



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 conducted over two months (February–March 2026). 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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1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to read and write is the foundation for developing high-quality human resources. A major issue in educational institutions is functional illiteracy. Functional illiteracy is distinctly different from absolute illiteracy or mere technical reading difficulties. Individuals may recognize letters mechanically but cannot comprehend the information. (Pasande et al., 2020). Students in this category only spell text without being able to understand the important meaning of the reading material they are facing or even do not know the letters at all.

The gap between technical reading skills and functional literacy directly impacts the smooth learning process in schools. Inadequate text comprehension causes students to fall behind in subjects requiring higher-order thinking skills and analytical reasoning. Failure to grasp the core message of the texts studied decreases learning motivation and increases the risk of declining academic achievement. Low functional literacy is strongly correlated with students' weak critical thinking skills when responding to new information in their environment (Andreani et al., 2021). Schools must implement structured interventions to improve reading comprehension.

School libraries hold a highly central role in designing interventions to address the problem of functional illiteracy. These facilities no longer operate merely as book storage rooms but have transformed into active learning resource centers fostering reading skills. Library managers are required to create an inclusive environment and facilitate literacy habits through continuous mentoring programs. Various engaging reading activities can be initiated to stimulate students' interest in exploring the meaning of texts (Mujahidin et al., 2022). Synergistic collaboration between librarians and educators is also crucial to ensure measurable literacy improvements.

Previous studies have extensively explored the effectiveness of school literacy programs in fostering general student reading interest. Most research highlights physical facilities and the teacher's role as primary solutions. Most programs merely focus on independent reading activities for a few minutes before lessons begin to habituate interaction with texts (Munthe et al., 2024). While this approach increases library visits, it rarely improves reading comprehension. Text analysis skills for slow-reading student groups rarely receive specific attention in these conventional programs.

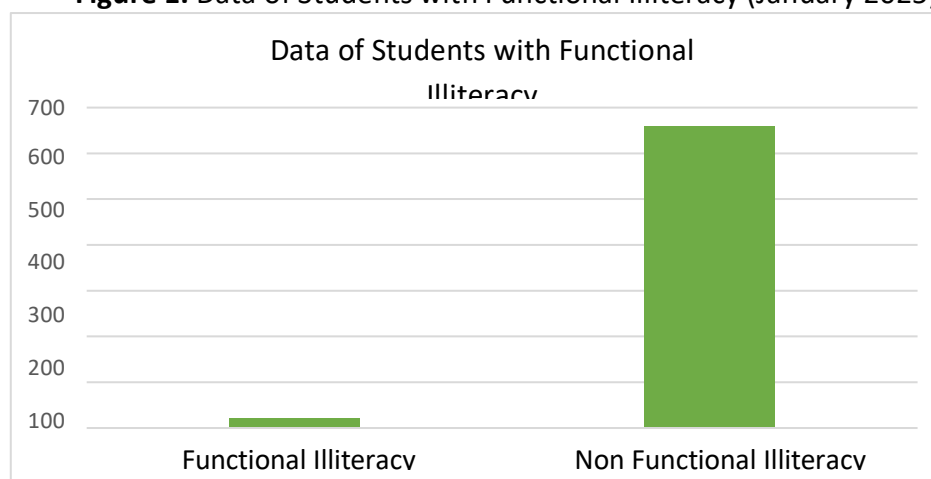
Previous research has not widely touched upon interventions specifically designed to eradicate functional illiteracy among secondary school students. The focus of previous studies generally remains locked on tackling low reading interest at the elementary school level. This study aims to fill that void by examining the novelty of the Gerakan Satu Jam Membaca (GSJM) program in the school library. The GSJM intervention is unique because it integrates gradual reading assistance, read-aloud sessions, meaning comprehension exercises, and letter recognition from the foundational stage. This integrated approach offers a new knowledge perspective regarding the strategy of libraries transforming into literacy clinics oriented toward functional understanding.

The phenomenon of functional literacy inequality is clearly identified at SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu. Based on preliminary field data before the implementation of the comprehensive intervention, the management found a number of students who were still functionally left behind.

Table 1. Comparison of Functional Literacy Data at SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu (January 2025)

Category	Number Of students	Percentage
Functional Illiteracy	20 Students	2.95%
Non-Illiteracy	659 Students	97.05%
Total	679 Students	100%

Source: Author's Research, 2026

Figure 1. Data of Students with Functional Illiteracy (January 2025)

Source: Author's Research, 2026

The preliminary field data clearly shows that out of a total of 679 students, 20 students, or approximately 2.95%, were categorized as functionally illiterate. This baseline snapshot of 20 students was taken before intensive GSJM implementation.

