Rehabilitation through Reading

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Submission date: 18-Sep-2025 03:07PM (UTC+0700)
Submission ID: 2754513951
File name: 2025.09.17_-_Revisi_Artikel_IJCLS_-_Copy.docx (119.56K)
Word count: 4675
Character count: 27590

Rehabilitation through Reading

Evaluating Prisoners' Right to Literacy as a Tool to Reduce Recidivism

ABSTRACT

The fulfillment of inmates' right to reading materials is crucial for effective rehabilitation within Indonesia's correctional system. Despite robust legal guarantees—from the 1945 Constitution to specific laws and regulations—practical implementation faces significant hurdles. High recidivism rates in Indonesia underscore the urgent need for genuine rehabilitation beyond mere punitive measures. Using a doctrinal legal research method, the analysis draws on statutory and conceptual approaches, supported by case studies from Class IIB Pinrang, LPKA Pekanbaru, and Class IIA Kupang. Findings highlight there is a persistent gap between legal mandates and on-the-ground reality. To bridge this, a fundamental shift is needed: reading must be seen not just as a formal right, but as a core educational and rehabilitative tool for intellectual and personal development. Strategic improvements require stronger cross-sector collaboration, enhanced officer training, and outcome-based evaluation to ensure reading genuinely transforms inmates and supports their successful reintegration into society

KEYWORDS

Correctional Facilities, Literacy Programs, Reading Material, Recidivism, Rehabilitation

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of rehabilitation, as outlined in Law Number 22 of 2022 concerning Correctional (Undang-Undang Nomor 22 Tahun 2022 tentang Pemasyarakatan) ("**Correctional Law**"), envisions the improvement of inmates' personality and independence so that they may realize their mistakes, reform themselves, refrain from re-offending, and live as law-abiding and responsible citizens,[1] while at the same time

[1] Anis Widyawati dan Ade Adhari, *Hukum Penitensier Di Indonesia: Konsep Dan Perkembangannya* (Rajawali Pers, 2020), http://repository.untar.ac.id/40436/.

protecting society from repeated criminal acts.[2] However, the reality shows a stark contrast: Indonesia's recidivism rate surged to 18.12% of 268,001 inmates in 2020,[3] a dramatic escalation from 11.86% in 2017, 10.94% in 2018, and 9.06% in 2019,[4] underscoring the systemic failure to realize the rehabilitative ideals of correctional law.

Recidivism is influenced by various factors, ranging from economic marginalization and lack of family support to ineffective rehabilitative efforts within prisons. A crucial dimension is the lack of fulfillment of inmates' basic rights, which can undermine the entire rehabilitation process. When these rights are neglected, the likelihood of reoffending increases.[5] Among the various fundamental rights that should be fulfilled for inmates, there is one that is rarely discussed, the right to literacy or access to reading materials. A study by Emily Music emphasized that one way to address recidivism rate is by ensuring the proper implementation of literacy programs within correctional institutions. [6]

The study was grounded in data showing a link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime, which is tied to reading failure. Not coincidentally, more than 70% of inmates in American prisons cannot read above a fourth-grade level. Moreover, records from penal institutions indicate that inmates who receive literacy assistance have only a 16% chance of returning to prison, compared to a 70% chance for those who do not receive such support.[7]

Literacy programs provide inmates with constructive alternatives that help redirect their energy away from negative behaviors. The process of learning to read not only equips them with practical skills but also occupies their time productively, reducing opportunities to engage in harmful activities such as drug use or violence. As their literacy improves, inmates gain access to broader forms of reading, including novels and magazines, which serve as positive outlets for self-expression and

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[2] Widyawati dan Adhari, *Hukum Penitensier Di Indonesia*; Hanin Kusuma Ardy, "Peran Pembinaan Literasi Terhadap Perubahan Sikap Dan Tingkah Laku Narapidana Di Lembaga Pemasyarakatan Kelas IIB Tuban," *Wijaya Yuridika* 4, no. 2 (2021): 549880, https://doi.org/10.31328/wy.v4i2.2380.

