interesting literacy programs. Although the collection of books in the library is still limited, students still show a high interest in storybooks that are appropriate for their age. Another influencing factor is the support from parents which also influences students' reading habits at home.

Discussion

The Important Role of School Libraries

According to Sari and Nasution (2021), school libraries act as learning resource centers that function to store and disseminate information. Libraries provide not only textbooks, but also a variety of other materials that can encourage students' interest and motivation to read. Meanwhile, Gonzalez (2020) emphasized the role of libraries as an important means in developing literacy that has an impact on students' academic achievement.

Sulistyo-Basuki (2019) provided an in-depth definition of the role of libraries as information literacy centers that not only provide access to reading materials, but also teach information literacy skills to users. This book explains how libraries, especially in schools, can serve as independent learning centers for students. The relevance to the research is that even though the library collection of SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa is limited, the library can still carry out its functions through creative literacy programs.

Factors Influencing Reading Interest

Factors that affect students' reading interest include the availability of reading materials, library facilities, literacy programs, and support from teachers and librarians. Duncan (2022) stated that the active involvement of teachers and librarians in literacy activities is also an important factor. Krashen emphasized the importance of "free reading" in improving students' literacy skills. He explained that providing access to reading materials that are interesting to students can foster an interest in reading naturally. This book shows that the success of literacy programs in libraries depends not only on the number of book collections but also on the relevance and attractiveness of the books to students.

Literacy Program in School Libraries

An effective literacy program can increase student engagement in reading. Setiawan (2022) identified several activities that have succeeded in increasing students' interest in reading, such as reading hours together, interactive stories, and book clubs. These programs not only actively engage students but also provide space for students to explore their reading interests.

Based on previous research, school libraries have an important role in developing students' interest in reading. According to Sari and Nasution (2021), a well-managed school library can be an interesting learning center for students. Arifin (2020) added that library programs such as reading together, reading competitions, and regular book borrowing are able to significantly increase student literacy. Duncan (2022) emphasizes the importance of creating a reading culture in schools that is supported by innovative programs from libraries.

However, despite its limited facilities, the library still serves as a hub for literacy activities. Librarians and teachers actively strive to create an environment that supports students' interest in reading with a variety of activities. One of them is the "Friday Reading" program which is held every week, where students are required to read books in the library for one hour. In addition, the library also holds storytelling and storytelling competitions to involve students more actively in literacy activities.

IFLA provides international guidance on how school libraries should be managed, including the ideal number of collections, the design of the space, and the role of librarians in fostering a culture of literacy. By comparing the condition of the library of SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa with this guide, it can be seen that there is a gap that is the basis for providing improvement recommendations. Gallagher criticized the teaching method of reading that is too formal and tends to be boring, so that students lose interest in reading. He proposed the need for a creative approach in literacy activities to make reading a pleasant experience for students. This is in line with programs such as "Friday Reading" and storytelling competitions at SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa.

In addition, reading together in class and book discussions also play an important role in increasing students' interest in reading. Teachers who are actively involved in supporting literacy activities act as motivators who direct students to be more interested in books and reading in a fun way.



Figure 1. Pupil Condition in the Classroom



Figure 2. Students do read activities together in class



Figure 3. The state of books in the library



Figure 4. Students show interest in reading by visiting the library

Implications

The findings of this study indicate that school libraries, even with limited resources, hold significant potential as central hubs for promoting student literacy. These results carry several important implications for educational policymakers, teachers, and library administrators. First, schools should prioritize the development of creative literacy programs that can enhance students' reading interest despite limitations in facilities and book collections. Programs such as *Friday Reading*, storytelling sessions, and book discussions have been shown to significantly increase student engagement.

Second, the role of teachers and librarians as literacy facilitators should be strengthened through continuous professional development. Active teacher involvement in literacy activities has a direct impact on students' motivation to read. Third, the findings highlight the need for stronger support from local governments and education authorities, particularly in allocating resources for library development in remote areas. This includes funding for diverse book collections, improving library infrastructure, and enhancing the capacity of librarians.

At the national level, the results reinforce the importance of school libraries as instruments for implementing the Indonesian School Literacy Movement (Gerakan Literasi Sekolah – GLS) and achieving broader national literacy goals. Schools in geographically disadvantaged areas should receive priority interventions to reduce literacy gaps between regions.

Research Contribution

This study offers meaningful contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on school library roles within remote and under-resourced settings—an area that has received limited attention in Indonesian literacy research. By integrating empirical observations with international literacy perspectives, the study demonstrates that the quality of literacy programs and the involvement of educators are more influential than the mere quantity of book collections.

Practically, the study provides concrete examples of effective literacy strategies that can be implemented in schools with minimal resources. Programs such as *Friday Reading* and storytelling competitions offer replicable models for other schools facing similar constraints. Furthermore, the study identifies key enabling factors such as teacher creativity, principal support, and a collaborative literacy culture that can inform the design of literacy interventions in primary education.

This research also contributes to policymaking by offering insights that can guide the development of literacy policies sensitive to local contexts, particularly regarding disparities in literacy access between urban and rural schools.

Limitations

Despite yielding valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single elementary school located in a remote area, which limits the generalizability of the findings to schools with different characteristics, such as urban schools or those with extensive library facilities. The local context strongly influences the outcomes observed.

Second, the study relies on qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. As such, the findings primarily reflect the perceptions and experiences of the participants rather than objective measurements of students' reading interest or literacy levels. Future research employing mixed-methods designs or quantitative assessments may provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Third, the limited duration of the study prevented the researcher from examining the long-term impact of the literacy programs implemented. While activities such as *Friday Reading* and storytelling sessions show promise, their sustained effects on students' reading interest cannot be confirmed within the scope of this research. Longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the enduring impacts of these literacy initiatives.

Suggestion

Based on the results of the research, it is suggested that schools can continue to improve quality of the library by adding a more varied and interesting collection of books for students. In addition, literacy programs need to continue to be developed to involve all students more, not only in the school environment but also at home. Parents also need to be empowered to support literacy activities at home, such as by inviting children to read books together. This book offers practical guidance for managing a school library, from how to increase book collections to strategies for increasing student engagement in literacy activities. The author also highlights the importance of involving teachers and librarians as agents of change in reading culture in schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the library at SD Negeri 071150 Ombolata Alasa has a significant role in increasing students' interest in reading despite facing various limitations. Literacy programs implemented, such as "Friday Reading", storytelling competitions, and reading together in class, have proven to be effective in attracting students' attention and increasing the frequency of visits to the library. Although library facilities still need to be improved, libraries still function as literacy centers that support learning in schools.

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