Based on the theoretical gap and the real field phenomenon described, this research is structured to further explore library literacy interventions. The main objective of this study is to analyze the contribution of the SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu library in eradicating functional illiteracy through the implementation of GSJM. This paper also seeks to identify the determinant factors that support or hinder the program's achievement in the field. Findings from this research are expected to provide tactical contributions and serve as an empirical reference model for other schools. Secondary educational institutions can adopt a similar framework to design more essential library literacy strategies.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach utilizing a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the library's role in eradicating functional illiteracy. Fieldwork was conducted intensively over a period of two months, spanning from February to March 2026, at the SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu Library in North Sumatra. This site was selected because it actively implements the GSJM program for students with comprehension difficulties. Qualitative case studies allow researchers to capture the complexity of literacy interventions within their natural educational settings comprehensively (Fadli, 2021).

The researcher acted as the primary instrument for data collection, carefully selecting informants through purposive sampling based on specific involvement criteria. The participants consisted of one head librarian, two homeroom teachers actively facilitating the

program, and five students specifically identified as experiencing functional illiteracy. Student selection relied heavily on preliminary reading test scores indicating a clear gap between mechanical reading and actual text comprehension. Prior to any data collection, all adult participants and the students' parents provided formal informed consent, ensuring strict adherence to research ethics protocols (Campbell et al., 2020).

Data were gathered comprehensively through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Interviews lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes per session, utilizing flexible guides focused on program implementation and individual student progress. Observations were directed by specific indicators, including student engagement levels during read-aloud sessions, interaction with learning materials, letter recognition, and peer discussions. Documentation sources encompassed student attendance records, library visitation logs, daily reading progress journals, and the school's official literacy program guidelines.

The collected data underwent a systematic interactive analysis model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Raw transcripts from interviews and observational field notes were filtered to isolate information directly relevant to the GSJM program's impact. The refined data were structured into descriptive narratives to capture the nuanced progression of the students' functional literacy skills accurately. Interpretations were systematically drawn from these organized displays to formulate coherent conclusions regarding the library's strategic role.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the study implemented rigorous methodological and source triangulation. Interview statements from teachers were cross-verified against library attendance logs and direct observations of student behavior during reading sessions. Whenever minor discrepancies emerged between student claims and teacher assessments, the researcher conducted follow-up observations to contextualize the variations. The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was firmly solidified through member checking, where preliminary interview transcripts were shared back with adult participants to verify the accuracy of their recorded perspectives (Amin et al., 2020).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Role of the SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu Library in Eradicating Functional Illiteracy

In January 2025, 20 students (2.95%) experienced functional illiteracy. They recognized the alphabet mechanically but failed to extract meaningful information from texts. This specific gap clearly distinguishes functional illiteracy from absolute illiteracy, emphasizing the cognitive disconnect between decoding symbols and actual text comprehension. Addressing this cognitive gap requires targeted interventions that actively train reading comprehension strategies. Libraries serve as an ideal environment for this intensive remediation by providing diverse, leveled texts tailored to individual abilities (Sari & Suryana, 2022).

The Gerakan Satu Jam Membaca (GSJM) program directly tackles this comprehension deficit by implementing a structured, progressive mentoring approach. Librarians and teachers collaborate to facilitate guided reading sessions where students must articulate the core message of the text rather than just reading aloud. This guided approach proves highly effective because it interrupts the habit of passively skimming symbols. The mechanism driving this cognitive shift relies on immediate, interactive feedback. When a student struggles with a word or misinterprets a sentence, the facilitator intervenes instantly to correct the decoding error and prompts analytical questions. "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" (Informant I, March 3, 2026). This continuous cycle of reading, questioning, and direct correction forces active cognitive engagement, gradually rewiring how students process written information and helping learners build their own understanding. Active meaning-making transforms passive readers into critical thinkers capable of analyzing information (Wiguna et al., 2021).

Beyond the structured program, the physical and psychological environment of the school library significantly influences student literacy behavior. A well-organized, comfortable reading space lowers the affective filter of students who typically feel anxious when facing complex texts in formal classrooms. Observations show that students linger in the library study area, use the whiteboard provided, and read the simple learning books provided to facilitate reading. The availability of accessible, age-appropriate materials encourages self-directed learning and gradually rebuilds their academic confidence over time. Providing a safe, non-judgmental space operates as a critical determinant in sustaining long-term reading habits for struggling learners (Pratama & Rofiq, 2023).



Figure 2. GSJM Activities in the School Library
Source: Researcher's documentation, 2026.