[3] Codingest, "Optimalisasi Peran Bapas dan Pokmas Lipas Pada Residivisme," Ditjenpas, diakses 5 Juli 2025, https://www.ditjenpas.go.id/optimalisasi-peran-bapas-dan-pokmas-lipas-pada-residivisme; "MENGATASI LINGKARAN RESIDIVISME: PEMBERDAYAAN NARAPIDANA MELALUI PEMBINAAN KEMANDIRIAN DI LEMBAGA PEMASYARAKATAN | Triwikrama: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial," diakses 5 Juli 2025, https://ejournal.warunayama.org/index.php/triwikrama/article/view/296.

[4] Hak Asasi Manus, *KEMENTERIAN HUKUM DAN HAK ASASI MANUSIA REPUBLIK INDONESIA*, t.t.

[5] Fransisca Iriani R. Dewi dkk., "PENGEMBANGAN MODUL PELATIHAN UNTUK MENINGKATKAN RESILIENSI REMAJA," *Jurnal Muara Ilmu Sosial, Humaniora, Dan Seni* 6, no. 1 (2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.24912/jmishumsen.v6i1.13478.2022.

[6] "*Teaching Literacy in Order to Turn the Page on Recidivisim," diakses 16 September 2025, https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2998&context=jled.

[7] "*Teaching Literacy in Order to Turn the Page on Recidivisim."

recreation. In the long term, these programs enhance their educational prospects, foster personal development.[8] Given with these benefits, not only will the recidivism rate decline, but inmates will also be better prepared for reintegration into society.

To note, all these promising outcomes will remain out of reach without proper facilities. Emily Music's research shows that literacy programs fail where prisons lack libraries, classrooms, and even basic reading materials. Indonesian correctional legal framework likewise reflects this concern, as it explicitly incorporates the right to reading materials among the fundamental rights of inmates. Article 9 (h) of the Correctional Law states that inmates have the right to receive reading materials and follow media broadcasts that are not prohibited. This provision is further strengthened by the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), specifically Rule 64, which supports the idea that every prison must have a library with an adequate collection to support inmate learning and recreation.[9] Yet, the persistently high rate of recidivism in Indonesia raises the question of whether such normative guarantees are sufficient in practice.

Several studies have examined the implementation of prisoners' rights within correctional institutions. Muslimin and his team conducted empirical research on the fulfillment of rights for narcotics-abuse prisoners in the Class IIB Pinrang Detention Center.[10] Johar and colleagues investigated the implementation of the right to education for juvenile inmates at the Special Child Development Institution (LPKA) in Pekanbaru.[11] Similarly, Napu and his team explored the broader implementation of inmates' rights at the Class IIA Kupang Correctional Facility.[12] While these studies provide valuable insights, their focus remains largely on the empirical aspects of facility provision, such as libraries, without delving into the deeper question of how such facilities—particularly access to reading materials—affect the rehabilitation process itself.

To date, no research in Indonesia has specifically examined the influence of literacy and access to reading materials within the correctional system on

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[8] "*Teaching Literacy in Order to Turn the Page on Recidivisim."

[9] Kasey McCall-Smith, "Introductory Note to the United Nations Revised Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)," *International Legal Materials* 55, no. 6 (2017): 1180–82, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020782900003698.

[10] Muhammad Fadli Muslimin dkk., "Menebus Kesalahan, Meraih Hak: Kisah Narapidana Narkotika di Balik Jeruji," *Jurnal Litigasi Amsir*, 31 Oktober 2024, 188–201.

[11] Olivia Anggie Johar dkk., "Pelaksanaan Hak Pendidikan Terhadap Narapidana Anak Di Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Pekanbaru," *Jurnal Hukum Respublica* 22, no. 1 (2022), https://journal.unilak.ac.id/index.php/Respublica/article/view/12102.

