

The Role of School Libraries as a Support for Learning: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

School libraries are one of the learning resources that play an important role in supporting the learning process, developing literacy, and fostering students' reading culture. The existence of school libraries is not only intended as a place for storing book collections but also as an information center, a learning resource center, and a facility that supports independent learning. This paper aims to examine the role of school libraries as a support for learning, their forms of utilization in learning activities, and the inhibiting factors that affect the optimization of libraries in schools. The method used is library research by examining books, journal articles, and previous research findings relevant to the utilization of school libraries. The results of the review indicate that school libraries play a role in increasing reading interest, expanding students' access to learning resources, supporting learning activities, and assisting teachers and students in obtaining relevant information. However, the utilization of libraries still faces several obstacles, such as limited access to updated collections, a lack of library management personnel, low student visitation interest, inadequate facilities, and the suboptimal integration of libraries into learning activities. Therefore, optimizing school libraries needs to be carried out through collection renewal, professional library management, the provision of comfortable facilities, school literacy programs, and collaboration among librarians, teachers, and school stakeholders. This review emphasizes that school libraries can serve as effective supports for learning when they are managed systematically and integrated with students' learning needs.

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Introduction

Literacy skills and access to learning resources are important aspects in supporting the quality of learning in schools. In the Indonesian context, students' literacy challenges remain a serious concern. The PISA 2022 results show that only about 25% of Indonesian students reached Level 2 or higher in reading literacy, far below the OECD average of 74% (OECD, 2023). These data indicate that schools need to strengthen the literacy ecosystem and provide learning resources that are accessible, relevant, and supportive of students' learning activities.

One facility that can support the strengthening of literacy and learning is the school library. The library does not only function as a place for storing book collections but also as a learning resource center, an information center, and an academic space that helps students obtain reading materials, references, and information relevant to their learning needs. The IFLA School Library Manifesto emphasizes that school libraries play a role in improving the teaching and learning process through collections, professional services, active collaboration, literacy, critical thinking, and inclusive education (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2021). Thus, the school library needs to be understood as an integral part of the learning system, rather than merely a complementary facility.

The role of the school library is increasingly important because classroom learning often has limitations in terms of time, resources, and space for exploration. Through the library, students can expand their knowledge beyond the material delivered by teachers, develop reading habits, search for information, and build independent learning skills. Eskha (2018) emphasizes that libraries serve as learning resources because they provide information, reading materials, and facilities that can support the educational process. The study by Trijatmiko, Wedi, and Ulfa (2019) also shows that school libraries can be utilized as learning resources that support learning activities in elementary schools.

Recent studies also show that the presence of libraries and adequate library personnel can be associated with students' learning achievement. Wine, Pribesh, Kimmel, Dickinson, and Church (2023) found that students in schools with full-time librarians achieved higher reading and mathematics scores than students in schools without full-time librarians. These findings strengthen the view that school libraries not only support reading interest but also contribute to the learning process through the availability of collections, information services, and professional support for both students and teachers.

However, the utilization of school libraries as a support for learning still faces various obstacles. Common obstacles include limited access to updated collections, a lack of library management personnel, inadequate facilities, low student visitation interest, and the suboptimal integration of libraries into learning activities. In the Indonesian context, the National Library recorded the national Community Literacy Development Index (IPLM) in 2024 at 73.52. This achievement indicates positive progress in literacy development, yet it also emphasizes the importance of continuously strengthening library services and access to literacy (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2024).

Based on the above explanation, this review is important to examine the role of school libraries as a support for learning, their forms of utilization in learning activities, and the factors that hinder the optimization of libraries in schools. The focus of this review is not only to explain the importance of libraries in general but also to emphasize how libraries can be managed and utilized more effectively so that they truly support the learning process, the development of reading interest, and students' independent learning.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine the role of school libraries as a support for learning through a literature review. Specifically, this review is directed at explaining the function of libraries as learning resources, identifying the inhibiting factors in the utilization of school libraries, and formulating strategies for optimizing libraries so that they become more integrated with learning activities.

Method

This study employed a library research method. This method was selected because the study aimed to examine, analyze, and synthesize various relevant literature on the role of school libraries as a support for learning. A literature review can be used as a research method when it is conducted systematically and transparently, and when it aims to map existing knowledge, identify patterns of findings, and formulate new directions of understanding from various relevant academic sources (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, this review does not merely summarize the literature but also synthesizes findings related to the role of libraries, barriers to their utilization, and strategies for optimizing school libraries.

