

Library Roles in Community Empowerment: A Literature Study

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Abstract. This paper is aimed to investigate the social role of libraries in the form of community empowerment. Studies that have been dominant in discussing the existence of libraries as providers of collections for the public to read make this research significant because it attempts to put forward the potential for new study perspectives that can touch the heart of public needs in the social realm. This research departs from the layers of the library pyramid in the form of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. The four layers of the pyramid are used as the existential foundation of libraries in playing their role in society. The library's role has been found in three groups: the role of a public space, an agent of change, and a community developer. The first role is played in the form of increasing the quality of accessibility for discourse development. The second role as an agent of change has paved the way for society to gain equal and broad access, giving birth to an educated society. The accumulation of these roles places libraries in a vital position as community developers. Libraries have encouraged developments in people's lives. Issues of information accessibility, equality, social justice, and social harmony guide libraries through their social functions in society.

Keywords: library role, social justice, community empowerment, agent of change, public sphere

1. Introduction

The library, as a place that facilitates various access for interaction, both individuals and groups, is a dynamic space (Laugu, 2015). The existence of libraries in their midst does not exist simply as an inanimate object. However, it emerges through a dynamic process that encourages knowledge practices, social interaction, capital competition, networking through various platforms, etc. The presence of libraries, both through government schemes and public interest advocacy, has illustrated the dynamics of community life. With all its dynamics, community life, where libraries play a fundamental role, is a public space driven by the library pyramid in the form of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom (Grataridarga, 2019).

The four layers that form the pyramid are the corridors of community accessibility to social dynamics that occur continuously in actualizing human culture. The data pyramid functions as a sleeping source of knowledge in the library, which positions the library as a document repository. All forms of knowledge recording are a library layer (Ebisi & Arua, 2018). This layer requires continuous preservation as an effort to preserve the originality of knowledge sources spread through the dissemination of information. The dissemination of knowledge has provided access to cultural capital, which forms three constructions of tradition: dominant culture, residual culture, and emergent culture (Storey, 1993).

Another presence of the library is as an information center whose primary goal is to serve library users. As an information center, a library is a place for producing data relevant to society's needs. Therefore, the availability of information and public accessibility to information have become fundamental concerns among librarians so that public needs can be met (Green, 2020). That is the importance of the position of the library information pyramid. This is a significant concern for the community to access various up-to-date information available in the library to empower activities and programs in the community.

The next component of the pyramid is knowledge. The library is a space for knowledge production and a vehicle for scientific communication, which facilitates interaction between writers whose ideas mutually construct each other to produce other new ideas (Klain-Gabbay & Shoham, 2018; Duffy, 2024). Besides, libraries have become melting pots between writers and society (Nurdin & Mukhlis, 2019). At this point, innovative ideas emerge from contestative meetings between actors involved in library practice. Knowledge management, carried out professionally, creates various values that society can uphold. This value of knowledge gives birth to the dimensions of the pyramid of wisdom, which guides society to understand the truth. This truth is intended as a value that becomes a basis for making decisions and understanding each person's differences. The value of this knowledge has given birth to wisdom in society, which ultimately creates social equality and harmony (Talawar et al., 2022; Nanjunda, 2017), which develops through the accumulated role of libraries in the form of public spaces, agents of change, and community developers, as will be explained in the discussion.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical framework, two theoretical constructs will be explained to explain the conceptual work in this research. The two theoretical constructs are the role of libraries and community empowerment. In the first construct, the view of Connell (1979) can be used to explain that a role is a social action that follows specific rules. Therefore, the role in question has certain qualifications that help people carry out their activities. This definition is in line with the view which states that a role has developed based on a set of behaviors, rights, obligations, beliefs, and norms held by a person about a certain social status (Wikipedia, 2024), and all these elements are in synergy with each other (Genilloud & Wegmann, 2000).

As an activity that makes everyone move and do something within a framework, the construct of the phrase library role can be understood as a conceptual framework that describes the scope of library activities in a social space. This activity contains the function and purpose of the library's existence in society (Chi, 2024; Desmarchelier et al., 2024). In this context, libraries provide a conceptual framework for reading and understanding the phenomenon of library activities that contribute to social change. This activity also reflects knowledge management practices that develop and change over time (Bouaamri, 2023).

The second construct is community empowerment. The concept of empowerment is an active process that drives social and political transformation in a community, resulting in a renegotiation of power by the community to gain more control and a desire to form alliances with other communities (Kruahong et al., 2023). This empowerment specifically advocates for social groups who experience marginal conditions, weak economies, and other socially vulnerable conditions. Community empowerment describes a process that allows people to increase control over their lives. Communities in this context may or may not be spatially connected but share common interests, concerns, or identities (WHO, 2024).

