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The Role of School Libraries in Eradicating Functional Illiteracy: A Case Study at SMPN 1 Pancur Batu

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the role of the school library in overcoming functional illiteracy through the *Gerakan Satu Jam Membaca* (GSJM) program at SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu. Functional illiteracy is defined as a condition in which students are able to read mechanically but have difficulty understanding texts, thus requiring strategic intervention to bridge the gap.This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Informants were selected purposively, consisting of a librarian, teachers, and students identified as experiencing functional literacy barriers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation, with credibility tested using triangulation techniques and member checking. The results indicate that the GSJM program effectively improves students' comprehension skills through guided reading and read-aloud activities. There was a decrease in the number of students experiencing functional illiteracy from 20 to 5 students during the program period. The main supporting factor is the close collaboration between librarians and teachers, while inhibiting factors involve students' low internal motivation and limited literacy support from the family environment. In conclusion, the school library functions as a crucial literacy center, but its success requires continuous synergy between the school and parents..

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INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is a fundamental competency that enables students to access information, construct knowledge, and participate meaningfully in educational activities. However, the ability to recognize written words does not necessarily indicate an adequate understanding of their meaning. Functional literacy difficulties arise when individuals possess some basic reading skills but remain unable to comprehend, interpret, or apply written information effectively in everyday and academic contexts (Medzhidova et al., 2021). Contemporary reading research emphasizes that successful comprehension involves interactions among word recognition, language comprehension, cognitive processes, and self-regulation (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The persistence of reading difficulties represents a significant concern in Indonesia. According to the Programme for

International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, approximately 25% of Indonesian students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading, indicating substantial challenges in meeting minimum reading competency expectations (OECD, 2023).

In secondary education, inadequate reading comprehension can constrain students' engagement with increasingly complex learning materials. Students who struggle to interpret written information may encounter difficulties in identifying main ideas, drawing conclusions, evaluating arguments, and completing tasks requiring higher-order thinking. These challenges are associated with broader concerns about academic participation and critical thinking development (Aston, 2024). Research on students with persistent reading difficulties indicates that effective support requires interventions addressing specific reading competencies rather than relying exclusively on general reading exposure (Scammacca et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2013). Moreover, improvements in reading fluency do not consistently translate into corresponding gains in comprehension (Steinle et al., 2022). Evidence-based guidance therefore recommends combining explicit decoding instruction, purposeful fluency activities, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies according to students' identified learning needs (Vaughn et al., 2022).

School libraries represent a potentially important institutional setting for addressing these challenges. Beyond providing access to collections, school libraries can facilitate guided reading, literacy instruction, and collaboration between librarians and teachers. Literacy-oriented library activities may encourage students to engage more actively with texts and develop reading habits through structured educational support (Mujahidin et al., 2022). International school library guidelines similarly emphasize the integration of library programmes into teaching and learning, particularly through collaboration between school librarians and classroom educators (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2015). Previous studies have reported positive associations between school library services, professional librarian involvement, and student academic achievement (Lance & Kachel, 2018; Wine et al., 2023). An evidence review also identifies school libraries as potentially valuable environments for supporting reading engagement and literacy development (Cole et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these findings do not establish that library participation alone is sufficient to overcome persistent reading comprehension difficulties.

Existing school literacy initiatives have frequently emphasized reading habits, access to books, and scheduled independent reading activities. In Indonesian educational settings, such activities are commonly incorporated into school literacy programmes to increase students' exposure to reading materials (Kartikasari & Nuryasana, 2022). Although these approaches may support reading engagement, their effectiveness in addressing specific comprehension difficulties requires closer examination. A meta-analysis of independent reading practices found positive effects on reading attitudes and word recognition but little evidence of improvement in reading comprehension (Bus et al., 2024). Similarly, a recent review of school libraries in junior high education highlighted the importance of structured literacy programmes, appropriate collections, and librarian–teacher collaboration while identifying continuing institutional constraints (Aly et al., 2026).