The data sources in this study consisted of journal articles, academic books, policy documents, institutional reports, and scientific publications discussing school libraries, learning resources, reading interest, literacy, and the utilization of libraries in the learning process. The literature analyzed in this review consisted of 10 main sources selected based on their relevance to the research focus. These sources included national journal articles, international journal articles, policy documents, institutional reports, and international guidelines on school libraries. The number of sources may be adjusted if the author adds or removes literature in the final reference list.

The inclusion criteria for selecting the literature included: (1) discussing the role of school libraries as learning resources or as a support for learning; (2) discussing the utilization of libraries in improving students' reading interest, literacy, or independent learning; (3) containing inhibiting factors or strategies for optimizing school libraries; (4) being published within the last 10 years, except for policy documents that remain relevant; and (5) originating from academic sources or official institutions that can be academically justified. The exclusion criteria included: (1) popular sources without an academic basis; (2) blog posts or personal web pages that cannot be verified; (3) sources that do not discuss the context of school libraries or learning; and (4) literature that only presents general definitions without contributing to the focus of the review. The establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria is necessary to ensure that the literature selection process is more transparent, focused, and scientifically traceable (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The data collection procedure was carried out in several stages. First, the researcher determined the focus of the review, namely the role of school libraries as a support for learning. Second, the researcher searched for literature using keywords such as school library, learning resources, students' reading interest, school literacy, library utilization, school library, learning resources, and student literacy. Third, the researcher read the titles, abstracts, and contents of the literature to assess the suitability of each source with the focus of the review. Fourth, literature that met the criteria was selected as the main source for analysis. Fifth, the researcher recorded important information from each source, including the purpose of the study, main findings, inhibiting factors, and recommendations for optimizing school libraries. These stages are in line with the principles of systematic literature reviews, which emphasize an explicit process of searching, selecting, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing literature (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

To ensure that the literature selection process could be traced, the researcher applied a simple selection flow consisting of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and determination of final sources. The principle of transparency in reporting the literature selection process is important so that readers can understand how sources were selected and why certain sources were used in the synthesis of the review. Although PRISMA 2020 was primarily developed for reporting systematic reviews, its principles concerning transparency in the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of sources can be used as a general reference to clarify the literature selection process (Page et al., 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis. Each selected piece of literature was read in depth to identify main ideas and recurring findings. Data from the literature

were then grouped into several main themes, namely: (1) the role of school libraries as learning resources; (2) the role of libraries in increasing students' reading interest and literacy; (3) barriers to the utilization of school libraries; and (4) strategies for optimizing libraries in supporting learning. Thematic analysis was used because it enables researchers to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret patterns of meaning emerging from various data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The synthesis process was conducted narratively. The researcher did not only summarize the content of the literature but also compared and connected various findings to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the role of school libraries in learning. The synthesis was carried out by comparing similarities and differences among findings, identifying common patterns, determining the most frequently occurring inhibiting factors, and formulating strategies for optimizing school libraries. Through this procedure, this review is expected to provide a systematic, traceable, and relevant overview of how school libraries can function as a support for learning.

Results

Inhibiting Factors in the Utilization of School Libraries in Learning

The results of the review indicate that the utilization of school libraries in supporting learning still faces several obstacles. These obstacles include a lack of library management personnel, the absence of a clear library management structure, limited access to updated reading collections, inadequate reading room facilities, and the low level of integration between library activities and classroom learning processes. This condition has caused school libraries to function less fully as active, attractive, and relevant learning spaces for students' needs.

Limited collections are also an important factor influencing students' interest in using the library. Collections that are outdated, insufficiently varied, or not aligned with learning needs may reduce students' interest in visiting the library. In addition, the absence of library visit programs, visit cards, or structured literacy activities makes library utilization more passive. Students tend to visit the library only when they need to complete certain assignments, rather than as part of their daily learning culture.

Another obstacle that needs attention is weak institutional support. School libraries are often not positioned as a strategic part of the learning system but are instead regarded merely as complementary facilities. As a result, collection development, the provision of library management personnel, facility improvement, and collaboration between teachers and library staff have not been optimally implemented. In fact, a professionally managed library can support literacy-based learning, material enrichment, and the development of students' independent learning skills.

The Role of Libraries in Increasing Students' Reading Interest

The results of the review show that school libraries play an important role in increasing students' reading interest. Libraries provide reading materials that can broaden students' knowledge, foster reading habits, and support literacy development. Through collections of books, magazines, articles, reference materials, and digital resources, students have the opportunity to become familiar with various types of reading materials that suit their needs and interests.

