

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LIBRARIES IN FOSTERING YOUTH AGENCY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY IN WEST SUMATRA, INDONESIA

O papel das bibliotecas comunitárias na promoção da agência juvenil e da mobilidade social: um estudo de métodos mistos em Sumatra Ocidental, Indonésia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigated how community libraries in West Sumatra contribute to youth agency development and influence social mobility among rural youth. It also examined the key factors mediating the relationship between library engagement and social mobility.

Method: The study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The data were collected from 150 youth participants (aged 15-24) across five community libraries in West Sumatra Province, Indonesia, through surveys and conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 youth and ten library staff. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

Result: The results of this study showed that the library program participation significantly predicted youth agency ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$) and showed a positive correlation with perceived social mobility ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). Youth agency emerged as a significant mediator between library engagement and social mobility ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative findings revealed that structured programs and leadership opportunities were crucial in developing youth agencies and facilitating access to educational and career advancement opportunities.

Conclusions: According to the findings, it can be concluded that the potential of community libraries played significant roles as catalysts for social transformation in underserved communities, suggesting the need for sustained investment in library programs and resources to promote youth empowerment and social mobility.

KEYWORDS: Rural Youth. Library Engagement. Library Program. Leadership Opportunities. Social Transformation.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo investigou como as bibliotecas comunitárias em Sumatra Ocidental contribuem para o desenvolvimento de agências juvenis e influenciam a mobilidade social entre os jovens rurais. Ele também examinou os principais fatores que mediam a relação entre engajamento da biblioteca e mobilidade social.

Método: O estudo utilizou um desenho convergente paralelo de métodos mistos. Os dados foram coletados de 150 jovens participantes (de 15 a 24 anos) em cinco bibliotecas comunitárias na Província de Sumatra Ocidental, Indonésia, por meio de pesquisas e entrevistas semiestruturadas conduzidas com 25 jovens e dez funcionários da biblioteca. Os dados quantitativos foram analisados usando estatísticas descritivas e inferenciais, enquanto os dados qualitativos foram submetidos à análise temática.

Resultados: Os resultados deste estudo mostraram que a participação no programa da biblioteca previu significativamente a agência juvenil ($\beta = 0,56$, $p < 0,001$) e mostrou uma correlação positiva com a mobilidade social percebida ($r = 0,49$, $p < 0,001$). A agência juvenil surgiu como um mediador significativo entre o engajamento da biblioteca e a mobilidade social ($\beta = 0,40$, $p < 0,001$). As descobertas qualitativas revelaram que programas estruturados e oportunidades de liderança foram cruciais no desenvolvimento de agências juvenis e na facilitação do acesso a oportunidades educacionais e de avanço na carreira.

Conclusão: De acordo com as descobertas, pode-se concluir que o potencial das bibliotecas comunitárias desempenhou papéis significativos como catalisadores da transformação social em comunidades carentes, sugerindo a necessidade de investimento sustentado em programas e recursos de bibliotecas para promover o empoderamento dos jovens e a mobilidade social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Juventude Rural. Engajamento de Biblioteca. Programa de Biblioteca. Oportunidades de Liderança. Transformação Social.

1 INTRODUCTION

Community libraries exist to provide a haven that nurtures literacy, education, and social development (Dudley, 2013). However, their functions are much more critical than just providing conventional services of an educational nature, especially in societies where formal education and socioeconomic opportunities are minimal. In a setting such as West Sumatra, where the youth face structural barriers in social mobility, community libraries may instrumentally serve the development of youth agencies (Tanjung; Harahap, 2023). This would be the capability to make choices, take control of life, and affect society. In turn, youth agencies would drive social mobility and thus help young people transcend socioeconomic barriers into life chances (Kundu, 2020).