Meanwhile, conceptual accumulation about the role of libraries in community empowerment is a theoretical framework for understanding the phenomena of library programs and activities in society. Several studies that attempt to link the role of libraries and community empowerment show that library programs and activities have played a significant role in community development. Mubofu and Mambo (2021) examined it conceptually based on a systematic review analysis of the topic in question. They expressed the importance of library activities in providing information services to provide access to information to the public so that they understand how to empower themselves. This activity is not limited to scientific activities, such as reading and borrowing library collections, but is also open to other activities, such as playing, discussing, networking, and so on (Connell, 1979).

3. Method

This study is literature research (Richardson, 2019; George, 2008), the data of which is based on literary works that discuss the topic studied. To guide the implementation of this research, researchers searched for sources in scientific journals and other sources relevant to the study theme. In searching for these sources, researchers have used the main keywords in the draft research title: role, the role of libraries, empowerment, community empowerment, and the role of libraries in empowering communities. The results of this search found a variety of written works, some of which were limited to the role of libraries and others in the form of community empowerment.

In addition, various sources in different ways show that libraries have an essential position in society. Researchers have studied and interpreted the diversity of focal points from various sources to find the role of libraries in community empowerment. These roles are validated through the triangulation technique of source

data with other source data, which is then analyzed interpretively based on the Miles and Huberman technique (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, it is grouped into several leading roles of libraries related to community empowerment.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The role of libraries in empowering the community and their professional efforts to realize social justice is one of the fundamental functions. Libraries, as a pyramid of knowledge, are essential capital with significant social and community empowerment access. Based on the author's research in the form of a literature review, the role of libraries in this context can be seen in three dimensions, namely, from the function of public space to the public sphere, libraries as agents of change, and the role of libraries in community empowerment. These three role dimensions will be seen in the following explanation

4.1. The role of libraries in public space to the public sphere

The library's connectivity with equality and social justice are two inseparable relationships. One of the functions of the presence of a library is to support fundamental human aspects in the form of knowledge (Zandonade, 2004; Pendit, 2019). Knowledge is the primary human ladder towards a level of empowerment or becoming a human whose existence is recognized by the environment. Therefore, the library becomes a space and stage that crosses internal and external challenges. The comprehensive role of libraries is an inseparable part of issues of equality and community empowerment (Burdic, 2017). The cross-border role of libraries can be seen in several ways, as follows.

The library as a service space has transcendence into social activities. The library as a place describes its existence as a space that is used to carry out service tasks. As a place, a library cannot be separated from a physical image or space, a place where people can gather and hold activities (Bennett et al., 2005; Garnar & Tonyan, 2021). At this point, the library positions itself as a space for social activity, which refers to various possible social empowerment programs that can be carried out, such as meetings of certain social groups, community activities, community economic empowerment training, and so on (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2021).

Besides that, whether held internally or externally, library events have opened up the possibility of generating ideas for future events or other programs. Many events have been held that allow libraries to interact with institutions or communities that share the aim of empowering society, including advocating for gender equality so that each gender has the same opportunity to achieve prosperity (Marx & Kim, 2019). Libraries as public spaces have a core value in empowering every human being through the public spaces available in libraries (Suharso et al., 2019). Therefore, every library event provides space to explore ideas for the birth of other important events for the community.

Libraries are also considered meeting points, providing opportunities for scientific discussion sessions that depart from ordinary meetings. The concept of a meeting point is familiar terminology. However, it has long been integrated into library

practice only because it is inherent in people's social interactions, so it does not demonstratively become a general discourse in library services, especially for those who have made an appointment for an activity (Ismail & Chi, 2017). This terminology only requires a particular form of formal or informal activity. Therefore, this meeting point develops according to community development. However, developing this terminology has given more space to young people from the current dominant generation, Generation Z or Generation Alpha (Sanjeev et al., 2022). In essence, the library has been used as a meeting point by all generations, especially generations Z and Alpha above, for various purposes, which in this context places the library as a space that facilitates scientific interaction through scientific discussions among the community (Nurdin & Mukhlis, 2019).

Likewise, libraries can be considered social sites, which positions them as social sites. Positioning the library at this level can mean that it is a space containing historical elements that have provided an experience for humans to develop their social aspects. The development of this social aspect marks a momentum for connectivity where the role of libraries is vital in human social life (Bouaamri, 2023). This connectivity element is the basis that gives birth to the harmonious dimension of interaction that occurs among library users. Social harmony is a tradition not born by itself but emerges from a social process built based on knowledge continuously practiced and developed by libraries (Jaeger et al., 2016).

