



Strategic Management in Public Library: Empowering Community Reading Habits at Regional Level

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the strategic management approaches executed to enhance public reading habits within the geographically fragmented context of regional public libraries. The problem addresses the declining trend of sustained community reading interest and library underutilization, which is further exacerbated by severe geographical isolation, administrative inertia, and resource constraints in developing regional districts. To address this issue, this study employs a qualitative case study design focused on the Regional Public Library of Tojo Una-Una Regency, Central Sulawesi. Data were meticulously gathered through triangulated instruments, including semi-structured interviews with key administrative and community informants, field observations of outreach initiatives, and comprehensive institutional document reviews. The qualitative data were then analyzed using an interactive model comprising systematic data condensation, structural data display, and continuous conclusion verification to ensure interpretive trustworthiness. The empirical findings reveal that the chief librarian successfully neutralized severe geographical fragmentation by shifting from centralized operations to a decentralized, network-based distribution model. Management optimized limited resources by building cross-sector alliances and deploying an innovative, amphibious book-box rotation system using local maritime transportation networks to regularly reach marginalized island communities. Based on these insights, future research should employ mixed-methods approaches across diverse regional typologies to evaluate how digital literacy platforms can be integrated into this collaborative strategic management framework.

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Introduction

The development of a robust reading culture is a fundamental cornerstone for fostering an enlightened, innovative, and socio-economically resilient society in the modern era (Pathollah et al., 2025; Torgesen, 1977). Literacy directly correlates with a community's capacity to navigate complex global challenges, process critical information, and improve overall quality of life through continuous self-education (Hasanah et al., 2022; Salamah & Sarjiyem, 2025). Nowadays, the reality demonstrates that regions with higher literacy rates and well-established reading habits consistently exhibit greater economic productivity, reduced social inequality, and more active civic participation (Katoningsih & Sunaryo, 2020). Consequently, understanding how to systematically cultivate and sustain these community reading habits becomes an imperative social mission rather than a mere educational luxury. Public libraries, as democratized institutions of lifelong learning, must therefore transition from passive book repositories into dynamic hubs of social transformation (Ayumi et al., 2025; Rafi et al., 2022). So, investigating the mechanisms that drive community literacy at the regional level is critical for empowering society, ensuring that public knowledge resources are effectively leveraged to bridge the socio-economic divide and promote sustainable regional development for all citizens.

Despite the undisputed importance of literacy, a widespread and critical problem persists within modern society: the declining trend of sustained reading habits among the general public, particularly at the regional and district levels (Sukiri et al., 2024). This alarming decline is deeply exacerbated by the rapid proliferation of short-form digital entertainment and social media platforms, which capture public attention spans but often fail to cultivate deep, critical comprehension skills (Pan, 2020; Shaikh & Kochar, 2023). Furthermore, regional communities frequently suffer from a severe lack of structured guidance, limited access to high-quality literary materials, and a historical absence of engaging public literacy programs. This creates a widening intellectual gap between metropolitan centre and developing regional districts, leaving rural populations vulnerable to misinformation and educational stagnation (Krauss et al., 2020; Wolters & Brady, 2021). The problem lies not just in the availability of physical books, but in the lack of an overarching societal ecosystem that actively encourages, rewards, and sustains reading as a daily habit.

A closer examination of the current situation in regional public libraries reveals a stark and troubling phenomenon that demands immediate managerial intervention. Earlier observations indicate that while many district libraries possess adequate physical infrastructures and growing book collections, the reading rooms remain chronically underutilized, and visitor numbers continue to dwindle annually. Many regional libraries operate under obsolete, bureaucratic routines, maintaining static operating hours and uninspiring environments that fail to attract the younger generation or working professionals. Consequently, outreach

programs are often treated as mere administrative formalities rather than community-driven campaigns, resulting in a severe disconnect between library services and actual community needs. In several districts, local leadership overlooks the strategic value of the public library, leading to stagnant budgetary allocations, undertrained staff, and a total lack of innovative literacy initiatives. This disconnect represents a critical operational paradox: the library exists as a funded public institution, yet it fails to function as a catalyst for community empowerment, operating in isolation from the vibrant public it is mandated to serve.