Youth agency has been highlighted as a critical factor in social development and mobility (Morgan; Parker; Marturano, 2020). Research suggests that granting young people knowledge, at least developing skills, and access to resources can significantly impact their ability to masterfully navigate and alter their socioeconomic circumstances (Krauss, 2021). Social mobility reflects the degree to which an individual or group moves along a social hierarchy (Lawler; Payne, 2017). It has been closely related to educational attainment and the opportunities given by community resources. In Indonesia, inequity in access to quality education, especially in rural regions, reduces the number of youths who can attain upward mobility, thus being one of the issues that influence regional development. In such contexts, community libraries are often the main social institutions that provide more than a place for



education but civic engagement, skills development, and community networking centers that are so vital in developing agency and mobility (Edwards; Robinson; Unger., 2013; Kranich, 2001).

Research has shown how the library is a dynamic learning, innovative, and social space with changing faces (Hernández-Pérez; Vilariño; Domènec, 2022; Igwe; Sulyman, 2022; Lotfy *et al.*, 2022; Garoufali; Garoufallou, 2024). The library concept as a third-place social space other than home and work has been raised in recent scholarship, emphasizing its role in community building and the development of social capital. In Indonesia, for example, community libraries are often found in areas where socioeconomic conditions may be underserved by formal systems of education (Somantri, 2021; Sutisna; Dalimunthe; Retnowati, 2021; Rifanto; Hufad; Hasanah, 2024). These libraries provide an inclusive place and allow young people to access digital resources for themselves, be engaged in self-directed learning, and be part of community-driven initiatives on leadership and decision-making.

Despite community libraries' potential, research into their role in enhancing youth agency and promoting social mobility in rural Indonesia remains incomplete. Most available studies in the literature narrowly focus on the role of formal education systems in enhancing social mobility while underemphasizing the roles of informal institutions like libraries (Domina; Penner; Penner, 2023). This paper attempts to fill this lacuna by determining how community libraries in West Sumatra enhance youth agency and social mobility in both individual and community-level outcomes.

The following research questions guide this study:

- a) How do community libraries in West Sumatra contribute to the development of youth agencies?
- b) How do these libraries influence social mobility among youth in rural communities?
- c) What are the key factors that mediate the relationship between library engagement and social mobility?

This study attempts to provide practical knowledge for policy and program leaders and educators on utilizing community libraries as a tool of social change. This will, therefore, be an important study in informing educational policy and practice in rural and underserved areas. As nations strive to attain equitable social and educational outcomes, they have to be informed by an understanding of the place occupied by informal institutions such as community libraries. The focus of this research on West Sumatra thus carries the potential to contribute to an understanding of how libraries can act as community assets in enabling

youth, building social capital, and ensuring upward social mobility where formal systems are lacking. Additionally, the findings might significantly contribute to reducing disparities in education and socioeconomic status throughout Indonesia and could serve as a model to be further adapted in similar regions worldwide.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The convergence parallel mixed-methods design, which incorporates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, was used for this research (Creswell; Plano Clark, 2023). This design has been adopted because it marries the breadth of quantitative methods with the depth of qualitative inquiry; it is thus supposed to offer a robust framework within which to address the research questions. While the quantitative strand explored the youth's engagement with community libraries and the consequent association with their view of social mobility, the qualitative strand investigated the experiences of the youth regarding the agency they develop due to library participation, offering a richness of insight into the mechanisms of social mobility.

2.2 Participants

The two major groups of informants in this study were the youth who actively used community libraries in West Sumatra and the library staff. Participating youths were selected using both purposive and snowball sampling methods. Purposive sampling was first used to select participants who had regularly visited the community libraries for at least six months so they knew the library's services. Where necessary, subsequent snowballing was effected where other participants, as the initial participants and library staff recommended, met the inclusion criteria.

A total of 150 youth participants aged between 15 and 24 years were recruited from five community libraries located across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in West Sumatra. The participants will be selected from various socioeconomic backgrounds to reflect the heterogeneity of the community. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten staff members in the library, including librarians and program coordinators, to get further



information on the operational aspects of libraries and their programs for youth empowerment.