This position creates a garden of society, which has turned the library into a community playground. In the context of Indonesian libraries, types of libraries managed independently by the community have emerged, such as Community Learning Park (called TBM), Modern Learning Place, and other community libraries (Nurdin & Saufa, 2020). These types of libraries are initiated by specific communities, involving all components of society by positioning the library as a space that advocates for their education and welfare. The position of this playroom has developed into a space for community empowerment, not just reading quietly in the spaces provided. However, it has been developed into activity programs that raise enthusiasm and innovation for reading, which ultimately results in the community indirectly having a reading tradition. They experience a process of strengthening literacy through book reviews related to people's interests and livelihoods (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2021).

This community empowerment effort has created various perspectives on the substantial meaning of libraries, one of which is as a place of protection. Libraries become shelters from various events, especially protection from hoaxes and information fraud (Andermann, 2023). The library has guaranteed the truth of knowledge and information through mechanisms for providing collections and other information sources. The validity of library knowledge and information can be measured, effectively empowering the community (Biswas & Deb, 2019). As a knowledge shelter, the library allows all forms of knowledge interaction. Libraries facilitate writers and readers to develop their knowledge through a scientific communication approach, either through direct collections or expert discussions and other scientific discussions.

4.2. Libraries as agents of change

Libraries, as drivers of change, have played an essential role in various sectors of society's life. Libraries, the epicenter of knowledge management and production, have encouraged community empowerment in all areas of their lives (Talawar et al., 2022). Therefore, the development of libraries in all dimensions, both in academic environments, such as schools, colleges, and other academic institutions, as well as in the general public, has played a vital role in influencing people's thoughts and actions. The presence of this library illustrates a form of fundamental facilitator role, which is not surprising if the library is recorded as having helped create educated individuals and communities with strong literacy skills. This education and literacy significantly impact libraries as drivers of change, especially in their independence in understanding their needs (Shukla et al., 2013).

The above environmental changes in society are directly connected to increasing awareness of a better level of life. The process towards betterment requires strengthening the reading culture environment and getting used to the dialectics of information to form a transformative process in society's knowledge. This knowledge transformation requires skills and program innovation to brand the fundamental role of libraries in injecting library literacy capital (Sethy, 2018; Overstreet, 2023). Therefore, the injection program needs to be a point to adopt various ideas from users or the public who have the potential to become library users. This injection program is correlated with the social inclusion program, which adopts community needs to be resolved together through, among other things, book reviews whose topics are directly related to their work and profession (Bouaamri, 2023). In essence, the role of libraries here is to develop the local capacity of the community so that they achieve a better standard of living economically, educationally, culturally, and so on.

Achieving such goals manifests a vision of change that can synergize with the library's position as an agent of change. Therefore, libraries are essential partners of society in realizing the vision of change and turning it into a joint strategy in carrying out social change, which places more emphasis on strengthening society's literacy culture in facing the social media era. As a vehicle for exploring ideas for change, the library will continue to experience strengthening if the library's position is placed in an actual social reality. The developing social reality shows how significant the roles of libraries are in society's literacy capacity. They need literacy competence to face the frenzy of information that develops in society at a certain point but tend to enjoy every type of information they receive without verification at another point (Krolak, 2005).

Libraries, as agents of social change, are a form of capital that can encourage the rise of cultural leadership through reading. Reading is a prerequisite for modern humans (Kelly, 2023). Reading competency will shape and develop social interactions based on community literacy culture. Cultural capital is an urgency for a society to create an open and progressive space in designing a humanist, religious, and cultural life. At this point, libraries strengthen culture, finance knowledge, deepen epistemology, embody axiological values, and develop paths toward sustainable teaching and learning (Stone,

1970). Libraries have a practice and knowledge management tradition that facilitates the public in exploring knowledge (Pendit, 2019).

The progressiveness of the library tradition provides a contextual basis for understanding library development. This development also determines the role of libraries as learning commons (Allison et al., 2019). The library is a place for learning together with the community. This label creates an image that introduces the library as a support system in the community literacy strengthening system, which provides an environment that advocates for the community to learn together. In addition, this function synergistically strengthens the library's position as a community learning center (Monroe, 1976; Joselin & Panneerselvam, 2016). The implications of the library's presence as a community learning center have created independent programs in the community, such as Community Reading Gardens and Community Learning Centres. In the Indonesian literacy context, various community programs that support the functions of libraries as learning centers have developed in various places (Nurdin & Saufa, 2020).

The role of the library as a learning center builds a strong path in advocating the mission of social change in society. Fundamental social change can occur if social forces coalesce through intellectual interaction. An interaction is born from a relationship between actors that creates communication, both traditionally normative and intellectually progressive (Klain-Gabbay & Shoham, 2018). Both can move a relationship; only the first is more stagnant than the second, more dynamic and progressive; at this point, a social change can occur actively while forming innovation in society. The active function of the library will encourage social change and community empowerment through the second route.