However, students' reading interest is not determined solely by the availability of collections. It is also influenced by the quality of library management, the comfort of the reading room, ease of access to collections, and teachers' involvement in guiding students to use the library. A library that merely provides books without attractive literacy programs tends to be less effective in developing students' reading habits. Therefore, libraries need to offer programs that can attract students' interest, such as shared reading activities, literacy competitions, thematic

reading corners, awards for active readers, and the integration of learning assignments with the use of library collections.

Teachers also play a very important role in connecting the library with learning activities. Teachers can assign information-seeking tasks, guide students in using relevant reading sources, and encourage them to make the library part of the learning process. Thus, the library does not merely function as a reading room but also becomes a space for developing a literacy culture that actively involves students, teachers, and library staff.

The Role of Libraries as Learning Resources

School libraries serve as learning resources because they provide various materials and information that can support the learning process. Learning resources are not limited to textbooks but also include references, encyclopedias, magazines, articles, popular scientific works, digital materials, and other information sources that students can use to deepen their understanding of subject matter. Through the library, students can obtain additional information beyond the explanations provided by teachers in the classroom.

As a learning resource, the library helps students develop independence in searching for, selecting, understanding, and using information. This role is very important because learning should not rely solely on teachers and textbooks. Students need to be trained to search for information independently, compare sources, and use reading materials to complete assignments or understand lesson content. Thus, the library supports active learning and helps students build information literacy skills.

The library can also function as a collaborative learning space. In addition to being used for individual reading, the library can be utilized as a place for discussion, group work, literacy activities, and project-based learning. When properly managed, the school library can become an information center, a learning center, and an innovation space that supports the broader educational process.

Strategies for Optimizing School Libraries as a Support for Learning

Based on the synthesis results, the optimization of school libraries needs to be carried out through several strategies. First, schools need to update and align library collections with curriculum needs, students' interests, and developments in knowledge. Second, libraries need to be managed by personnel who have competence in information management, user services, and literacy program development. Third, library spaces need to be made comfortable, well organized, and attractive so that students feel motivated to read and learn.

Fourth, libraries need to be integrated into the learning process. Teachers can design assignments that encourage students to use library collections, search for references, and compile reading results. Fifth, schools need to develop sustainable literacy programs, such as regular reading activities, literacy clubs, book exhibitions, review-writing competitions, and awards for students who actively use the library. These strategies are important so that the library does not function merely as a physical facility but truly becomes part of the learning culture in schools.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Review Findings on the Role of School Libraries as a Support for Learning

Review Theme	Main Findings	Implications for Schools
Inhibiting factors in library utilization	Limited updated collections, lack of library management personnel, inadequate facilities, and low integration with learning	Schools need to strengthen library management, facilities, collections, and policy support
Role in increasing reading interest	Libraries provide reading materials, literacy spaces, and activities that can foster a reading culture	Teachers and library staff need to develop attractive and sustainable literacy programs

Review Theme	Main Findings	Implications for Schools
Role as a learning resource	Libraries provide information and references to expand learning beyond the classroom	Libraries need to be integrated with assignments, projects, and learning activities
Optimization strategies	Collection renewal, professional management, comfortable reading spaces, and teacher-librarian collaboration	Libraries need to be positioned as part of the school learning ecosystem

Discussion

The results of the review indicate that school libraries play an important role in supporting learning, increasing reading interest, expanding access to information, and building students' independent learning skills. However, this role does not occur automatically. Libraries can function effectively only when they are actively managed, have relevant collections, provide comfortable learning spaces, are supported by competent personnel, and are integrated into classroom learning activities. IFLA emphasizes that school libraries play a role in improving the teaching and learning process through collections, professional services, collaboration, literacy, critical thinking, and inclusive education (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2021).

Critically, not all school libraries are able to perform their function as learning resource centers. In some contexts, libraries function merely as book storage rooms because their collections are outdated, their facilities are limited, and they lack sustainable literacy programs. This condition causes students to view the library as a learning space that is neither attractive nor relevant to their academic needs. Eskha (2018) emphasizes that libraries can serve as learning resources, but their effectiveness depends on the availability of collections, management quality, and utilization in the educational process.

The role of libraries in increasing reading interest also needs to be understood carefully. Although libraries provide reading materials, students' reading interest is not determined solely by the availability of books. Reading interest is also influenced by the quality of collections, ease of access, the atmosphere of the reading room, teacher support, the school literacy culture, and the relevance of reading materials to students' needs. A study by Negara et al. (2022) on school libraries and students' reading interest shows that the existence of a library needs to be supported by adequate facilities, collections, and utilization in order to have an impact on reading interest.