[12] Papy Michael Napu dkk., "IMPLEMENTASI HAK-HAK NARAPIDANA BERDASARKAN UNDANG-UNDANG NOMOR 22 TAHUN 2022 SERTA HAMBATAN-HAMBATANNYA DI LEMBAGA PEMASYARAKATAN KELAS IIA KUPANG," *Petitum Law Journal* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1, https://doi.org/10.35508/pelana.v1i1.13349.

rehabilitation outcomes. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap. Given on this basis, the researcher is interested in examining whether Indonesia's correctional system—both normatively and in its practical implementation—aligns with the ideals of effective rehabilitation, particularly the provision of reading materials and literacy. In addition, the researcher seeks to analyze the obstacles and potential improvements that could be introduced to achieve more optimal fulfillment of the right to reading materials and literacy within Indonesia's correctional system. Accordingly, this research aims not only to fill the gap in existing studies but also to offer a critical perspective on how literacy provision can serve as a strategic entry point for strengthening Indonesia's correctional reform agenda, one of which is to combat recidivism.

2 Method

This study employs a doctrinal legal research method to assess whether Indonesia's correctional system fulfills the rehabilitative ideals articulated in Law No. 22 of 2022 on Corrections, with particular attention to the right to access reading materials and literacy. The analysis draws on primary legal sources such as the Correctional Law, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), and ministerial regulations, supported by secondary materials including scholarly works and prior empirical research. Given the limited availability of empirical studies on the fulfillment of inmates' rights, particularly regarding reading materials, the researcher selected the existing case studies conducted in Class IIB Pinrang, LPKA Pekanbaru, and Class IIA Kupang. These studies provide the most relevant data available, though still limited, on how correctional facilities implement literacy-related rights, offering insights into both normative and practical aspects of the system.

The research applies statutory and conceptual approaches to build the normative and theoretical framework, while comparative perspectives are used to highlight practical lessons from other jurisdictions. Qualitative content analysis is employed to identify recurring themes, including the adequacy of legal guarantees, obstacles to implementation, and the link between literacy provision and reduced recidivism. This method enables a systematic normative assessment of how literacy can serve as a strategic entry point for advancing correctional reform in Indonesia.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Normative and Practical Alignment of Indonesia's Correctional System with Rehabilitative Ideals

1. Legal Regulations Regarding the Right to Reading Materials for Inmates

The understanding of literacy's importance was recognized by Indonesia's founding fathers from the very beginning of the nation's formation. This awareness is reflected in the formulation of the country's fundamental goals, two of which are "to advance the general welfare" and "to enlighten the nation." This was then concretized in the state's constitutional formulation as stipulated in Article 31 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia ("**UUD 1945**"), which states: "Every citizen has the right to education."Although the wording of this regulation does not explicitly mention the word 'reading material,' this aspect is inherently inseparable from the intended meaning of education.

Furthermore, the same spirit is also enshrined in the following articles:

Article 28C Paragraphs (1) and (2) UUD 1945

(1) *Every person has the right to self-development through the fulfillment of their basic needs, the right to education, and the right to benefit from science and technology, art and culture, for the sake of improving their quality of life and for the welfare of humankind.*

(2) *Every person has the right to advance themselves by collectively striving for their rights to build their society, nation, and country.*

Article 28F UUD 1945

Every person has the right to communicate and obtain information for the development of their person and social environment, and has the right to seek, obtain, possess, store, process, and convey information by utilizing all available channels.

Through the articles outlined previously, the presence of reading materials is implicitly reflected in phrases such as "right to education," "science and technology," and "obtaining information." These rights, guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution, affirm that these aspects play a crucial role in human development. Ultimately, the fulfillment of these rights can only be realized if adequate and easily accessible reading materials are available to all segments of society.