Table 1 - Demographics of youth participants

| Characteristic | N (150) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|---------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 72 | 48 |
| Female | 78 | 52 |
| Age Range | | |
| 15–18 years | 65 | 43.3 |
| 19–24 years | 85 | 56.7 |
| Educational Background | | |
| High school students | 70 | 46.7 |
| University students | 80 | 53.3 |
| Socioeconomic Status | | |
| Low-income | 90 | 60 |
| Middle-income | 45 | 30 |
| High-income | 15 | 10 |

Source: Elaborated by authors (2024).

2.3 Data Collection

The two major data collection tools used in this study are a survey and semi-structured interviews. Using this combined approach, the statistical relationships between library engagement and social mobility examined the deeply personal experiences that underpin these dynamics.

2.3.1 Quantitative Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was given to 150 young participants to gather data on their involvement with community libraries and their views on social mobility. The questionnaire was modified from established scales that assess youth agency (Boomkens *et al.*, 2019) and social mobility (Mitnik; Cumberworth; Grusky, 2016). Questions were asked on how often the library was used, involvement in certain programs like digital literacy workshops and leadership training, and the impact of library engagement on education and career opportunities. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale extending from 1 (strongly disagree)

to 5 (strongly agree), enabling the measurement of opinions and encounters. Information was gathered for six weeks.

2.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

In the qualitative strand, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participating youth and ten library staff. Interviews explored participants' experiences with community libraries, particularly how libraries facilitate agency and contribute to social mobility. Personal empowerment was probed for decision-making, leadership development, and how the library has supported long-term goals related to higher education or employment. Interviews were conducted in person and via Zoom, depending on the participant's availability, and lasted 45-90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

2.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The analysis of the survey data involved using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistical analysis was utilized to summarize the demographic traits of participants and their involvement with community libraries. Inferential assessments, such as correlation and multiple regression, were used to investigate the connections between library involvement and young people's views on social advancement. The analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS 25 software. The significance level was established as $p < 0.05$ to ascertain statistical significance.

2.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun; Clarke, 2023). This required becoming acquainted with the data, analyzing the transcripts, recognizing trends, and creating themes representing how community libraries impacted participants' feelings of empowerment and opportunity for advancement. NVivo software was used to arrange and code the qualitative information. The study used an inductive method to uncover themes



from the data, connecting results to the theoretical concepts of youth empowerment and social advancement.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to rigid ethical standards to safeguard the well-being of the subjects. Before participating in the study, all participants provided their informed consent. Parental or guardian consent was also required for participants under 18. Participants were guaranteed that their identity would remain confidential and that fake names would be used instead of real names when presenting qualitative data. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and all actions followed the ethical standards outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2019).

2.6 Trustworthiness and Validity

In order to maintain the credibility and accuracy of the qualitative data, various tactics were utilized. Member checking involved participants reviewing transcripts and initial findings to verify the accuracy of the interview data. Furthermore, researchers engaged in peer debriefing with colleagues to discuss and confirm the themes identified in the analysis (Lincoln; Guba, 1990). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the quantitative data, showing acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$) for all key constructs, such as youth agency and social mobility.

3 RESULTS

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses are detailed in the results section, addressing each research question. The findings are organized based on the three research inquiries, merging statistical data from quantitative analysis with thematic insights from qualitative data. Combining both data types assists in cross-verifying the results and offering a thorough insight into the impact of community libraries on empowering youth and enhancing social mobility in West Sumatra.



3.1 Research Question 1: How do community libraries in West Sumatra contribute to the development of youth agencies?

The first research question establishes the extent to which community libraries nurture youth agencies. Table 2 summarizes statistics on participants' use of community libraries and their feelings of agency using a Likert scale.

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics of library engagement and youth agency

| Variable | M | SD | Range |
|-----------------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Frequency of library visits (per month) | 4.8 | 1.5 | 1-10 |
| Participation in library programs | 3.9 | 0.8 | 1-5 |
| Perceived youth agency | 4.2 | 0.7 | 1-5 |

Source: Elaborated by authors (2024).