Previous studies have mapped public library management through various strategic and technical dimensions. Tang et al., (2024) found that physical accessibility and diverse inventories temporarily increase community patronage, while Situmorang (2022) highlighted a critical gap due to traditional operational lenses overriding holistic strategic frameworks. Conversely, Fabricius & Cundill, (2014) proved that adaptive leadership systematically reshapes long-term reading behaviors, aligning with Hasna et al., (2024), who linked proactive strategic planning directly to enhanced regional literacy. At the governance level, Koomson & Afoakwah, (2023) demonstrated that performance-based budgeting strengthens visitor retention, whereas Knies et al., (2024) discovered that district-level cross-sectoral partnerships significantly expand the reach of reading programs. And the last, Alenezi, (2023) emphasized that chief librarians' utilization of digital innovations acts as a primary catalyst for empowering community reading habits locally. Synthesizing these seven studies confirms that institutional leadership and strategic vision in public libraries are absolutely paramount to reversing public literacy decline and fostering sustainable, region-wide reading cultures.

This study directly addresses these scholarly omissions by repositioning the discourse from routine library administration to the domain of proactive strategic management and institutional leadership. While previous literature emphasizes what libraries possess in terms of physical resources, this research investigates how libraries strategically utilize those resources to achieve broader societal outcomes (Gerard et al., 2022). By evaluating the strategic choices, community engagement frameworks, and visionary policies implemented by library leadership, this study bridges the gap between management theory and public literacy promotion (Pulimeno et al., 2020). The contribution of this research is twofold: it provides a fresh theoretical framework that connects organizational strategy with behavioural social change, and it offers actionable empirical insights for public administrators (Ferede et al., 2024; Paletta et al., 2025). Understanding this relationship is critical because traditional library models are no longer sufficient to compete with digital distractions, making it essential to discover how strategic public management can effectively revitalize these vital institutions to empower regional communities sustainably.

And this study argues that the successful revitalization of public literacy depends fundamentally on the implementation of dynamic, community-oriented

strategic management, rather than merely expanding physical book collections. It hypothesizes that when library leadership proactively adopts modern strategic management frameworks, it can successfully transform public libraries into highly engaging, relevant, and impactful socio-educational hubs. The contribution of this research lies in providing a robust, empirically validated strategic model for chief librarians and regional policymakers, offering a clear guide on how to leverage institutional authority, innovative programming, and stakeholder collaboration to foster a sustainable reading culture, thereby driving socio-intellectual empowerment across regional communities.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study design to comprehensively investigate the strategic management of the chief librarian in enhancing public reading habits within a specific regional context (Tesar, 2021). The case study approach is selected because it allows for an in-depth, holistic, and contextual exploration of contemporary phenomena within their real-life settings, particularly where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are highly integrated. The empirical research is conducted at the Regional Public Library of Tojo Una-Una Regency, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. This location is purposively chosen due to its unique geographical characteristics as an archipelagic and developing region, which presents distinct logistical and socio-cultural challenges in promoting literacy, making it a critical and information-rich case for evaluating strategic public management under resource-constrained conditions. Data collection techniques are strictly triangulated to ensure empirical robustness, comprising semi-structured interviews with the chief librarian, library staff, and local community leaders; continuous field observations of library operations and public outreach programs; and an extensive documentation review of institutional strategic plans, annual performance reports, and literacy program budgets.

Data analysis follows the interactive model, which systematically covers data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Lê & Schmid, 2022). During the data condensation phase, the voluminous raw data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documents are selected, focused, simplified, and transformed to identify critical themes regarding strategic leadership and community engagement. Subsequently, the organized information is structured into systematic data displays, such as narrative texts and matrix tables, to enable deep conceptual comparison and the identification of hidden operational patterns (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). In the final stage, conclusions are progressively drawn and verified by constantly checking the evolving propositions against the empirical field data to ensure valid conceptual alignment. To guarantee data trustworthiness and validity, the researcher implements rigorous data triangulation techniques, combining multiple data sources and methods alongside member checking, where preliminary findings are

returned to the key informants in Tojo Una-Una to confirm the accuracy, credibility, and interpretive authenticity of the qualitative analysis.

