

## **THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' READING INTEREST: A STUDY AT MTSN 1 LANGKAT**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the role of the school library in enhancing students' reading interest. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to examine library activities, reading habits, and available collections. Findings reveal that the library plays a significant role in promoting reading culture, though its function is not yet optimal due to limited space, a lack of updated collections, and librarians' multiple responsibilities. Despite these constraints, the library remains an essential learning resource for students who demonstrate consistent reading habits. Factors that most influence students' reading interest include collection diversity, room comfort, regular literacy programs, and support from teachers and librarians. Challenges such as competition with gadgets and limited book variety can be addressed through new acquisitions, donation programs, and digital resource utilization. Overall, well-managed libraries supported by all school elements effectively foster students' reading culture.*

**Keywords:** school library, reading interest, student literacy

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran perpustakaan sekolah dalam meningkatkan minat baca siswa. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi untuk mengetahui aktivitas perpustakaan, kebiasaan membaca siswa, serta koleksi yang tersedia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perpustakaan memiliki peran penting dalam menumbuhkan budaya membaca, meskipun fungsinya belum optimal karena keterbatasan ruang, koleksi buku yang kurang mutakhir, dan tugas ganda pustakawan. Meskipun demikian, perpustakaan tetap menjadi sumber belajar utama bagi siswa yang memiliki kebiasaan membaca secara konsisten. Faktor yang paling berpengaruh terhadap peningkatan minat baca antara lain keberagaman koleksi, kenyamanan ruang, kegiatan literasi rutin, serta dukungan guru dan pustakawan. Hambatan seperti persaingan dengan gawai dan keterbatasan koleksi dapat diatasi melalui pengadaan buku baru, program donasi, serta pemanfaatan sumber digital. Secara keseluruhan, perpustakaan yang dikelola dengan baik dan mendapat dukungan seluruh elemen sekolah mampu menumbuhkan budaya membaca di kalangan siswa.

**Kata Kunci:** perpustakaan sekolah, minat baca, literasi siswa

## **Introduction**

School libraries are one of the essential facilities that support the learning process. Their existence is not only as book storage spaces but also as centers of knowledge that help students broaden their horizons. Libraries play a vital role in shaping reading habits, enabling students to seek information from various sources (Rahayu & Wijaya, 2021). In modern education, libraries function as active learning media that foster independent learning and strengthen students' information literacy (Widodo, 2024). However, in reality, many school libraries have not functioned optimally as literacy centers due to limitations in facilities, collections, and professional staff (Kamilia et al., 2023).

Reading interest is one of the key factors in students' academic success. Students who read regularly tend to understand lessons more easily and possess broader knowledge than those who rarely read (Sari, 2023). Nevertheless, the rise of gadgets and digital media has significantly changed students' learning habits. Many students are now more attracted to online entertainment than printed books, leading to a noticeable decline in reading interest (Hasanah, 2020; Purwaningsih et al., 2023). This condition reveals a gap between the ideal function of libraries as literacy centers and the current reality in which students are increasingly detached from productive reading activities.

Previous studies have explored the role of libraries in enhancing students' literacy. Rahayu and Wijaya (2021) found that modern library management plays a key role in cultivating reading habits among elementary students. Meanwhile, Kamilia et al. (2023) highlighted that effective collection management and engaging reading spaces are primary factors that increase students' visits to libraries. Their findings suggest that adequate facilities positively correlate with improved reading interest.

Resti and Aslam (2023) further emphasized that effective library utilization can nurture early reading habits, particularly through regular literacy programs and teacher involvement. However, their research focused on the elementary level and did not examine the unique characteristics of Islamic junior high schools (*madrasah tsanawiyah*).

Similarly, Imron and Zamdani (2023) investigated the revitalization of school libraries through teacher-librarian collaboration, concluding that teacher support is crucial in motivating students to read. Nevertheless, their study did not explore how the interaction between physical facilities, book collections, and literacy programs influences reading interest in Islamic schools. Therefore, a research gap remains regarding how libraries in *madrasah* settings function as literacy centers that integrate reading culture with Islamic educational values.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the role of Islamic junior high school libraries, specifically MTsN 1 Langkat, in enhancing students' reading interest through an Islamic literacy approach rooted in knowledge and

*adab* (ethics of reading). This study not only examines the library's function as a book provider but also highlights its role as a joyful learning environment and a hub for literacy habituation within the *madrasah* context.