Multiple regressions were analyzed to establish the link between how often people visit the library, their program involvement, and their perceived sense of control in youth's decision-making. The findings showed that both factors were important in predicting youth empowerment, with library engagement having a greater influence ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$) compared to visit frequency ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$). The model accounted for 48% of the variability in youth agency ($R^2 = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$).

The findings indicate that consistent library attendance is significant, but engaging in activities such as digital literacy workshops or leadership training has a greater impact on empowering youth. This is consistent with the literature highlighting the transformative capabilities of participatory learning environments (Mardiana, 2024).

The qualitative data enhanced the quantitative results, offering valuable insights into how young people perceive the growth of agency through their interactions with libraries. Multiple individuals thought about how certain library programs improved their ability to make decisions and boosted their self-assurance.

For instance, Participant 7, a 19-year-old university student, noted:

"Before I joined the leadership program at the library, I didn't really believe in my ability to lead or make important decisions. But through the activities and support from the library staff, I started feeling more confident in expressing my opinions and taking initiative."

Similarly, Participant 12, a 17-year-old high school student, shared:



"The library gave me more than just books. It gave me a space where I could experiment with ideas and make mistakes without judgment. I started running small group discussions, and that made me realize I could actually influence others."

These reflections indicate that beyond mere attendance, the structured programs and opportunities for leadership at the community libraries played a significant role in empowering youth. This qualitative data reinforces the quantitative finding that participation in library programs is a key driver of agency. However, Participant 3, a 16-year-old who only attended the library sporadically, remarked:

"I don't feel much different because I only go there to study for exams, not for the programs. It's helpful for that, but I wouldn't say it's changed how I see myself."

This would suggest that, whereas library use may have some benefit for academic preparation, an agency develops more distinctly from deeper engagement with the library's programs. Quantitative and qualitative results suggest that participatory programs matter in developing youth agencies.

3.2 Research Question 2: How do these libraries influence social mobility among youth in rural communities?

To address the second research question, the study examined how library engagement is related to young people's views on social mobility. Table 3 displays the statistical descriptions of the social mobility variables.

Table 3 - Descriptive statistics of library engagement and perceived social mobility

| Variable | M | SD | Range |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Perceived improvement in educational prospects | 4.1 | 0.8 | 1-5 |
| Perceived improvement in career prospects | 3.8 | 0.9 | 1-5 |

Source: Elaborated by authors (2024).

An examination of the data indicated a notable and positive connection between attending library events and one's perceived opportunities for education and career advancement ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). Nonetheless, the connection between how often individuals visit and social mobility was less strong ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that simply

going to the library does not have as much of an impact as participating in its organized activities.

These results show that libraries substantially boost social mobility by improving educational and career prospects for youth, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Previous research has shown that community libraries serve as informal learning spaces, positively influencing how individuals see their educational opportunities (Sari *et al.*, 2024).

The qualitative information provided more detail on how young people see the importance of libraries in helping them move up socially. Several attendees emphasized how libraries linked them to educational materials and job prospects.

Participant 22, a 20-year-old aspiring entrepreneur, explained:

"I didn't have access to the internet at home, and the library's free Wi-Fi was a game-changer. I learned how to write a business plan from online tutorials and now I'm starting my own business."

Participant 9, an 18-year-old preparing for university entrance exams, shared:

"Without the library, I wouldn't have had access to the study materials and the mentorship programs. They helped me apply for scholarships, and now I'm about to go to university."

However, not all participants experienced such transformative impacts. Participant 15, a 17-year-old from a higher-income family, commented:

"The library is useful, but I didn't rely on it as much because I already had access to the resources I needed at home."

These qualitative insights support the quantitative findings that community libraries may significantly improve the educational and career prospects of beneficiaries who do not have any other avenue of access. Thus, they play an important role in leveling the playing field by making the tools for social mobility available to less privileged youths.

3.3 Research Question 3: What are the key factors that mediate the relationship between library engagement and social mobility?