An important gap therefore concerns how school libraries can organize sustained, differentiated reading support for secondary school students experiencing substantial foundational literacy difficulties. While previous studies have examined reading

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motivation, school library services, and classroom-based interventions, further context-specific evidence is needed regarding integrated library-based programmes that combine foundational reading assistance with explicit comprehension development. This distinction is particularly relevant for students whose reading abilities remain below the demands of their educational level. Addressing such difficulties requires attention to students' initial competencies, the progression of instructional activities, and the organizational conditions supporting implementation.

This issue is evident at SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu, Indonesia, where preliminary school-level data collected in January 2025 identified 20 of 679 students (2.95%) as experiencing functional literacy difficulties according to the school's initial classification. Although this proportion represents a relatively small group within the student population, the identified difficulties indicate a need for targeted educational support. The classification provides a contextual basis for investigation rather than a population-level estimate of functional illiteracy. In response, the school library introduced the GSJM, or One-Hour Reading Movement, as an intervention incorporating progressive reading assistance, guided reading-aloud activities, comprehension exercises, and foundational letter-recognition support where required.

The contribution of this study lies in examining GSJM as an integrated, library-based literacy intervention that moves beyond routine reading promotion toward differentiated support for students with identified reading difficulties. Rather than assuming that programme participation necessarily improves literacy, the study investigates how its instructional components and institutional implementation relate to the intended development of functional reading competencies. Specifically, this study aims to examine the contribution of GSJM to addressing functional literacy difficulties among students at SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu and to identify the instructional, institutional, and contextual factors that facilitate or constrain its implementation.

METHODS

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to examine the role of a school library in addressing functional literacy difficulties through the GSJM, or One-Hour Reading Movement. This design was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of programme implementation, students' reading experiences, and the institutional conditions influencing literacy support within a natural educational setting (Fadli, 2021).

The research was conducted at the library of SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was selected because its library had implemented GSJM as a targeted literacy support programme incorporating guided reading activities, reading-aloud sessions, comprehension exercises, and foundational reading assistance. Preliminary school-level data from January 2025 identified 20 of 679 students (2.95%) as experiencing functional literacy difficulties. These historical data provided contextual information about the school's literacy challenges and were not treated as a direct baseline measurement of the students participating in the 2026 study.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in GSJM implementation or their experiences of functional literacy

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difficulties. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study required information-rich perspectives from individuals directly connected to the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020).

The study involved eight participants: one head librarian responsible for library services and programme coordination, two homeroom teachers involved in facilitating GSJM activities, and five students identified as experiencing functional literacy difficulties. The students were selected based on preliminary reading assessment results indicating difficulties in understanding written materials despite some ability to recognize or read text. Their participation enabled the examination of reading-related experiences and the support provided within the programme.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 15–20 minutes per session and followed flexible interview guides addressing GSJM implementation, reading difficulties, instructional assistance, student participation, and perceived changes in reading practices. The interview format allowed participants to describe their experiences while providing opportunities to explore relevant issues in greater detail. Direct observations focused on students' participation in GSJM activities, including engagement during reading-aloud sessions, interactions with learning materials, letter-recognition activities, and participation in reading-related discussions.

These observations provided contextual evidence concerning how reading support was delivered and how students responded during the activities. Document analysis complemented the interviews and observations. The documents examined included student attendance records, library visitation logs, daily reading progress journals, and the school's official GSJM guidelines. These materials provided additional information about programme organization, participation, and documented reading activities.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive approach involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2020). Data condensation involved identifying and selecting relevant information from interview transcripts, observational field notes, and institutional documents concerning the implementation of GSJM and students' reading-related experiences. The selected information was organized into descriptive accounts to examine patterns of programme implementation, student engagement, instructional assistance, and reported reading development.

Data from different sources were compared to identify convergent findings, discrepancies, and contextual explanations. Conclusions were developed through the interpretation of these patterns and their relationships to the research objectives. The analysis focused on understanding how GSJM was implemented, how the school library supported participating students, and which conditions facilitated or constrained literacy assistance. Interpretations concerning changes in reading abilities were limited to the evidence available from participant accounts, observations, and documented reading activities.

