

The role of national associations in advocating for school libraries: The case of Indonesia

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Abstract:

School libraries play an important role in education. They provide resources and services that facilitate the development of students' reading, academic achievement and lifelong learning. However, the development of libraries is sometimes given low priority due to limited resources but multiple demands in the schools. There is thus a need to advocate for school libraries so that they can be on the agenda of policy makers and administrators. National school library associations can play an important role in keeping school libraries on the agenda. In Indonesia, the two main school library associations are the Asosiasi Pekerja Informasi Sekolah Indonesia (APISI) or Indonesian Association of School Information Professionals, and the Asosiasi Tenaga Perpustakaan Sekolah Indonesia (ATPUSI) or Indonesian Association of School Library Personnel. Both associations have worked towards empowering school librarians to further develop their libraries. A short survey of a sample of members found that through the associations' training programs, short courses, meetings and consultancies, the participants had gained greater knowledge and skills, been able to discuss common problems, and developed a network of like-minded people. The findings of the survey suggested that they valued the efforts of the associations. Four lessons learned the survey and from the management of the association are that advocacy efforts need to be action-oriented, planned and coordinated, sustained, and that they need to be subject to constant review.

Keywords: School libraries, School library associations, Indonesia, Advocacy

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Introduction

School libraries play an important role in education. The preamble to the *UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto* (1999), among the many policy documents on school librarianship, emphasizes this importance by saying:

“the school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today’s information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with lifelong learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens.”

Numerous studies have shown that school libraries make a difference to student achievement, and that they have a positive impact on students and on learning. School libraries make an impact in various ways, through their collections, services, and the activities of the teacher librarian. The school library is central to learning and plays a key role in encouraging innovation, curiosity and problem solving (National Library of New Zealand, n.d.).

Yet school libraries are sometimes neglected within the school itself. This can be due to many factors, including the lack of understanding on the role of school libraries in education, lack of training among school librarians, lack of time to carry out their duties, lack of support from principals and teachers, over-emphasis on examination results, and other possibilities. Each of these may apply in a different situation.

While these factors may contribute in different contexts, in reality policy makers and administrators are often faced with multiple demands from the school – the need for classrooms and physical facilities, textbooks, supplies, school meals, sporting facilities, counseling services, and so on. In the real world, there are finite resources available, and it is not possible to meet every demand. School libraries need to make their case, otherwise their needs may not be considered or be low on the priority list. It is clear that there is a need for advocacy for school libraries.

Advocacy refers to actions that aim to change laws, policies, practices and attitudes. It can also be the act of making a case for a particular issue, idea or group of persons. Advocacy aims to influence policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. The actions of advocacy are usually directed at policy makers and administrators who hold the power to decide upon and implement the change required. Advocacy can also be directed towards changing opinions to take a specific form of action (Wikipedia, 2014).

There is an urgent need for advocacy for school libraries. Advocacy efforts should not wait until a need arises or a crisis occurs. Every day, people are pleading their cases for various requirements. If school libraries fail to do so, their needs may not be considered and they may be left out when the time comes to make decisions. It is through advocacy that the needs of school libraries are likely to get attention.

Advocacy is important to improve understanding of the role of school libraries among the stakeholders, to reach a more diverse audience, to bring about change, to establish credibility, and to raise the profile of organizations involved with school libraries. Many other organizations are advocating for their causes; school libraries cannot afford to be relaxed (IFLA, 2014).

The need for advocacy for school libraries is even greater in developing countries, where resources are limited, but the desire to develop is even greater. One such country where advocacy has been taking place and has had successful results is Indonesia.

Indonesia is a large country with a population of approximately 250 million spread out over 2 million sq. km. It is a developing country with a GDP per capita of about US\$ 4,900, which places it in the lower quartile of nations. While the Government is committed to developing education in the country, the challenge in developing school libraries is compounded in having more than 250,000 schools spread over 17,000 islands (Wikipedia, 2014). While there is good government support in legislation and policies, the development of school libraries has been challenging. However, it has been facilitated by the advocacy efforts of a number of institutions and library organizations.

Library Associations in Indonesia

One group of organizations that have been playing a role in advocacy for school libraries in Indonesia is the library associations. There are a number of library associations in Indonesia, among them:

- *Ikatan Pustakawan Indonesia (IPI)* [Federation of Indonesian Librarians]*
- *Ikatan Sarjana Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi Indonesia (ISIPII)* [Indonesian Federation of Library and Information Scholars]*
- *Asosiasi Pendidikan Tinggi Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi Indonesia* [Indonesian Association of Higher Education for Library and Information]*
- *Klub Perpustakaan Indonesia (KPI)* [Indonesian Library Club] whose members include school libraries and other smaller organizations

Two associations specifically for school libraries in Indonesia are

- *Asosiasi Pekerja Informasi Sekolah Indonesia (APISI)* [Association of Indonesian School Information Professionals]*
- and the newer *Asosiasi Tenaga Perpustakaan Sekolah Indonesia (ATPUSI)* [Association of Indonesian School Library Personnel]*