At legislative level, the importance of reading and the availability of reading materials is once again underscored by the enactment of Law Number 3 of 2017 concerning the Book System ("**UU Sisbuk**"). This law aims to develop literacy, particularly in the aspects of book publishing and fostering a reading culture among

the public.[13] The formation of the UU Sisbuk was driven by the desire to advance the national literacy culture while simultaneously boosting the nation's global competitiveness. This is clearly stated in consideration letter (b) of the UU Sisbuk, which reads:

> *"that books, as a means of building and enhancing the literacy culture of Indonesian society, need special attention to encourage society to play a role at the global level."*

The emphasis on literacy is also clearly reflected in the main body of the UU Sisbuk. This is evident in the following articles:

> Article 4(c) of the UU Sisbuk
> *"The implementation of the Book System aims to: ... c. foster a culture of literacy among all Indonesian citizens; .."*

> Article 8(b) of the UU Sisbuk
> *"Society has the right to: ... b. obtain easy access to Quality Books and book-related information."*

Along with the recognition of the various rights outlined previously, there's a corresponding responsibility incumbent upon the government to ensure the fulfillment. This responsibility is formulated in Article 36(a) and Article 39(a) of UU Sisbuk, which respectively state:

> *"The Central Government is responsible for guaranteeing the implementation of the Book System through a healthy book ecosystem to ensure the availability of Quality Books that are affordable and equally distributed without discrimination.",*

> *"The provincial Regional Government is responsible for guaranteeing the availability of Quality Books that are affordable and equally distributed without discrimination in its territory."*

By understanding the existence of the legal norms outlined above, it becomes

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[13] Sunardi Purwanda, "HAKIKAT PEMENUHAN HAK ATAS BUKU BACAAN UNTUK MASYARAKAT DI DAERAH TERDEPAN, TERLUAR, DAN TERTINGGAL" (doctoral, Universitas Hasanuddin, 2020), https://repository.unhas.ac.id/id/eprint/3222/.

clear how important the state considers it to foster a reading culture and provide quality reading materials for the community. The high urgency placed on this matter indicates that if these efforts are carried out optimally, they will bring positive impacts not only for individuals but also for societal groups and even the nation as a whole.

The right to reading materials is not excluded for those serving prison sentences, whether for a specific period, life imprisonment, or death penalty in correctional facilities.[14] The importance of access to reading materials and intellectual freedom for inmates is echoed globally. The American Library Association asserts that participation in a democratic society demands unrestricted access to current social, political, legal, economic, cultural, scientific, and religious information. Information and ideas available outside of prison are considered essential for inmates to prepare for their return to society, as life in a free society requires broad skills and knowledge. Even for those incarcerated for life, access to information and literature remains vital as a window to understand the world and maintain their intellectual dignity.[15] This aligns with the view of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who stated that when someone enters prison, they do not lose their humanity; their mind is not closed to ideas; and precisely in a dehumanizing environment, the need for identity and self-respect becomes even more urgent.[16]

The administration of corrections, as part of Indonesia's integrated criminal justice system, is based on a framework known as the Correctional System (Sistem Pemasyarakatan). This system, as stipulated in Article 2 of the Correctional Law, aims to guarantee the protection of inmates' rights while also promoting the improvement of their personality and independence. In its implementation, the Correctional System clearly outlines and regulates the rights of inmates.

The rights of inmates, as stated in Article 9 of the UU Pemasyarakatan, are as follows:[17]

Rights of Inmates	
a.	The right to worship according to their religion or beliefs;
b.	The right to receive both physical and spiritual care;

[14] "UU No. 22 Tahun 2022," Database Peraturan | JDIH BPK, diakses 5 Juli 2025, http://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/218804/uu-no-22-tahun-2022.
[15] "Prisoners' Right to Read: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights | ALA," diakses 5 Juli 2025, https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/prisonersrightoread.
[16] "Procunier v. Martinez, 416 U.S. 396 (1974)," Justia Law, diakses 5 Juli 2025, https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/416/396/.
[17] Database Peraturan | JDIH BPK, "UU No. 22 Tahun 2022."

c.	The right to receive education, instruction, and recreational activities, as well as opportunities to develop their potential;
d.	The right to receive health services and proper food according to nutritional needs;
e.	The right to access information services;
f.	The right to receive legal counseling and legal assistance;
g.	The right to submit complaints and/or grievances;
h.	The right to receive reading materials and follow mass media broadcasts that are not prohibited;
i.	The right to humane treatment and protection from torture, exploitation, neglect, violence, and all actions that endanger physical and mental well-being;
j.	The right to guaranteed work safety, wages, or premiums from work performed;
k.	The right to receive social services; and
l.	The right to accept or refuse visits from family, advocates, companions, and the public.

