

Optimizing the Role of School Libraries as Learning Resource Centers in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru

Nuraini Rahmawati¹, Lutry²

¹ Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia; nurainirahmawati89@gmail.com

² Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia; martarinalutry@gmail.com

Abstract: School libraries play a strategic role as learning resource centers supporting self-directed, creative, and project-based learning, as emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum. This study aims to explore how the school library at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru has been optimized to support teaching and learning activities within this framework. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with teachers, the school librarian, and students, as well as observations and documentation related to library usage. The findings reveal active utilization of the library by teachers for project-based learning, systematic literacy programs by the librarian, and students' engagement with the library for information seeking. However, several constraints remain, including limited collections, inadequate digital facilities, and a less conducive reading environment. These findings underscore the need for stronger collaboration among educators, librarians, and school leadership to expand library resources, improve infrastructure, and foster a culture of literacy.

Keywords: *school library; learning resource; Merdeka Curriculum; literacy; vocational high school*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in developing high-quality, character-driven human resources capable of adapting to global changes. In the era of rapid technological advancement, the challenge in education is not only delivering content but also creating learning ecosystems that cultivate critical, creative, and independent thinking. School libraries have evolved from mere book repositories into dynamic learning spaces that support literacy and exploration.

The Merdeka Curriculum, implemented gradually since 2021 by Indonesia's Ministry of Education, emphasizes differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and learner autonomy. This curriculum requires that learning resources extend beyond textbooks and include diverse formats, such as those available in school libraries. Thus, the role of the library is vital in facilitating knowledge discovery and skill development aligned with 21st-century education principles.

Despite this, many school libraries in Indonesia, including at vocational institutions like SMK, still operate with limited functionality. At SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru, the library primarily supports administrative lending tasks, with underutilized literacy activities and minimal teacher-student engagement in library use. This research investigates how school libraries can be optimized to fulfill their roles as active and central learning resource hubs under the Merdeka Curriculum, with particular focus on the roles of teachers, librarians, and students.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply investigate the optimization of the school library as a learning resource center in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru. This approach enabled the researchers to understand the experiences and perceptions of educational stakeholders in a holistic manner.

Purposive sampling was used to select informants who were directly involved with the school library: (1) teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and utilizing the library; (2) the school librarian managing library services; and (3) students who used the library as part of their learning activities. The number of informants was determined based on data saturation, ranging from five to eight participants.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were semi-structured to capture the informants' insights on library utilization. Observations documented user behavior and library integration within the school's learning activities. Documents included curriculum guidelines, library usage logs, and literacy activity reports.

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing with verification. To ensure validity, the study employed triangulation of sources and techniques, prolonged engagement, member checks, and audit trails as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of the school library at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru in supporting teaching and learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers, the school librarian, and students to gather diverse perspectives on library use. In addition, direct observations were conducted in the library to examine user interactions and the learning environment. Document analysis—including library usage records, literacy program schedules, and relevant reports—was also used to support data triangulation. All collected data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns related to library optimization, usage, and constraints.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Role of Teachers

Teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru have shown considerable initiative in utilizing the school library as a source of reference materials, particularly within the context of project-based learning promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. Several teachers actively encourage students to enrich their assignments by referring to available resources in the library, including textbooks, journals, and other supporting materials.

For example, in Information Technology classes, students are guided to explore current technological topics using materials from the school library. However, several challenges were identified, such as a limited range of collections, lack of digital infrastructure, and generally low student motivation for reading.

These conditions underscore the essential role of teachers as facilitators in fostering independent learning. According to Daryanto (2013), teachers should not merely deliver content but must also support students in discovering and using learning resources autonomously. The more teachers incorporate the library into classroom practice, the more students will perceive it as an integral part of the learning ecosystem.

3.2. Role of Librarians

The librarian at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru holds a critical function not only in managing the library's collections but also in initiating literacy programs and activities. Collection management is conducted systematically through thematic classification and periodic updates. Furthermore, the librarian has actively organized reading campaigns, book discussions, and literary competitions to engage students in literacy practices.

In collaboration with teachers, the librarian also strives to align available materials with current curriculum content. However, several limitations were reported, such as insufficient funding, limited staff, and inadequate technological tools to fully support the transition toward digital library services.

These findings are consistent with Anjani and Wibowo (2020), who emphasize the importance of innovative and collaborative librarians in improving students' literacy skills and engagement. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, librarians are not just custodians of books, but partners in the learning process.

3.3. Utilization by Students

From the students' perspective, the library is used primarily to complete assignments, search for references, and read non-academic books. There is a noticeable increase in library visits when students are given project-based tasks, which indicates a functional awareness of the library's role.