(*Note: The English translations given here are for clarity and do not necessarily represent official translations of the names)

The *Asosiasi Pekerja Informasi Sekolah Indonesia (APISI)* was formed on 26 August 2006 in Bogor, a city located about 60 km south of Jakarta. APISI started as a series of informal meetings among a group of school librarians who would meet often to share experiences of their activities. At the 3rd meeting, the participants agreed to the formation of an association to accommodate the aspirations of the members and to support the development of competencies. Over the years, APISI has become a development agency that focuses on competency development in school librarianship, the dissemination of information, and the involvement of various stakeholders in improving the quality of school libraries in Indonesia (APISI: Sejarah, 2010).

APISI aims to promote the school library as a learning resource center and to maximize the role of information professionals in the school. To achieve this goal, the association also encourages the participation of others, such as school principals, teachers, publishers, authors, and software developers in its programs (APISI: Sejarah, 2010).

APISI's vision is to enhance the capacity of school information professionals through a process of continuous self-development, and to create a society that is more passionate about school librarianship. Its mission is to become an organization for the competency

development of school information professionals so to stimulate the further development of school librarianship in Indonesia (APISI: Visi & Misi, 2010).

The *Asosiasi Tenaga Perpustakaan Sekolah Indonesia* (ATPUSI) is a younger but broader-based organization that was formed in Jakarta on 28 May 2009. It is an independent national organization, with the main aim of increasing professionalism in school librarianship, increasing knowledge of librarianship, information and documentation, and enhancing the skills and practices of school library personnel for the benefit of the nation and for society (ATPUSI: Tentang ATPUSI, 2012).

To achieve its objectives, ATPUSI carries out a variety of activities, including

- Serving as a forum for communication between the school and the library staff, and institutional libraries, documentation and information centers,
- Organizing and participating in various activities in the field of library science, documentation and information,
- Participating in the implementation of government programs and national development in the field of school libraries, documentation and information,
- Supporting advocacy programs for school library personnel.

Activities of School Library Associations in Indonesia

Both school library associations are active and carry out a number of activities. APISI concentrates on professional development and training, which it does through seminars, short courses, and school-based training packages. The training sessions are held in the larger cities, as well as in the smaller provinces every January and July. It also conducts consultancy sessions or ‘clinics’ for school librarians to discuss their problems. The association also has an active web site <http://apisi.org/>

ATPUSI holds larger meetings, conventions and symposia; it recently held its first national congress in conjunction with its 5th anniversary in June 2014. One of the strengths of ATPUSI is that it has branches in 30 out of 34 provinces in Indonesia (Nur Halim Sumirat, personal communication, 16 June 2014). This enables them to reach more school library personnel in implementing the programs. The regular annual meeting (*Rakornas/Rapat Koordinasi Nasional* or National Coordination Meeting) is held to coordinate the programs among the provinces. The provincial committees also attend this meeting, so that the programs can reach a wider area in a coordinated manner. ATPUSI too has an active web site <http://atpusi.or.id/>.

Both organizations are also involved with international activities, and both contributed significantly to the hosting of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) annual conference in Bali, Indonesia in August 2013. Following the conference, ATPUSI prepared and disseminated an 8-point resolution to various stakeholders in Indonesia on the need for further development of school librarianship in Indonesia. Similarly, APISI is also following up with local programs. Both organizations are also developing short-term and long-term plans based on learnings and recommendations from the conference.

Since 2006, APISI has held programs in some of the larger cities in Indonesia such as Jakarta, Bogor, Medan, Malang, Surabaya, Denpasar, Sukabumi and Bandung to promote information literacy. These programs have been done through seminars and workshops for school librarians and for teachers in charge of the library. Some schools have also approached APISI

for consultancy services in developing their school libraries, formally or informally through telephone or e-mails.

APISI has also been holding short courses since January 2011. This has sometimes been challenging because of the timing being too close to the beginning of the school year or end of school year, and the lack of funds. APISI is an independent non-profit, non-governmental organization and funding is a major challenge. The committee is actively trying to get funding support to run the planned programs through various means including networking with books publishers and book vendors, who have sometimes been of great help. Of late, APISI has also started demonstration projects of story-telling to elementary school children, and media and information programs for high school students in four of the larger cities in West Java. These not only demonstrate best practices to the school librarians, but also reach out to students directly.

Similar programs and short courses have also been held by *Klub Perpustakaan Indoensia* (KPI) for its members. The KPI programs focus on library management and on library software training. In Indonesia, many libraries use a library program called *Senayan Library Management Systems* (SLiMS) which was developed by a group of young local librarians.

ATPUSI has a program which also stresses on professionalism for school library personnel. This is slightly different from other associations in that it advocates a career path for the members. Most of ATPUSI members are working in public schools where certification can affect their salary. Therefore ATPUSI is playing an important role in helping its members climb the professional ladder.