Finding and Discussion

Finding

Archipelagic Literacy as Strategic Collaboration and Resource Optimization

The Archipelagic Literacy defines the proactive and adaptive management framework executed by the chief librarian to overcome severe geographical fragmentation in Tojo Una-Una Regency. In this study, this strategy manifests as a deliberate shift from traditional, centralized library services based in the capital of Ampana toward a decentralized, network-based distribution model tailored for island communities. Operationally, it involves reallocating limited institutional resources, forging formal and informal partnerships with maritime stakeholders, and mobilizing local volunteers to establish sustainable reading outposts across the Togean Islands. Instead of waiting for passive patronage, the library dynamically optimizes existing maritime transportation networks to bridge the massive spatial and infrastructural divide. This approach conceptualizes resource optimization not merely as budget management, but as the creative utilization of community-owned assets and cross-sector networks to ensure that high-quality literary materials regularly reach marginalized, remote coastal populations, thereby establishing an inclusive literacy ecosystem across the archipelagic territory.

To understand the execution of this strategy, interviews were conducted with key administrative actors. The Chief Librarian of the Regency stated:

"Dengan topografi pulau dan keterbatasan anggaran, membangun gedung perpustakaan cabang permanen di setiap tempat adalah hal yang mustahil. Oleh karena itu, kami menginisiasi kemitraan formal dengan para operator perahu motor lokal dan guru sekolah kepulauan untuk menciptakan sistem rotasi kotak jalur perairan yang memperbarui koleksi bukunya setiap bulan."

This statement clearly indicates that the leadership possesses a high level of strategic awareness regarding environmental constraints and successfully applies resource-leveraging theories. The researcher interprets this data as evidence of bureaucratic flexibility, where the chief librarian consciously bypasses rigid structural limitations by converting external public transport into an extension of library infrastructure. This collaborative mechanism proves that institutional limitations can be mitigated when leaders adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, shifting their role from simple asset custodians to active network facilitators who strategically align public services with pre-existing community logistics.

The perspective from the field was further validated by a local community leader from Talatako Island, who remarked:

'Sebelum adanya inisiatif ini, anak-anak hanya bisa melihat buku sesekali dalam sebulan, itu pun kalau ada. Sekarang, kedatangan berkala kotak

buku milik perpustakaan melalui kapal logistik mingguan telah mengubah balai desa kami menjadi pusat membaca yang hidup bagi keluarga.”

This testimony provides robust evidence of the direct social impact generated by the chief librarian's strategic optimization model. The researcher interprets this empirical feedback as a validation of heightened community trust and enhanced public engagement. The consistent delivery schedule has successfully normalized reading habits within an isolated ecosystem by transforming a scarce resource into an accessible public utility. By embedding literacy materials into the community's vital supply lines, the library management has successfully altered public perception, causing islanders to view the public library not as a distant, detached government office, but as an active, supportive partner in their daily socio-educational development.

Based on observations conducted at the Ampana and several island outposts further corroborate the active implementation of this collaborative strategy. The researcher observed library staff systematically indexing, packing, and sealing specialized waterproof plastic containers filled with diverse educational books, which were then officially handed over to public boat captains bound for the outer islands. Subsequent observations at the Togean outposts revealed that these book-boxes were enthusiastically received by local youth volunteers, who immediately organized open-air reading circles near the docks and village centre. This condition demonstrates high operational sustainability and organic community co-creation. The process of data rotation operates seamlessly because it relies on mutual civic responsibility rather than expensive state-funded infrastructure. This observation proves that the strategic management model has successfully institutionalized a participatory culture where local communities actively maintain the literacy infrastructure, ensuring continuous operational flow despite challenging maritime weather conditions and deep geographical isolation.