The implementation of GSJM triggered a positive shift in student engagement, evidenced by a drastic increase in voluntary library visits and book borrowing frequencies. Clarifying previous baseline records, longitudinal observation data demonstrated a consistent, gradual decline in the number of functionally illiterate students. The initial baseline of 20 students progressively decreased to 5 students as participants successfully transitioned into proficient readers capable of independent comprehension. This measurable progress proves that habitual, mentored reading significantly accelerates the acquisition of functional literacy skills. Continuous, personalized assistance proves far more effective than generalized, school-wide reading campaigns (Rahmawati & Khoiruddin, 2022).

These findings enrich the existing literature by highlighting the absolute necessity of intensive, personalized interventions within school libraries. Previous studies often emphasized mere facility improvements or mandated silent reading, which rarely improved actual text comprehension for slow readers. The GSJM model demonstrates that a library's true value lies in its active programming and the collaborative pedagogical efforts between librarians and subject teachers. Integrating various literacy activities, such as writing and reading comprehension, and ensure the holistic development of cognitive processing

skills. This proactive library model serves as a robust framework for schools aiming to eradicate functional illiteracy comprehensively (Kurniawan & Hidayat, 2021).

3.2. Supporting Factors in Efforts to Eradicate Functional Illiteracy

The success of the GSJM program fundamentally relies on the structured collaboration between classroom teachers and librarians. Teachers function as active facilitators providing direct pedagogical guidance, while librarians curate specific reading materials tailored to individual cognitive levels. This integrated support system significantly lowers the learning barrier for struggling students. Joint pedagogical efforts create a cohesive learning environment where students feel continuously guided rather than abandoned with difficult texts. Such collaborative scaffolding actively reinforces basic reading mechanics before advancing to complex text analysis (Heriyanto et al., 2021).

Informant 3 highlighted this targeted approach during the March 3 interview, emphasizing personalized assistance starting from basic letter recognition. This gradual mentoring effectively translates conceptual learning theories into practical library interventions without requiring formal curriculum overhauls. Students reconstruct their understanding of phonics and vocabulary step-by-step under close supervision. Intrinsic motivation naturally emerges as learners experience small, consistent victories in decoding previously incomprehensible words. Building foundational competence directly influences a student's willingness to engage in more demanding comprehension exercises later (Nugraha & Octavianah, 2020).

Table 2. Longitudinal Progress of Student Literacy Skills (January – June 2025)

Year	Month	Number of Students Not Yet Able to Read	The Number of Students Has Increased	Not on Progress
2025	January	20	0	Initial Data
2025	February	18	2	2 Student Became Proficient
2025	March	15	5	Gradual Improvement
2025	April	12	8	Program Becoming Effective
2025	May	8	12	Majority Proficient
2025	June	5	15	Nearly All Proficient

Source: Author's Research, 2026

The longitudinal data collected spanning January to June 2025 definitively clarifies the program's measurable impact over time. Initially, twenty students completely lacked functional comprehension skills during the program's inception. A consistent, month-by-month reduction occurred, leaving only five students struggling by the end of the semester. These remaining five students did not experience the same progressive trajectory primarily due to severe external socio-economic pressures that constantly disrupted their learning consistency. Field observations and interviews revealed that these specific individuals face a high burden of domestic responsibilities, routinely assisting parents with economic survival immediately after school hours. The physical and cognitive fatigue resulting from these daily obligations leaves them with minimal mental bandwidth to absorb or retain the literacy skills introduced during the library sessions. Sustained interventions distinctly prove that functional illiteracy requires long-term, patient remediation rather than brief, intensive workshops, especially for students battling systemic barriers at home. (Mustafa et al., 2022).

Informant 2 confirmed the visible enthusiasm among participants attending the targeted after-school sessions. The informant noted that students eagerly participated in recognizing letters and understanding simple texts, specifically during the scheduled Tuesday through Thursday sessions.

Table 3. Implementation Schedule of the GSJM Program at SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu Library

Category	Description
Day	Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday
Participants	All Students Experiencing Functional illiteracy (20 Student)
Time	14.00-15.00 WIB
Location	Scholl Library
Facilitator	Homeroom Teachers and Librarian

Source: Author's Research, 2026

Dedicating specific hours exclusively for remedial literacy strips away the social stigma often associated with reading difficulties in regular classrooms. The fixed schedule establishes a comforting routine, allowing students to mentally prepare for the cognitive effort required. Consistent engagement in a safe environment dramatically accelerates the transition from hesitant decoding to confident reading. Structured time allocation forms the backbone of habituation processes necessary for permanent skill acquisition (Rahim et al., 2023).