In addition, the role of libraries as learning resources depends greatly on teacher involvement. Libraries will be more effective when teachers guide students to use library collections for assignments, projects, discussions, and structured reading activities. Trijatmiko et al. (2019) show that the utilization of school libraries as learning resources can be carried out through learning assignments that encourage students to use the library, thereby helping them become more accustomed to reading and searching for information. Conversely, if classroom learning never connects students with the library, the library risks remaining a passive facility.

International empirical studies also reinforce the idea that school libraries are more effective when supported by professional library personnel. Wine et al. (2023) found that the presence of full-time school librarians was associated with higher reading and mathematics achievement among elementary school students. This finding indicates that a library is not sufficient as merely a room and a collection of books; it also requires professional services capable of connecting information resources with students' learning needs.

Thus, school libraries have great potential as a support for learning, but their effectiveness is conditional. Libraries will function optimally when there is institutional support, professional management, relevant collections, sustainable literacy programs, and integration with the

curriculum. Conversely, libraries will be less effective if they are positioned only as administrative facilities without clear utilization strategies. PISA 2022 data show that Indonesian students' reading ability remains a challenge; therefore, schools need to strengthen the literacy ecosystem through various learning resources, including school libraries (OECD, 2023).

Practically, schools need to develop strategies for optimizing libraries through several steps. First, they should update reading collections according to curriculum needs and students' interests. Second, they should provide library managers who possess competence in information services. Third, they should make the library part of learning activities through literature-based assignments, reading projects, and resource-based learning. Fourth, they should develop school literacy programs that involve teachers, students, and library staff. Fifth, they should conduct periodic evaluations of library utilization so that schools can determine whether the library is truly being used as a learning resource or merely functioning as a passive facility. The importance of strengthening library services is also in line with the report of the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, which shows that the Community Literacy Development Index in 2024 reached 73.52 and still requires continuous strengthening of literacy services (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2024).

Thus, this discussion shows that the role of school libraries cannot be understood merely in normative terms. Libraries do have strategic functions, but their benefits depend greatly on the quality of management, the relevance of collections, teacher involvement, facility comfort, library personnel, and the school literacy culture. Therefore, efforts to strengthen school libraries need to be carried out systematically so that libraries truly become learning resource centers that support learning, rather than merely spaces for storing books.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the literature review, school libraries have an important role as a support for learning because they provide information sources, reading materials, and academic spaces that can help students and teachers expand access to knowledge. Libraries do not only function as places for storing books but also as learning resource centers that support the learning process, the development of reading interest, information literacy, and students' independent learning.

This review also shows that the optimization of school libraries still faces several obstacles, such as limited relevant and updated collections, a lack of library management personnel, inadequate facilities, low student visitation interest, and the suboptimal integration of libraries into classroom learning activities. These obstacles have caused libraries to be less fully utilized as active and strategic learning resources.

The main contribution of this review is to emphasize that the role of school libraries as a support for learning is conditional. Libraries will function effectively when they are managed professionally, have collections that align with students' needs and the curriculum, are supported by sustainable literacy programs, and involve collaboration among teachers, library staff, and school stakeholders. Therefore, schools need to position libraries as an integral part of the learning ecosystem, rather than merely as complementary facilities.

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Research Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of academic research. Since this article is a literature review, the study did not involve direct human participants, clinical intervention, experimental procedures, or the collection of personal data from students, teachers, or school communities. The data used in this study were obtained from published journal articles, academic books, policy documents, institutional reports, and relevant scientific publications. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, the review process was carried out responsibly by maintaining academic integrity, accurately representing the reviewed literature, and properly acknowledging all cited sources.

Author Contributions

Dony Kurniawan: conceptualization, literature search, literature selection, data analysis, synthesis of findings, and writing of the original draft.

Fitri Nur Hayati: methodology, review of relevant literature, refinement of the research focus, and manuscript editing.

Ibnu Ikhsan: validation of the literature synthesis, critical review of the findings and discussion, and support in organizing the manuscript structure.

Ahmad Saefulloh: academic supervision, final review, manuscript revision, and approval of the final version.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Artificial Intelligence Use Statement

The authors declare that artificial intelligence, if used, was employed only as a technical support tool for language editing, grammar checking, translation assistance, and improving manuscript readability. All literature selection, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, arguments, and conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of published journal articles, academic books, policy documents, institutional reports, and scientific publications related to school libraries, learning resources, reading interest, literacy, and the utilization of libraries in the learning process. Since this study is based on publicly available literature and does not involve primary data collection from human participants, no additional dataset was generated. Further information regarding the reviewed sources may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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