Additionally, this study emphasizes the dynamic interaction between librarians, teachers, and the learning environment in shaping students' reading culture. By employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research fills the gap concerning how library management strategies and literacy programs in Islamic schools can serve as catalysts for reading engagement in the digital era (Al-Harbi & Alqahtani, 2024; Nurhasanah et al., 2025).

This study aims to analyze and describe the role of the school library in fostering students' reading interest at MTsN 1 Langkat. Specifically, it seeks to identify the factors influencing students' reading motivation, reveal the challenges faced by the library, and propose strategies to optimize its function as a center for literacy development.

The main argument of this study is that school libraries function not merely as book repositories but as literacy development centers capable of cultivating a reading-oriented character among students. When libraries are professionally managed—with diverse collections, comfortable reading spaces, and active collaboration between librarians and teachers—they can become the driving force behind a sustainable reading culture (Widodo, 2024; Resti & Aslam, 2023).

This research is significant because its findings are expected to contribute to developing effective strategies for managing school libraries, particularly in Islamic educational institutions. A deep understanding of the library's role and challenges can help schools design policies to strengthen students' literacy culture. Furthermore, this study provides empirical insights into integrating Islamic values into school-based literacy practices, in line with the national education goal of nurturing knowledgeable, ethical, and character-driven learners.

## **Method**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of school libraries in fostering students' reading interest at MTsN 1 Langkat. The qualitative method was chosen because it is appropriate for exploring social realities and individual behaviors in their natural context without manipulation or experimental intervention (Widodo, 2024). This approach allows the researcher to obtain contextual insights into how the library functions as a literacy center and how the interactions among students, librarians, and teachers contribute to the development of a reading culture.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 1 Langkat, an Islamic junior high school that provides a library actively used by students. The site was selected purposively because its library plays a

strategic role in supporting teaching, learning, and literacy activities despite certain limitations in space, collections, and staff capacity. The participants of this study consisted of the librarian, two teachers, and eight students, all selected through purposive sampling based on their level of involvement in library activities. The librarian was responsible for managing collections, services, and literacy programs, while teachers and students represented active stakeholders in library utilization and reading culture.

Data were collected through three primary techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to identify students' behaviors and activities in the library, such as visit frequency, reading preferences, and interaction patterns with the librarian and facilities. The researcher carried out passive participatory observation over a two-week period to capture natural behaviors without disrupting normal routines. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the librarian, teachers, and students to gather detailed information about reading habits, institutional support for literacy, and challenges faced in library management. Meanwhile, documentation was used to obtain secondary data, including book catalogues, records of literacy activities, photos of the reading area, and archives of library development programs. The combination of these techniques provided comprehensive and triangulated data to strengthen the validity of findings (Widodo, 2024).

Data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously following the model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, the researcher selected and organized relevant information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. The presentation stage involved displaying the reduced data in descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Finally, the researcher conducted the conclusion drawing and verification process to identify emerging patterns, construct meaning, and formulate theoretical implications concerning the role of school libraries in enhancing students' reading interest. These analytical activities were performed iteratively to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and depth of interpretation.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources (librarian, teachers, students) and data collection methods (observation, interview, documentation). Transferability was ensured by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the library setting, while dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of all research steps. Confirmability was established by maintaining researcher neutrality and cross-checking data from multiple sources before drawing conclusions.

This study was conducted over a three-month period, from March to May 2025, encompassing several stages: the preparation of research

instruments, field data collection, data analysis, and report writing. Throughout the process, ethical considerations were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality of participants, and respect for the school's institutional regulations.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Madrasah Library at MTsN 1 Langkat**

The results of this study show that the library at MTsN 1 Langkat holds an important position as a facility supporting the teaching and learning process; however, its condition still requires attention to function optimally. The library space is relatively limited, so it can only accommodate a portion of students when several classes visit at the same time. The layout remains simple, with rows of bookshelves, several reading tables, and one librarian's desk. Lighting and ventilation are not yet optimal in some areas, making the reading atmosphere less comfortable for students who need a quiet and conducive environment for concentration.