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Trustworthiness and Research Ethics

The trustworthiness of the findings was supported through source and methodological triangulation. Information obtained from interviews was compared with direct observations and institutional documents, including attendance records and reading progress journals. When discrepancies emerged between participants' accounts and observational evidence, follow-up observations were conducted to clarify the circumstances underlying these differences.

Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interview transcripts with adult participants to verify the accuracy of their recorded statements. This procedure complemented triangulation by allowing participants to clarify or correct their accounts. These strategies were used to strengthen the credibility of the qualitative interpretations.

Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from adult participants and the parents of participating students. Given that the research involved school-age children and potentially sensitive information about reading difficulties, particular attention was directed toward voluntary participation and the protection of participants' personal information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of the GSJM Programme in the School Library

The findings indicate that the SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu Library implemented the GSJM, through structured reading assistance involving librarians and homeroom teachers. The programme was designed to support students experiencing difficulties in foundational reading and text comprehension. Activities included guided reading, reading aloud, letter-recognition exercises, and questions intended to assess students' understanding of written materials.

The instructional assistance was adjusted to students' observed reading difficulties. Students requiring foundational support received assistance with letter recognition and spelling, whereas those able to read words were encouraged to explain the meaning of sentences and passages. One staff informant described the approach during an interview:

> "We do not only teach students to read, but also ask them to explain the content... for students unable to recognize letters, we first teach them spelling." (P1)

This account indicates that programme activities addressed different aspects of reading, ranging from basic recognition skills to comprehension. The involvement of librarians and teachers also provided opportunities for students to receive immediate assistance when they encountered difficulties with particular words or texts.

Direct observations documented students using the library's study area, whiteboard, and simplified reading materials during GSJM activities. The available resources supported individual reading practice and facilitated interactions between students and programme personnel. The programme schedule specified sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM, with librarians and homeroom teachers serving as facilitators.

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Documented Changes in Students' Reading Status

The school-level data presented for January 2025 identified 20 of 679 students (2.95%) as experiencing reading difficulties under the school's preliminary classification. Additional programme records covering January to June 2025 documented a gradual reduction in the number of students classified as not yet able to read, as presented in Table 2. The records indicate that the number of students classified as not yet able to read decreased from 20 in January to five in June 2025. Correspondingly, the cumulative number reported as having improved increased from zero to 15. The documented pattern shows a progressive change in the school's recorded reading classifications during the six-month period.

Table 2

Recorded Changes in Students' Reading Status (January–June 2025)

Month	Students recorded as not yet able to read	Cumulative number reported as improved
January	20	0
February	18	2
March	15	5
April	12	8
May	8	12
June	5	15

However, the available records do not provide individual reading assessment scores, standardized comprehension measures, or sufficiently detailed criteria for determining when students were considered proficient. Furthermore, the reporting period preceded the fieldwork. These records therefore provide historical information about the programme rather than direct evidence of changes measured during the qualitative study.

Discussion

The School Library as a Setting for Targeted Literacy Support

The findings indicate that the SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu Library supported students experiencing reading difficulties through structured and differentiated activities within the GSJM programme. Rather than relying exclusively on routine reading activities, the programme incorporated letter recognition, guided oral reading, and comprehension-related questioning. This approach corresponds with contemporary perspectives emphasizing that successful reading involves interactions among word recognition, language comprehension, and active self-regulatory processes (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Graham et al., 2020). Evidence from intervention research also indicates that students with persistent reading difficulties require support directed toward specific components of reading rather than uniform instructional activities (Boucher et al., 2024; Filderman et al., 2022). In this context, the library functioned as a setting for organized instructional assistance, although the present findings do not establish the independent effectiveness of individual GSJM activities.

An important characteristic of GSJM was the adaptation of reading assistance to students' observed abilities. Students experiencing foundational difficulties received support with letter recognition and spelling, whereas those capable of reading words were encouraged to identify main ideas and explain textual meaning. This differentiation is

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consistent with evidence that reading comprehension interventions for adolescents can produce favorable outcomes when instructional activities address specific learner needs (Majidah, & Rullyana, 2024; Sohn et al., 2023). Research involving adolescents with reading disabilities also demonstrates the potential value of combining foundational reading instruction with comprehension and motivational support (Lovett et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these findings originate from intervention studies with different research designs and educational contexts. Their relevance to GSJM lies in supporting the rationale for differentiated assistance rather than providing evidence that comparable improvements occurred among the participating students.