Finally, the archipelagic literacy in the regency clearly demonstrate that geographical isolation can be successfully neutralized through systematic collaborative networks and creative resource optimization. The data pattern emerging from this investigation reveals a structured, three-tiered operational model: institutional resource mobilization at the administrative level, multi-stakeholder logistical collaboration at the transport level, and participatory community maintenance at the grassroots level. This distinct pattern shows that as strategic collaboration becomes more integrated, community reading habits in remote areas rise proportionally, independent of heavy infrastructural investments. The synergy between maritime actors, local educators, and library leadership creates a resilient, self-perpetuating logistics loop that effectively democratizes access to knowledge. This pattern proves that strategic public management in resource-constrained regional libraries depends entirely on the leader's capability to map, align, and mobilize external social capital, transforming geographical liabilities into highly interconnected, vibrant networks of community empowerment and sustainable literacy growth.

Community-Based Literacy Incubation trough Integrating Local Culture and Functional Reading for Grassroots Empowerment

The Community-Based Literacy Incubation defines as a transformative, value-driven strategy executed by the chief librarian to redefine the public library's utility in the regency. Rather than maintaining a rigid, purely academic book collection, this strategy operationalizes literacy as a functional, socio-economic tool that directly addresses the livelihoods of semi-rural and coastal populations. In practice, this framework manifests through the deliberate integration of local cultural identity—such as *indigenous storytelling* and traditional oral history—with targeted workshops that utilize applied, functional handbooks on small-scale maritime processing, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism development. By establishing community-based literacy incubators, the library management successfully shifts its operational philosophy from a passive, custodial institution into an active engine of grassroots empowerment. This approach ensures that reading habits are cultivated organically, as citizens begin to perceive reading not as an abstract intellectual exercise, but as a practical mechanism for immediate economic improvement and cultural preservation.

To provide verifiable empirical evidence regarding this strategic literacy incubation framework, the qualitative data obtained from various are systematically structured and presented in the matrix table below:

Table 1. Transformational Leadership and Spiritual Integration

Interview Data	Indicator	Informant
"We deliberately shifted our procurement to practical manuals on copra processing and seaweed farming, combining these reading sessions with actual skills training at the library."	Functional Reading Integration	Chief Librarian of Tojo Una-Una Regency
"Our kids used to ignore the library, but since they started using local folk tales and traditional games during the weekend reading clubs, the village hall is always packed."	Local Culture Assimilation	Head of Community Education (PKBM), Una-Una District
"The library's book on organic pesticide formulation saved our clove harvest this season. We read the manual together in our farming cooperative circle every Friday."	Grassroots Socio-Economic Empowerment	Chairman of the Local Farmers Cooperative, Ampana Tete

A critical analysis of the data presented in the matrix table reveals that the chief librarian's strategic management effectively breaks the historical inertia of bureaucratic library services. The first, *Functional Reading Integration*, signifies a deliberate departure from static collection development toward an demand-driven resource allocation model. By aligning book acquisition with the dominant economic sectors —specifically agriculture and fisheries— the leadership

successfully injects immediate pragmatic utility into the act of reading. This strategic choice directly addresses the psychological barriers to literacy often found in grassroots societies, where reading is frequently dismissed as a non-productive leisure activity. When the Chief Librarian transforms the library into an active learning laboratory where text directly translates into tangible skills, reading is repositioned as a highly valuable tool for livelihood optimization. This intellectual shift is crucial because it demonstrates how proactive administrative changes can transform a public archive into an essential economic asset for vulnerable regional communities.