In order to investigate the third research question, a mediation analysis was carried out to examine the factors that act as mediators in the correlation between library engagement and social mobility. The study found that youth agency plays a crucial role as



a mediator. The indirect impact of library involvement on social advancement via youth empowerment was notable ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that libraries promote social mobility by empowering young people.

These results indicate that when youth participate in library programs to develop agency, they are more empowered to take proactive steps to enhance their educational and career opportunities, resulting in increased social mobility.

The interviews offered additional support for this mediated connection. Multiple individuals talked about how getting involved in the library empowered them, leading to their motivation and ability to pursue further education or start their businesses.

Participant 19, a 21-year-old, reflected:

"Once I realized I had the power to make decisions for myself, I started taking my future more seriously. The library helped me find the right resources and people to guide me, and now I'm working toward getting a degree."

Participant 11, a 23-year-old who had previously struggled in school, remarked:

"I used to feel stuck, but after attending the library's leadership workshops, I found my passion for teaching. Now I'm studying to become a teacher, something I never thought was possible before."

Together, the qualitative data point to one key finding: that youth agency mediates library engagement and social mobility. This is not to say that libraries provide or offer social mobility in and of themselves; rather, it is that they encourage youth to pursue educational and career goals on their own, allowing them to attain upward mobility.

Overall, the findings expose how community libraries in West Sumatra are championing the promotion of youth agency and social mobility. Quantitative data support this hypothesis fairly well. Participation in library programs is significantly positively associated with youth agency and social mobility. This also complements qualitative data on how certain library programs allow youth to develop leadership competencies, access educational resources, and seek better career possibilities. The mediation analysis shows that youth agency is a core driver of how libraries drive social mobility. These findings draw out the critical function of the library within the community as a driver of social movement, particularly in underserved communities.

An exploratory analysis of demographic subgroups was also conducted to assess whether engagement and outcomes varied by gender and socioeconomic background. While no statistically significant differences emerged, some descriptive patterns were observed. For instance, female participants reported slightly higher perceived agency

scores ($M = 4.3$) compared to males ($M = 4.1$). Similarly, youth from low-income families highlighted greater reliance on library resources for educational and career support than peers from middle- and high-income groups. Although these differences did not reach significance, they suggest that community libraries may play a particularly critical role for disadvantaged groups, warranting further investigation in larger or comparative samples.

4 DISCUSSION

These findings depict important lessons learned from the study on community libraries as facilitators of youth agency and social mobility in West Sumatra: empirical contributions and theoretical implications of the research. In addressing the research questions, the results have shown a clear link between library participation- particularly through structured program participation- and youth agency development, enabling them to attain social mobility (Souza; Dumont, 2018; Jusoh *et al.*, 2023). The findings align with previous literature that locates the informal education space as a key driver of personal empowerment and social transformation for marginalized communities (Berman, 2020; Ferrer-Fons; Rovira-Martínez; Soler-I-Martí, 2022; Kluvankova *et al.*, 2021). However, it gives deeper insights into how libraries nurture such change at the community level and uniquely contributes to the literature.

The first research question was about the contribution of community libraries to the development of youth agencies. The quantitative findings revealed that participation in library programming, rather than the number of times one visited the library, strongly predicted perceived youth agency. This also agrees with the works of Gibbs, Bartlett and Schugurensky (2021) and Korfiatis and Petrou (2021), which indicated that participatory learning environments are ideal for building decision-making skills and self-efficacy among youths. Qualitative data further enriched this finding, as participants described how these leadership programs, mentorship, and active engagement opportunities in the libraries raised their confidence levels and strengthened their capability for influencing change around them. Such findings confirm a theoretical perspective indicating that youth agency is an essential constituent of personal and social development in contexts of deprivation. Its novelty lies in the fact that, as a highly unexplored informal learning space, community libraries become sites of fostered agency (Souza, 2020). Whereas previous literature has often focused on school and formal institutions as empowerment sites, this study aims to

shift the focus onto community libraries and provide evidence of their potential to act as critical change agents.