The historical programme records documented a reduction from 20 students classified as experiencing reading difficulties in January 2025 to five in June 2025. Although this pattern is consistent with the programme's intended objectives, the absence of standardized and comparable reading assessments prevents attributing the recorded changes directly to GSJM. The distinction between reading fluency and comprehension is particularly important because improvements in word recognition do not necessarily indicate equivalent gains in understanding written texts (Majidah, & Rullyana, 2024; Steinle et al., 2022). Consequently, an important practical implication is the need for a differentiated monitoring system that assesses letter recognition, decoding, fluency, and comprehension separately. Such documentation would enable librarians and teachers to adjust reading assistance according to individual progress while providing a stronger basis for evaluating the programme's educational contribution.

Collaboration, Learning Resources, and Structured Participation

Collaboration between librarians and homeroom teachers emerged as a central supporting condition in GSJM implementation. The findings suggest that teachers contributed instructional guidance while library personnel facilitated the organization of activities and access to appropriate reading materials. This arrangement is consistent with evidence highlighting the educational contribution of professionally supported school library services. A propensity-score analysis involving elementary schools found that the presence of full-time school librarians was associated with higher reading achievement, although its institutional context differs from the present case (Wine et al., 2023). Indonesian school library research similarly emphasizes the relevance of user education in helping students understand and utilize library services and resources (Aprianti et al., 2022; Baharudin et al., 2023). These findings suggest that sustainable literacy assistance requires coordinated responsibilities, including instructional planning, resource selection, and regular communication between teachers and librarians.

The availability of simplified reading materials, interactive learning tools, and a designated reading area also supported programme delivery. Observations indicated that students used the library's whiteboard and reading materials during assisted learning activities, while scheduled sessions provided recurring opportunities for participation. Research in Indonesian school libraries has highlighted the contribution of appropriate facilities and infrastructure to creating comfortable environments and encouraging library visits (Ikrimah et al., 2023). However, attendance and physical engagement should not be interpreted as direct indicators of literacy development. Reading engagement involves behavioral, cognitive, and motivational dimensions that require distinct consideration (Lee et al., 2021). Accordingly, the library should maintain accessible reading spaces and

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structured schedules while progressively developing collections matched to students' reading abilities. Collaboration between librarians and teachers should also extend to jointly monitoring comprehension-related activities rather than focusing exclusively on attendance and borrowing records.

Student Engagement and the Sustainability of Reading Development

The findings suggest that student engagement was influenced by the nature of reading activities, the availability of guidance, and opportunities to experience manageable learning tasks. Participants' responses indicated favorable engagement during some guided sessions, although the study did not systematically measure motivation or changes in reading attitudes. This distinction is important because reading engagement encompasses more than visible participation and may involve students' interest, persistence, and cognitive investment in understanding texts (Lee et al., 2021). Evidence from structured interventions involving adolescents with reading disabilities further indicates that combining reading instruction with motivational support can strengthen students' perceived reading competence (Lovett et al., 2021). These findings provide a rationale for designing GSJM activities that offer attainable learning challenges, constructive feedback, and opportunities for students to recognize their developing abilities.

The relationship between reading engagement and digital technology also requires careful interpretation. Although the original accounts identified competing recreational preferences, the present study did not systematically assess smartphone use or establish that digital entertainment reduced students' reading comprehension. Technology should therefore not be treated as an inherently negative influence. Research on technology-supported reading interventions has reported promising outcomes for learners experiencing reading difficulties, although the evidence primarily concerns younger students and specific instructional applications (Alqahtani, 2024). These findings suggest that digital resources could complement library-based reading assistance when aligned with defined learning objectives. However, the suitability of such tools for GSJM participants would require assessment of their accessibility, instructional relevance, and actual contribution to reading practices.