Furthermore, the correlation between *Local Culture Assimilation* and *Grassroots Socio-Economic Empowerment* underscores a sophisticated understanding of localized public management. The data from the educational and cooperative leaders indicate that literacy programs achieve maximum penetration when they respect and mirror the community's existing social structures. Utilizing indigenous storytelling serves as a familiar psychological gateway for younger demographics, lowering their resistance to textual media. Simultaneously, embedding reading habits within communal farming groups leverages the region's strong social capital. The researcher critically interprets this mechanism as a highly effective Stealth Literacy Strategy; the community does not perceive themselves as being forced to read, but rather as participating in an inclusive communal gathering that enhances their collective welfare. Consequently, by nesting functional information inside familiar socio-cultural vessels, the library management overcomes educational alienation and successfully builds an organic, self-sustaining reading ecosystem across the regency.

These findings are strongly validated by direct field observations conducted at several village literacy incubators in the Ampana and Una-Una districts. The researcher observed that the physical space of the regional library and its community outposts had been reconfigured; standard, intimidating bookshelves were replaced with open, communal workshops filled with both practical reading materials and physical processing tools. During an observed session, a group of local fishermen was seen actively referencing an illustrated textbook on fish preservation techniques while simultaneously executing the steps on their catches under the guidance of a volunteer instructor. The researcher interprets these empirical observations as concrete proof of institutional co-creation and experiential learning. The public library has successfully moved past its physical walls, embedding itself directly into the daily workspaces of the community. This active integration proves that the strategy effectively eliminates the gap between theoretical knowledge and grassroots practice, generating high public enthusiasm and sustainable reading habits through immediate economic feedback loops.

And the community-based literacy incubation in the regency demonstrates that public reading habits are maximized when literacy is systematically tied to local cultural values and functional economic activities. The data pattern emerging

from this analysis reveals a highly structured, self-reinforcing cycle: cultural integration sparks initial public interest, functional reading provides immediate practical solutions, and economic empowerment reinforces long-term community dedication to the library's resources. This pattern proves that the traditional model of passive, generic book provision is entirely obsolete for regional development. Instead, the strategic management pattern identified here highlights that the success of public literacy initiatives depends on the leader's capability to align institutional goals with the socio-economic survival needs of the grassroots. Ultimately, this structural paradigm offers a robust blueprint showing how regional libraries can leverage cultural proximity and functional education to foster resilient community reading habits while driving holistic social empowerment.

Discussion

The findings of this study regarding archipelagic literacy and community-based literacy incubation offer profound theoretical and practical insights into modern public sector management. When comparing these findings with existing academic literature, there is a striking alignment with the core tenets of Strategic Management in public organizations, which argue that public managers must look beyond internal organizational boundaries to co-create public value with external stakeholders (Khan et al., 2020; Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). Traditional library management literature often conceptualizes resource optimization strictly through inward-facing administrative frameworks, such as internal budget reallocation or digital repository expansion. However, the phenomenon challenges this conventional paradigm by demonstrating that in resource-constrained and geographically fragmented environments, strategic management must be outward-facing, entrepreneurial, and highly adaptive (Gligorea et al., 2023). While prior research frequently views geographic isolation as an insurmountable barrier to literacy development, this study proves that spatial fragmentation can be successfully neutralized by converting existing informal maritime transportation networks and civic social capital into an extension of the library's physical distribution infrastructure, thereby offering a resilient alternative to asset-heavy institutional models.

In the other side, the integration of functional reading and indigenous socio-cultural values within localized community incubators expands upon current understanding of information literacy and community-based education. Traditional literacy models in the literature often adopt a top-down, standardized pedagogical approach that treats reading as a generalized academic skill (Grotlüschen et al., 2020). In contrast, the strategic framework implemented by the chief librarian shifts the paradigm toward a demand-driven, localized model where reading materials are directly embedded into the functional economic activities—such as maritime processing, agriculture, and eco-tourism—and cultural practices of the grassroots population (Arabeche et al., 2022; Hough, 2004). This finding directly contradicts classical assumptions that regional

communities are intrinsically resistant to institutional reading habits due to low educational backgrounds. Instead, the data reveals that public disengagement is primarily driven by utility alienation, where the available literary resources do not match the immediate survival or cultural needs of the community. By nesting functional texts within familiar cultural frameworks, like traditional storytelling and cooperative circles, the library administration eliminates this alienation, aligning perfectly with contemporary socio-cultural learning theories which state that knowledge acquisition is most effective when it is deeply situated within the learner's lived experiences and daily socio-economic context.