The physical provision of leveled children's books and interactive whiteboards acts as a crucial catalyst for cognitive development. Informant 1 noted that these accessible tools directly support interactive learning sessions outside the rigid classroom structure. A welcoming spatial arrangement invites reluctant readers to explore texts without the pressure of immediate academic assessment. Matching text complexity perfectly with a student's current developmental stage prevents frustration and subsequent academic withdrawal. Strategic collection development ultimately transforms the library from a passive archive into an active literacy incubator (Suryani & Argawati, 2021).

Implementing mandatory library visitation policies ensures equitable access to these carefully curated literacy environments. Scheduled class visits guarantee that even completely unmotivated students interact with reading materials regularly. Frequent, low-stakes exposure gradually normalizes the act of reading, shifting it from an academic chore to an expected daily activity. Peer influence during these communal visits also gently pressures reluctant students to participate in book discussions. Institutionalizing reading time secures the longevity of the school's reading culture beyond the lifespan of the specific GSJM intervention. For this upward trajectory in functional literacy to remain sustainable in the long term, the external motivation provided by scheduled sessions must successfully transition into spontaneous reading habits. This sustainability heavily depends on the library's capacity to continuously refresh its collection with relevant, leveled texts and the school's commitment to making the collaborative mentoring structure between librarians and teachers a permanent element of their pedagogical culture. (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

3.3 Inhibiting Factors in the Eradication of Functional Illiteracy

Internal motivation heavily dictates the success of literacy interventions, yet it constantly competes with external digital distractions. Students exhibit extreme reluctance

to participate in sustained reading activities when their cognitive habits are shaped by the rapid entertainment cycles of social media and smartphones. This technological immersion severely diminishes the attention span required to process and comprehend complex written texts. Passive classroom environments and monotonous teaching methods exacerbate this disengagement, making traditional reading appear obsolete and tedious to modern learners. Reversing this trend demands highly interactive library programming that can rival the visual stimulation of digital platforms, shifting students' perceptions of reading into a dynamic activity (Kusuma & Supriyadi, 2022).

Socio-economic realities also construct significant barriers outside school hours. Many functionally illiterate students must assist their families financially, reducing their time for study. "I prefer to go home early so I can play with my friends. Sometimes my mother asks me to come home quickly to help her sell things at home". This statement explicitly illustrates how immediate economic obligations inevitably eclipse long-term academic investments in marginalized households. Literacy ceases to be a priority when basic survival needs and fatigue dominate the daily familial routine (Wibowo & Purwanto, 2023).

The absence of parental scaffolding actively neutralizes the reading progress achieved during library interventions like the GSJM. A functionally illiterate student requires continuous environmental reinforcement; without books or intellectual encouragement at home, newly acquired comprehension skills quickly atrophy. "There is, but only sometimes, and even then no one really pays attention when I study at home. More often I'm asked to help my parents rather than to study". Educational apathy within low-income families fundamentally stifles the cognitive curiosity necessary to decode meaning from texts. Schools must structurally bridge this gap by functioning as the primary, and sometimes only, literate environment for these vulnerable demographics (Nugroho & Suryawati, 2021).

Addressing these systemic barriers necessitates a fundamental shift in how educational institutions perceive the eradication of functional illiteracy. Programs cannot operate in isolation from the students' socio-economic realities; they must integrate compensatory mechanisms to offset the lack of domestic academic support. Building functional literacy is inherently a socio-cultural endeavor requiring synergistic community outreach to slowly alter parental perceptions of education. The findings strongly suggest that reading interventions will plateau unless schools actively negotiate the competing demands of digital entertainment and economic survival. Comprehensive policy frameworks must provide extended, safe learning spaces that shield students from these external pressures during critical developmental phases (Setiawan & Yuliana, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that the library of SMP Negeri 1 Pancur Batu plays a fairly significant role in efforts to eradicate students' functional illiteracy. This role is reflected in the implementation of structured and sustainable literacy programs, particularly through the One Hour Reading Movement (GSJM). This program does not merely focus on reading activities but also includes guided reading, read-aloud sessions, writing summaries, and comprehension activities through simple discussions. The learning pattern applied is adjusted to students' ability levels, thereby supporting both beginners and those who are already capable of understanding texts.

Supporting factors in the implementation of this program include collaboration between teachers and librarians, the availability of adequate library facilities, a diverse and leveled collection of books, and direct mentoring for students. In addition, students'

enthusiasm in participating in the activities serves as an important indicator of the program's success. The comfortable library environment also contributes to creating a learning atmosphere that supports literacy activities.

On the other hand, several inhibiting factors affect the sustainability of the program, such as low student motivation, a tendency to prefer non-academic activities, and limited support from the family environment. Economic conditions also play a role, as some students are required to help their parents, which limits their time for studying. This indicates that the success of literacy programs does not depend solely on the school, but also requires support from families and the surrounding environment to ensure that literacy development can be carried out optimally.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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