The programme's regular schedule represented an important organizational mechanism for maintaining opportunities to practise reading. Nevertheless, repeated participation alone does not guarantee improvement in comprehension. A meta-analysis of school-based independent reading found relatively favorable outcomes for reading attitudes and word recognition but little evidence of corresponding improvements in comprehension (Bus et al., 2024). Similarly, research on fluency interventions for struggling secondary school readers indicates that gains in reading fluency do not consistently translate into improved comprehension (O'Connor, 2018; Steinle et al., 2022). These findings reinforce the importance of integrating independent reading with explicit comprehension activities. For GSJM, a practical priority is to combine scheduled reading sessions with guided questioning, brief comprehension checks, and individualized feedback. Monitoring should distinguish students' attendance and reading frequency from their demonstrated ability to interpret and explain written information.

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Family Responsibilities and Continuity of Literacy Support

Family responsibilities and inconsistent home-based assistance emerged as potential barriers to sustained participation in GSJM. Student interviews indicated that some participants were expected to assist with household economic activities or experienced limited support for independent study outside school. These accounts suggest that opportunities to practise reading may differ according to students' everyday circumstances. Evidence from a meta-analytic review of low- and middle-income countries indicates that home learning environments are associated with children's language and literacy development, although the reviewed populations and educational conditions are not directly equivalent to those of the present study (Nag et al., 2024). Research in Indonesian educational settings has also emphasized the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and students in supporting literacy activities (Munthe et al., 2024). However, the present findings do not justify attributing reading difficulties to parental neglect or assuming that families facing economic pressures are less committed to their children's education.

These findings have implications for organizing literacy support that accommodates students' circumstances. Schools may consider flexible opportunities for reading assistance, access to suitable materials for home use, and communication with parents regarding manageable literacy activities. Such arrangements should recognize differences in family resources and avoid placing unrealistic additional demands on households. The library may also strengthen continuity by coordinating students' reading activities with classroom instruction and identifying those who require further support. Nevertheless, the evidence remains limited to a single-school qualitative case involving eight participants, while the historical reading records cover a different period from the 2026 fieldwork. The findings therefore provide context-specific insights into programme implementation rather than establishing causal relationships between family circumstances, GSJM participation, and reading outcomes. Future evaluation should align programme documentation with repeated student-level reading assessments and systematically examine how school and home environments interact in supporting functional literacy development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of the SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu Library in addressing students' functional reading difficulties through the *Gerakan Satu Jam Membaca* (GSJM), or One-Hour Reading Movement. The findings indicate that the library contributed to structured literacy support by facilitating differentiated reading activities, including foundational reading assistance, guided oral reading, and comprehension-related exercises. Collaboration between librarians and homeroom teachers, the availability of accessible reading materials, and regularly scheduled learning sessions emerged as important conditions supporting programme implementation. Historical school records also documented a reduction in the number of students classified as experiencing reading difficulties, from 20 in January to five in June 2025. The study therefore highlights the library's contribution as an organized setting for targeted reading assistance rather than establishing the programme's causal effectiveness in improving functional literacy.

The findings further indicate that students' participation and opportunities for continued reading practice were influenced by competing after-school activities, household responsibilities, and varying levels of learning support at home. These

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circumstances emphasize the importance of coordinating school-based literacy assistance with students' broader learning environments. School libraries should strengthen collaboration with teachers, provide reading materials appropriate to individual abilities, and establish consistent procedures for monitoring foundational reading and comprehension development. Flexible programme arrangements and communication with families may also help address barriers to sustained participation. Given the study's single-case qualitative design and limited number of participants, its findings should be interpreted as context-specific insights into programme implementation. Future research should incorporate clearly defined literacy assessment criteria, repeated student-level measurements, and longitudinal evaluation to determine whether and under what conditions library-based interventions contribute to sustained improvements in functional reading competencies.

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Declaration of AI

Grammarly was used solely to assist with grammar, spelling, and language editing to improve the clarity and readability of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and approved all revisions and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript. Grammarly was not used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation of research findings.

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Author contributions statement

AS: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing – original draft. KJ: Conceptualization, methodology, supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.

Conflict of interest statement

Authors state no conflict of interest.

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