The second question explored libraries' role in the social mobility of youth. As discussed, the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that out-of-school-time libraries, particularly through structured programs, have positive perceptions about future educational and career opportunities. This also aligns with existing studies on community-based organizations' generally supportive role in fostering upward mobility through access to resources, mentorship, and skill-building opportunities (Marques, 2024). These libraries have served as key contact points for reaching young people from low-income backgrounds with educational materials and digital resources not available to them in their homes (Israni; Ellison; Dillahunt, 2021; Soulent; Tedrow, 2022). This agrees with the findings of Cox (2021), who noted that libraries can be a source of critical exposure to information and technology that may level the playing field in education in developing countries. Qualitative data particularly accounts from those participants who used the library resources to initiate businesses or gain university scholarships, further prove that community libraries serve as levelers for giving opportunities to disadvantaged youths to compete in higher education and the workforce. The findings extend the literature by providing evidence from a unique regional context - West Sumatra - and demonstrating exactly how libraries in rural and semi-urban areas contribute to promoting social mobility, aspects that have been rarely explored in previous studies.

The key theoretical contributions arising from this study are based on the findings from the third research question, namely, the factors mediating the relationship between library engagement and social mobility. The findings suggest that youth agency is a powerful mediator, supporting that social mobility does not occur organically as an outcome of access to resources but is heavily intertwined with agency developed by individuals through involvement in structured activities. This corresponds to theories of social stratification that maintain that upward mobility is facilitated not only by structural opportunities but also by individual capabilities, such as agency and self-efficacy (Andersson, 2021; Emirza; Öztürk; Şengönül, 2021; Martin; Harrison, 2022). The mediation analysis presented below provided empirical evidence that agency developed through library participation forms the main mechanism for youth improvement in educational and career prospects. This further supports the theoretical model with qualitative data, in which participants reported feeling empowered to take their futures into their own hands after participating in library programs. Thus, this research also contributes to the literature by providing some empirical evidence



of how community libraries as informal education spaces foster the creation of skills and the agency to engage in social mobility.

These study findings also find a place in and extend the growing body of literature focusing on community libraries and youth development within the Indonesian context. Past research has pointed to the role that libraries may play within Indonesian rural contexts, serving as informal learning spaces providing access to resources that complement more formal education systems facing challenges around access and quality (Rosser; King; Widoyoko, 2021; Melania *et al.*, 2024). In this respect, the research of Winata, Fadelina and Basuki (2021) reveals that, in Indonesia, community libraries may be one particular source of crucial assistance for the young, as they offer opportunities to access educational resources, places to develop further literacy skills and safe spaces where adolescents can share free time with peers. These studies are primarily focused on issues concerning literacy and access to books. The present research extends this understanding by considering that libraries also nurture youth agency and promote upward social mobility, thus providing a broader perspective on their roles in rural Indonesian communities.

Considering the particularities of the Indonesian context, community libraries have come to play an especially significant role in young people's development, given inequalities in accessing formal education and resources in rural and semi-urban settings like West Sumatra. Besides, geographic diversity and economic inequalities in Indonesia are also huge obstacles to equal education and social mobility opportunities for youth, especially in remote regions. In most rural areas, such as West Sumatra, formal education systems are usually under-resourced; these aspects include but are not limited to a lack of quality learning materials and technology (Santos *et al.*, 2018; Mariyono *et al.*, 2021; Waty; Nengsих; Rahman, 2024). Community libraries, therefore, fill an important gap, not only in terms of information access but also through organized activities that implement the acquisition of digital literacy, leadership, and critical thinking skills required for personal and social development among Indonesian youth (Almeida; Freire, 2018; Mia, 2020). The findings in this study affirm the view that community libraries can serve as agents of empowerment, particularly at levels where formal education infrastructures are poor or inequitably distributed.