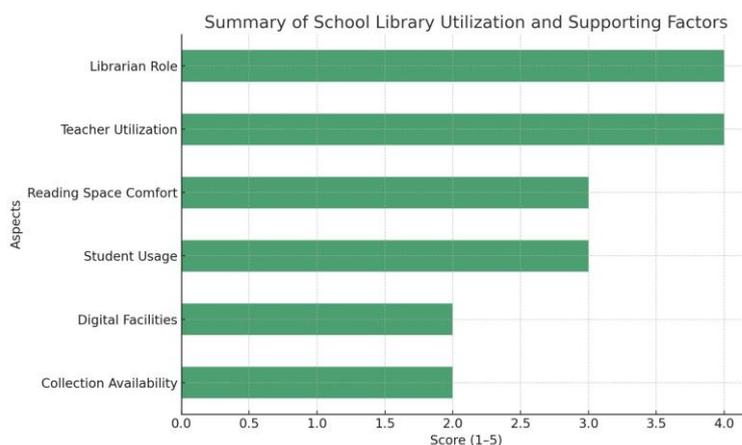
Nonetheless, students also pointed out several obstacles: the reading area is not always conducive, the available books are not always relevant to their vocational specializations, and access to internet or digital facilities is limited. These limitations hinder the full potential of library utilization in supporting student learning.

Despite these barriers, many students expressed enthusiasm for literacy events such as poetry readings, book reviews, and reading competitions. They also provided constructive suggestions for improving the library space and its services. These insights support Nurhadi's (2021) argument that school libraries must evolve into

interactive and inclusive learning environments to effectively support critical thinking and student autonomy.

3.4 figure, grafik and schemes

Figure 1. summary of school library utilizati



The results of the research are illustrated in Figure 1, showing that the school library is mostly utilized by teachers and librarians, while the students' usage remains moderate.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the optimization of the school library at SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru as a learning resource center in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is progressing positively, although it still faces structural and cultural challenges.

First, from the perspective of teachers, there is growing awareness and effort to integrate the library into project-based learning. Teachers not only instruct students to use the library but also encourage them to deepen their understanding by exploring relevant materials. However, this effort is often hindered by the limited availability of diverse learning resources, insufficient technological support, and underdeveloped student literacy habits (Daryanto, 2013).

Second, the school librarian plays a central role as both a manager of library services and a facilitator of literacy development. Through proactive initiatives such as literacy programs and collection management aligned with curriculum needs, the librarian contributes significantly to supporting the learning environment. Nevertheless, challenges related to funding, digital infrastructure, and staffing remain substantial barriers to further development (Anjani & Wibowo, 2020).

Third, students demonstrate functional awareness of the library's role, especially when assigned projects. Their participation in literacy activities shows potential, though utilization is not yet fully optimal. Their feedback regarding the need for a more comfortable reading space, updated resources, and better digital access reflects an increasing understanding of the library's importance as a meaningful learning hub (Nurhadi, 2021).

Overall, the findings affirm that successful optimization of the school library requires a collaborative effort among teachers, librarians, students, and school leadership. In the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, the school library should transform from a static book repository into a dynamic learning space that promotes critical thinking, creativity, and student independence.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the principal, teachers, librarian, and students of SMK Negeri 2 Pekanbaru for their cooperation and valuable contributions throughout the research process. Appreciation is also extended to Universitas Lancang Kuning for the academic support provided during the completion of this

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

REFERENCES

- Anjani, R., & Wibowo, A. (2020). The role of librarians in improving information literacy in secondary schools. *Journal of Education and Culture*, 5(2), 145–157. <https://doi.org/10.31227/jpk.v5i2.2020>
- Daryanto. (2013). *Instructional media: Its essential role in achieving learning objectives*. Yogyakarta: Gava Media.
- Fitriani, N. (2021). The use of school libraries in promoting students' reading culture. *Journal of School Literacy*, 3(1), 32–41.
- Kemendikbudristek. (2022). *Panduan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*. Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal PAUD, Dikdas, dan Dikmen. <https://kurikulum.kemdikbud.go.id>
- Kurniawan, B. (2020). School library management in improving digital information services. *Journal of Islamic Educational Management*, 8(2), 77–85.
- Moleong, L. J. (2018). *Qualitative research methodology*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nurhayati, S. (2021). School literacy programs based on library use. *Journal of Education and Library Studies*, 5(1), 11–20.
- Prasetyo, D., & Harahap, F. (2022). Collaboration between librarians and teachers in literacy-based learning. *Journal of Library and Information Science*, 7(2), 100–110.
- Rosdiana, R., & Amirullah, M. (2023). Use of libraries as project-based learning sources in vocational schools. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 6(1), 33–42.
- Sutarno, N. S. (2006). *Libraries and information literacy in education*. Jakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Syahrial, R., & Nurhasanah, D. (2020). The role of libraries in supporting Merdeka Curriculum implementation in secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Innovation*, 8(3), 190–200.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). *21st century skills: Learning for life in our times*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wahyudi, S., & Utami, R. (2021). Collaboration between teachers and librarians in developing information literacy. *Journal of Educational Management*, 9(2), 101–115.
- Yuniarti, D., & Ramadhani, E. (2022). Transformation of conventional libraries to digital in supporting literacy under the Merdeka Curriculum. *Digital Education Journal*, 2(2), 78–87.
- Zulfikar, H., & Lestari, A. P. (2019). Analysis of student reading interest through school library services. *Journal of Education and Literacy*, 4(1), 55–64.