Outcomes of Efforts by Library Associations in Indonesia

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the efforts by the two associations have had an impact on the development of school libraries in Indonesia. For example, two of APISI's short class participants won the Best Elementary School Library in Banten Province in 2014. They had also attended seminars and workshops held by other associations. It shows that their continuous professional development contributes to the success of the school library they manage.

To gather evidence from a wider audience, a short survey was carried out in April 2014 to gauge the views of members. A brief questionnaire was sent to school librarians who had participated in at least one of the activities of APISI. They were asked seven free-response questions on their involvement and impact of their participation in association activities. Although only fourteen members responded, their views do provide some evidence on the role of associations. The responses are summarized below.

Reasons to Join the Association

All the respondents were members of APISI, while some also were members of ATPUSI or other organizations (they could be members of more than one organization). Eight respondents had been members for less than one year, two had been members between one to two years, and four members had been members for more than two years.

The activities they had been attended included seminars, workshops or training and short courses. They had many reasons for being involved in the associations, with the most frequently mentioned being to develop their knowledge and skills on school librarianship.

This could have been because many school librarians are teachers or administrative staff, and as most of them do not have a library science background, they therefore needed to learn how to manage a school library.

Being with the same professional colleagues was the second most cited the reason they joined the association. When the early school librarians meetings were held as a forerunner to APISI in 2005, the participants found that the meetings were useful and this led to the formation of APISI in 2006. Being together with other school librarians made their spirit stronger and brought about a realization that one is not alone in having difficulties in their library jobs. Members have opportunities to exchange ideas, share experiences and learn from other school librarians. This serves as a continuing professional development in school library profession.

The Role of the Associations

Through the seminars, workshops, trainings and short courses held by the associations, the members viewed the roles of the associations as helping them to obtain updated information, knowledge, experience and awareness of developments in school librarianship. The associations play a role as a hub to gather school librarians so that they could learn from one another on practical ways to do their jobs. Sometimes the members came with problems which were resolved not only by sharing and learning from others, but also with input from experts who were speakers in these activities. Moreover, the members also saw that the associations were helping them to develop their professionalism.

Most of the respondents felt that the associations did help them in doing their jobs as school librarians. They found that associations especially helped the novice librarians with advice and solutions in practical ways to solve their problems. Association also helped by providing new perspectives on school librarianship and encouragement to librarians to think ahead. Seminars and workshops were ideal activities in such situations, although one-to-one assistance was also available by email.

Some of respondents stated that the associations had not been able to help them yet, even though they had responded to their queries; this was because they felt they could not immediately apply the new knowledge they had gained. They believed the associations would help them with advice when needed in the future.

Expectations from Associations

Respondents expected the associations to be the medium of communication for sharing, exchanging ideas, encouraging creativity or inspiration, and even as critics for school library development. They hoped for associations to create a passionate profession in the future. They wished for more school library visits being made by the associations to give feedback based on the actual situations they face. This has obviously become a challenging task ahead as the number of members are growing.

Some respondents mentioned the need for advocacy to the stakeholders and decision makers on the importance of school libraries and the librarians. Associations were also expected to put their energies to work and to become assertive in their efforts for a better position for school librarians. There are many issues that have taken place which demonstrate that some stakeholders and decision makers may lack an understanding of the role of school librarians. A recent case was the move to put a 'problematic teacher' to be in charge in library, so as to avoid the teacher having direct contact with students. APISI took action by sending petitions to relevant officials (see <http://apisi.org/petisi/>).

In summary, it can be noted from the brief survey that members hoped for the role of associations to embrace all school libraries in Indonesia, manage the communication among the members, and educate them to be more qualified and professional librarians. In this way, the associations would also be able to meet their members' needs, and at the same time improve the professionalism of the members.

Lessons Learned

Based on the experiences of APISI and feedback from other associations, the lessons learned on the role of library association in advocating for school libraries can be summed up as follows:

- a. Advocacy efforts need to be action oriented. One-way dissemination of information through conferences and seminars is a good start, but it must be followed up with addressing the real issues faced by the librarians. In the case of Indonesia, the major issue has been the lack of training.
- b. Advocacy efforts need to be planned and coordinated. When there is more than one organization involved in the promotion of school librarianship, there needs to be planning for the programs meet the needs of the target groups, systematic delivery, and avoidance of duplication. A developing country like Indonesia with 34 provinces cannot afford to waste its hard-earned resources. The annual National Coordination Meeting hosted by ATPUSI is a good example of this planning and coordination.
- c. Advocacy efforts have to be sustained. One-off efforts have their value in introducing a concept or creating awareness, but results are obtained as a result of long-term sustained efforts. Over the years, both APISI and ATPUSI have carried out programs that are beginning to show results.
- d. Advocacy efforts need to be evaluated and modified based on the feedback. As needs of target groups change, there is a corresponding need to evaluate the efforts, review them and modify as necessary. Initial projects may be based international models and materials, but eventually they need to be modified to meet local needs.

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