The relevance of this study in a wider Indonesian context is underlined by the demographic trends and economic challenges Indonesia faces. Indonesia has just entered the demographic dividend and has a huge, growing youth population, which can push economic growth if enough opportunities are available. The challenges remain vast for



Indonesian youth, particularly regarding educational and employment issues. Youth unemployment is high, and there is a growing realization that many young people lack the appropriate skills and opportunities for success in an ever-competitive and globalizing economy. Therefore, this paper addresses these challenges by fostering youth agency and access to educational resources via community libraries (Iyengar, 2021; Mathabela, 2021). In addition, by allowing this generation to set educational and career goals independently, libraries contribute to the wider societal priority of enabling young people to play a full role in Indonesia's economic development.

This research also underlines the potential of community libraries to contribute to the Government of Indonesia's policy to develop youth's digital literacy and technological skills (Alwi *et al.*, 2024; Sari; Winasis; Pratiwi; Nuryanto, 2024). In the contemporary context of growing global competition and a developing digital economy, digital literacy is one of the essential skills Indonesian youth, especially those from rural areas with often limited access to technology, ought to possess. Accordingly, this paper showed that community libraries are among the important places for accessing traditional educational materials and developing digital skills. Equipped with free internet access, digital literacy workshops, and other training programs, these libraries also bridge the digital divide by preparing youth from marginal backgrounds with the needed skills to compete in today's technology-driven world. This also aligns with Indonesia's national agenda, which foresees digital literacy as part of the core components of future educational reforms that the government would implement in the country (Harmoko, 2021; Putri *et al.*, 2024).

The originality of the present study in an Indonesian context consists of how community libraries, especially those in rural and semi-urban areas, enable social change through the empowerment of youth to surmount the structural barriers to education and jobs (Husin *et al.*, 2023; Jamatia, 2023). Despite the promising outcomes, sustaining and replicating community library programs in underserved regions presents several challenges. Many libraries depend on limited or inconsistent funding, which affects their ability to maintain infrastructure and expand services. Staff often require continuous training to deliver digital literacy and leadership programs effectively, yet resources for professional development remain scarce. Furthermore, ensuring adequate digital infrastructure and maintaining youth engagement over time are persistent concerns. Recognizing these challenges is essential for policymakers and practitioners to design more resilient and sustainable models of community libraries. While much of the earlier literature focused on more basic aspects of literacy and basic education, this study showed that libraries could

contribute greatly to more complex forms of empowerment, like youth agency and social mobility. This insight is important for policymakers and educational practitioners in Indonesia because it suggests a need to broaden the role of community libraries beyond conventional roles (Mubofu; Mamb, 2021; Mustar; Rahmadaita, 2023). In return, this investment in community libraries as a space for youth development will more adequately position both the Indonesian government and local stakeholders to mitigate persistent inequality and resource limitations limiting the social and economic development of too many young Indonesians.

5 CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study has demonstrated the significant role of community libraries in West Sumatra in fostering youth agency and social mobility, particularly through structured programs and leadership opportunities rather than mere library attendance. The findings revealed that these libraries serve as crucial catalysts for social transformation by providing access to educational resources, digital literacy, and career development opportunities, especially benefiting youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The study identified youth agency as a vital mediating factor between library engagement and social mobility, indicating that libraries foster social advancement by first developing young people's capacity for self-determination and decision-making. While the study provides valuable insights, its limitations, including geographic specificity to West Sumatra, the cross-sectional nature of data collection, reliance on self-reported measures, and moderate sample size suggest opportunities for future research. These could include longitudinal studies tracking long-term impacts, comparative analyses across different Indonesian regions, investigations of specific program elements, and examination of digital resource roles in youth development. Future research could also incorporate more objective indicators of social mobility, such as higher education enrollment rates, employment trajectories, or household income data, when ethically and practically feasible. Such measures would complement self-reported perceptions and provide a more robust picture of how library participation affects long-term mobility outcomes. The findings have significant implications for educational policy and resource allocation, suggesting increased investment in community libraries as complementary educational institutions, particularly in areas with limited formal educational resources. Future research should also consider cost-



effectiveness analyses of library programs compared to other interventions and examine their impact on specific marginalized groups to understand further and enhance their role in promoting social mobility and youth empowerment.

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