4.3. Libraries as community developers

Libraries, as public spaces that engage in community development, are strongly oriented toward community empowerment through libraries at all levels and community groups (Lachal & Peich, 2018). The availability of a library will provide broad access to the public to understand their rights and obligations in interacting. In this situation, libraries can carry out promotive functions relating to the conditions and needs of society in terms of social justice, which includes equality, health, cleanliness, poverty, and so on (Jaeger et al., 2016). The availability of information through the library will open their minds to the issues above, some of which may still be marginalized. Therefore, the library's promotion of information on various kinds of underdeveloped social conditions above is urgent in fulfilling the library's promotive role.

To realize this, library institutional commitment is needed to implement the social development role above. Literacy commitments for libraries, for example, will influence various commitments, including the literacy of every member of society and access to knowledge. As a result, society will have insight into health, cost of living standards, gender equality, public participation, and social justice (Roy & Swargiary, 2024). These social elements in people's lives are essential aspects that will be developed

in library information management. Therefore, the library's ability and competence to play this role will show the interrelationship and mutual need between the community and the library (Baker & Evans, 2011).

Efforts to reach the point of mutuality of needs are necessary for libraries to demonstrate their role as community developers. The library's presence as the leading center for information has provided legal professionalism in serving users. The vision of serving the community is essential to fully contributing to community development through strengthening capacity and supporting learning (Nurdin & Agusta, 2021; Mubofu & Mambo, 2021). The power of this learning will be a crucial player in building a community reading culture and increasing the literacy of children, teenagers, adults, and parents, both locally and globally. Optimizing the role of libraries in supporting literacy and learning will be the primary key to playing the role of libraries as community developers. The development of society will occur if a good knowledge tradition is developed, and this situation will occur if a good literacy tradition exists in society (Khotimah et al., 2024).

Many examples of past knowledge development traditions can be referred to as a guide in the journey towards community development. In one Western view, for example, libraries are the primary means of democratizing knowledge for society (Kranich N., 2001). The library is recognized and held as an institution that provides space for the management and development of knowledge to create a democratic society, understanding their rights and obligations as a society so that they can act and behave according to the social order that applies in their environment. In this condition, a society feels true independence because it does not experience the effects of various turbulence in social life (Bouaamri, 2023; Talawar et al., 2022). This means they are on the life path of a democratic society, where the traditions of rights and obligations live in quality at all levels and social elements (Kranich N., 2001; 2020; 2021).

Such life has demonstrated the critical role of libraries as community developers. Libraries have played a role in all areas of knowledge and levels of community capacity, as can be seen from the emergence of various libraries in all sectors of public life, including school libraries, college libraries, special libraries, public or community libraries, and other libraries (Mubofu & Mambo, 2021). All types of libraries and their typologies have orientations that substantially encourage knowledge communication in society (Fagbola et al., 2011). For example, public libraries were initially designed to serve the community, especially those with limited reading materials and information access. Providing this access provides opportunities for people, especially marginalized societies, to get equal access to education and learning to become part of a democratic society with awareness of their rights and obligations as public citizens (Changmai, 2020; Biswas & Deb, 2019).

4. Conclusion

Library presence has illustrated community life dynamics, which inherently makes library actors play a fundamental role. Libraries as public spaces are built on four

layers of entities, including data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. These four layers have formed a library pyramid, which becomes a corridor for community accessibility to the social dynamics that occur continuously in actualizing human culture. The data pyramid functions as a sleeping source of knowledge in the library, which positions the library as a repository for documents, print and digital. This pyramid layer requires ongoing preservation to preserve the originality of knowledge sources spread through information dissemination. The availability of information has become a fundamental concern among librarians so that people's needs can be met. This is the layer of the library information pyramid. This pyramid layer opens up space for exploration and production of knowledge. It becomes a vehicle for scientific communication, ultimately giving birth to the final layer, namely the wisdom value of knowledge.

The layers of the pyramid as the existential foundation of the library have provided dynamic space for the library to play several roles, including as a public space, an agent of change, and a community developer. The first role is played through library efforts in improving the quality of accessibility from public space to the public sphere. This role emphasizes the importance of increasing scientific communication and discourse struggles that can drive knowledge production. The role of an agent of change has paved the way for society to gain equal access to broad insight and become an educated group. The accumulation of these roles places libraries in a significant position. Libraries have encouraged developments in people's lives. Information accessibility, equality, social justice, and social harmony have received appropriate and transparent supervision from the library's implementation of its social inclusion role.

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