The library contains a collection of textbooks, dictionaries, atlases, children's stories, and several general reference books. However, the number of recent publications and popular reading materials is still limited, resulting in a lack of diversity for students' reading choices. This is supported by findings that students often cannot find books that match their interests or age levels, which makes visits to the library less appealing. The library is managed by one or very few staff members who also have multiple responsibilities, making it difficult to provide intensive services such as lending, cataloging, and reading guidance. Although the opening hours have been adjusted to the school schedule, limited space and staffing mean that the library is usually crowded only during recess or special lessons, while at other times it tends to be quiet.

Documentation records show that some regular activities have been carried out, such as small book exhibitions or group reading sessions, but their frequency and scale are inconsistent each semester. The book inventory system is not yet detailed, resulting in less structured planning for collection development. Interviews with teachers and students reveal two important perspectives. Teachers acknowledge that the library plays a significant role in supporting learning, providing references for assignments, and broadening students' knowledge. Meanwhile, students express the need for a more engaging atmosphere and more interesting reading materials; some prefer using gadgets for entertainment or quick access to information rather than visiting the library. This indicates the need to renew the collection, improve the reading environment, and enhance services to make the library an attractive learning hub once again.

In conclusion, the library at MTsN 1 Langkat serves as an essential learning resource but has not yet been fully optimized due to limited space, a lack of updated books, and a shortage of staff. These conditions affect the frequency of visits and the sustainability of reading habits among students.

Therefore, gradual improvements in book collections, library facilities, reading programs, and service quality are needed to strengthen the library's role in supporting the educational goals of the madrasah.

### **The Relationship Between the Library and Students' Reading Interest at MTsN 1 Langkat**

The findings reveal a strong relationship between the presence and quality of the library and students' reading interest. Reading interest does not emerge instantly but develops when students have access to interesting books, comfortable reading spaces, and encouragement from teachers and the school environment. Students who regularly visit the library tend to demonstrate higher reading motivation—they borrow books more frequently, participate more actively in discussions, and complete reading-based assignments more effectively. Conversely, in classes that rarely use the library, students' reading interest appears low, as they tend to prefer other activities such as playing with gadgets or chatting.

Several key factors link the library to reading interest. The first is the diversity of collections, which allows students to find reading materials that match their curiosity and age level. The second is the physical environment of the library—tidy rooms, adequate lighting, and comfortable seating make reading a pleasant activity. The third factor is the implementation of library-based activities such as reading sessions, book discussions, and reading competitions, which can cultivate consistent reading habits. The fourth is the role of teachers and librarians, whose guidance, reading assignments, and personal examples strongly influence students' enthusiasm for reading.

However, several obstacles hinder the positive relationship between libraries and reading interest. The limited number of new books makes students quickly bored because the available reading materials rarely change. The small size of the library also limits group activities such as discussions or book reviews. The growing influence of gadgets is another challenge, as many students prefer watching videos or playing mobile games rather than reading books (Kamilia et al., 2023). In addition, family reading culture plays a role—students who see family members reading at home tend to have higher reading motivation.

Further analysis shows that reading interest is not only determined by book availability but also by how the school designs engaging reading experiences. Simple programs such as “one page a day” or storytelling sessions can serve as effective starting points. Literacy practices from other schools, such as *Read Aloud* activities, *BaSaBar* (one page a day), and book discussions, can be adapted to suit the adolescent level at MTsN 1 Langkat. These programs can promote consistent reading behavior and transform reading from a task into an enjoyable habit (Fadhilah, 2023).

The relationship between the library and students' reading interest is mutually reinforcing. An engaging library increases reading interest, while stronger reading interest encourages greater library use. To sustain this

relationship, improvements are needed in library collections, the reading environment, literacy programs, and the active involvement of both teachers and parents.