The implications of these findings are highly significant for the broader field of public administration and library science, as they provide a robust, empirically validated framework that bridges the gap between strategic management theory and social behavioural modification. This research introduces a novel conceptual model where the chief librarian acts not merely as a passive administrative custodian, but as a strategic network entrepreneur who dynamically maps, aligns, and mobilizes external social capital to drive institutional relevance. It enriches the literature on organizational resilience by demonstrating that institutional capacity in developing regions is not solely determined by formal fiscal allocations, but by the leader's capability to leverage cross-sector collaborations and co-creation frameworks. Moreover, these findings contribute to the evolving social library paradigm by establishing a clear, causal link between targeted public management interventions, localized cultural assimilation, and grassroots socio-economic empowerment. This theoretical shift challenges public sector researchers to view regional public libraries not as isolated, static book archives, but as dynamic, self-sustaining socio-educational ecosystems that possess the latent capacity to foster long-term intellectual capital and economic growth within marginalized populations.

And also, this study offers actionable, real-world blueprints for policymakers, regional library administrators, and public sector managers operating within resource-constrained, rural, or archipelagic territories globally. The success of the decentralized, amphibious book-box rotation system demonstrates that local governments do not need to wait for massive budgetary increments or expensive physical infrastructure development to resolve public literacy crises. Instead, administrators can immediately optimize pre-existing community logistics, such as local public transport networks, maritime routes, and village halls, to democratize access to knowledge. Practically, this research underscores the critical importance of reforming library procurement policies to prioritize functional, applied, and illustrated literature that directly addresses the specific socio-economic livelihoods of the local demographic. Library directors must also receive specialized training in strategic leadership, community networking, and multi-stakeholder negotiation, ensuring they possess the managerial competencies required to transform bureaucratic entities into vibrant community hubs that can effectively compete with modern digital distractions and build sustainable reading habits.

Ultimately, the holistic pattern emerging from this discussion establishes that the strategic management of public libraries in developing regions must transition from a model of passive supply to one of active, culturally rooted societal integration. The synthesis of geographic resource optimization and localized community incubation creates a highly resilient, self-perpetuating cycle where cultural proximity sparks public interest, functional reading provides immediate economic utility, and grassroots empowerment reinforces long-term community dedication to the library's institutional assets. This comprehensive approach proves that the existential crisis of relevance facing modern public libraries can be successfully resolved when leadership proactively adapts institutional operations to mirror the environmental realities and socio-cultural values of the community they serve. By shifting the administrative focus from what the library possesses to how creatively it utilizes external social networks, this strategic paradigm effectively redefines the role of regional public libraries, transforming them into indispensable catalysts for sustainable regional development, social equity, and lifelong collective empowerment across the grassroots society.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the strategic management of regional public libraries in resource-constrained and geographically fragmented areas like Tojo Una-Una Regency can successfully neutralize institutional inertia through outward-facing, adaptive networks and community-centre literacy incubation. The most critical lesson learned is that cultivating sustainable public reading habits depends not on massive physical infrastructure development, but on the library leader's entrepreneurial capacity to optimize external logistics and align reading materials with localized socio-cultural identities and functional grassroots economic needs. The core strength of this research lies in its robust theoretical contribution to public administration, as it bridges the gap between organizational strategy and social behaviour modification, providing an empirically validated blueprint for transforming passive archives into active socio-economic hubs. However, a notable limitation of this study is its singular qualitative focus on a semi-rural archipelagic territory, which may limit the direct generalizability of the findings to highly urbanized or digital-dominant environments. Therefore, future research should employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches across diverse regional typologies to investigate how digital literacy platforms can be integrated into this strategic collaborative framework to further accelerate community empowerment.

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