### **The Role of the Library in Fostering Students' Reading Interest at MTsN 1 Langkat**

The library plays a crucial dual role in fostering students' reading interest: as a provider of reading materials, a pleasant learning space, and a center for literacy activities within the school. It is not merely a place to store books but also a dynamic learning center that can cultivate reading habits among students. At MTsN 1 Langkat, the library has a strategic function in supporting education. Students need reading materials that match their age and interests so that reading becomes enjoyable rather than monotonous. Without the library's encouragement, students might only read compulsory textbooks, while the broader world of reading can open their perspectives and critical thinking. A well-managed and active library, therefore, is essential in developing students' reading habits from an early stage and in nurturing lifelong learners.

The study found that the library at MTsN 1 Langkat fulfills multiple functions. It provides reading materials, offers a comfortable reading environment, serves as a literacy hub, engages teachers and librarians in active collaboration, and addresses challenges through concrete steps. The library as a reading material provider must ensure a diverse collection, including fiction appealing to young readers, light non-fiction to expand knowledge, and academic books supporting school subjects. To overcome budget constraints, the school can collaborate with publishers, initiate book donation programs, and rotate books between classrooms to maintain fresh collections (Resti et al., 2023).

As a reading space, the library should be arranged comfortably with neat organization, sufficient lighting, ergonomic furniture, and thematic reading corners that make students enjoy staying longer. Given the limited space, creating small reading corners in each classroom or turning certain school areas into reading spots can be effective alternatives. Displaying posters, highlighting new books, and featuring teacher recommendations can further increase engagement.

As a literacy center, the library can host various programs such as reading clubs, book reviews, 15-minute reading sessions before class, storytelling competitions, and writing reviews. In the digital era, activities such as blog-writing or creating short content based on books can be added to make reading more interactive and enjoyable.

The role of librarians and teachers is equally important. Librarians are responsible for managing collections and organizing literacy events, while teachers should assign reading tasks, model reading habits, and discuss books with students. Collaboration between these two parties can enhance the effectiveness of literacy initiatives (Imron et al., 2023).

Although several challenges persist—such as limited collections, small spaces, and students’ preference for gadgets—these can be overcome through practical strategies. Libraries can utilize donations, digital resources, and partnerships to expand collections. Spatial limitations can be managed by rotating books and scheduling visits. The use of gadgets can be redirected positively through e-books, short video-based readings, or digital literacy programs that combine technology with reading.

To sustain these efforts, both short- and long-term plans are necessary. In the short term, the library can update its catalog, improve space arrangements, train staff, and launch a “15 minutes before class” reading program. In the medium term, it can acquire priority books, establish reading clubs, and organize literacy events regularly. In the long term, the madrasah can build additional reading rooms, develop digital collections, and strengthen reading culture both in school and at home. Consistent implementation of these strategies is expected to result in increased student visits, higher book circulation, and a more positive reading attitude.

Ultimately, a well-managed and well-supported library will contribute to shaping MTsN 1 Langkat students into individuals who are more knowledgeable, information-literate, and enthusiastic about lifelong reading and learning.

## **Conclusion**

The library at MTsN 1 Langkat plays a crucial role in supporting the teaching and learning process as well as in fostering a culture of literacy within the madrasah environment. However, its function has not yet reached full optimization due to several limitations, such as inadequate space, a lack of diverse and updated book collections, and a limited number of librarians. Both teachers and students recognize that the library significantly contributes to broadening knowledge, assisting in completing academic tasks, and creating a more enjoyable and meaningful learning atmosphere. Therefore, immediate improvements in physical facilities, expansion of collections, and professional development for library staff are essential to maximize the library’s role in the school’s educational ecosystem.

The study also confirms a strong relationship between the quality of the library and students’ reading interest. A library that offers a diverse collection, a comfortable atmosphere, regular literacy programs, and active support from teachers and librarians has proven effective in cultivating students’ consistent reading habits. Challenges such as limited new collections, insufficient space, and competition with digital devices can be addressed through practical measures such as book donation programs, classroom reading corners, integration of digital resources, and collaboration with external stakeholders.

With strategic management and consistent support from all school members, the MTsN 1 Langkat library has the potential to develop into an innovative and inclusive learning center. Furthermore, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for policymakers at the madrasah and Ministry

of Religious Affairs levels to design literacy development strategies grounded in Islamic educational values. Future studies are recommended to explore the effectiveness of digital literacy initiatives, collaborative models between librarians and teachers, and the influence of family reading culture on students' reading habits in Islamic schools.

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