Among the various rights inmates possess, letter (h) explicitly states their right to obtain reading materials. The explanation of Article 9 of the Correctional Law further clarifies that the reading materials referred to must not contain elements of pornography, radicalism, terrorism, provocation, or violence. These exclusions can be understood as a form of filtering, aimed at ensuring that the provided reading materials are positive and constructive, and capable of supporting the inmates' rehabilitation process. Here, access to books is crucial and normatively required to ensure the fulfillment of inmates' rights, as it serves a vital function in the rehabilitation process by supporting behavioral improvement and reducing

recidivism.[18]

The Correctional Law is also supplemented by implementing regulations, namely Government Regulation Number 32 of 1999 concerning the Requirements and Procedures for the Exercise of Rights of Correctional Inmates ("**PP 32/1999**"). The provisions regarding reading materials are detailed in Article 27 and Article 28 of PP 32/1999, which state:

Article	Provision
Art. 27	1) *Every Correctional Facility must provide reading materials, mass media in the form of print media, and electronic media.* 2) *The reading materials and mass media as referred to in article (1) must support the personality and independence development programs for Inmates and Correctional Children, and must not contradict prevailing laws and regulations.* 3) *Procedures regarding the lending and/or use of reading materials and mass media shall be further regulated by the Head of the Correctional Facility.*
Art. 28	1) *Every Inmate and Correctional Child who wishes to bring in and obtain reading materials or information from mass media from outside the Correctional Facility must obtain permission from the Head of the Correctional Facility.* 2) …

Based on all the regulations outlined, from the national constitution grounded in fundamental state objectives to the level of specific laws and their implementing regulations, it's clear that Indonesia has established a comprehensive legal framework to support the availability of reading materials and encourage a reading culture for all its citizens—without exception, including inmates.

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[18] Lauren Truong, "Books Behind Bars: The Right to Read in Prison," *National Coalition Against Censorship*, 9 Mei 2019, https://ncac.org/news/blog/books-behind-bars-the-right-to-read-in-prison.

2. Current State of Fulfillment of the Right to Reading Materials in Correctional Facilities in Indonesia

The fulfillment of the right to reading materials in correctional facilities has fundamentally been comprehensively regulated in various national legal instruments. One such instrument is the provision of libraries and access to mass media within detention centers or prisons. However, on-the-ground implementation shows that the mere presence of facilities does not automatically guarantee the achievement of the rehabilitative goals of the correctional system.

a. Class IIB Pinrang Detention Center, South Sulawesi

A case study at the Class IIB Pinrang State Detention Center (Rutan) indicates that a library has been provided, and the procedures for borrowing reading materials are relatively easy.[19] The Head of the Detention Services Sub-section, Mr. Andy Prajakarana, S.H., affirmed that every inmate has the right to access reading materials, and the library management system is administratively supervised by officers. The reading materials provided are also selected to support inmate development programs.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of utilizing these facilities has not been optimal. Some inmates, as revealed by inmate Suharmin, stated that although the library is available, reading interest remains low. Many are more interested in outdoor activities than reading. This indicates a gap between the provision of facilities and meaningful utilization.

This condition suggests that fulfilling the right to reading materials is not enough by merely providing physical means. There is a need for quality control of reading materials, curation of relevant content, and systematic guidance so that reading truly becomes part of the development and character-building process. Without a directed approach, the function of corrections as a means to rebuild the inmate's personality will be difficult to achieve, and the fulfillment of literacy rights will only be formalistic.

In other words, a detention center may fulfill the formal mandate of legal regulations by providing a library and reading materials, but if it is not accompanied by quality control and proper guidance on how reading can be a means of development, then the inmates' rights are not truly fulfilled. Correctional facilities should not merely be places to house inmates and fulfill administrative obligations, but must genuinely be spaces for moral and intellectual reconstruction.

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[19] Muslimin dkk., "Menebus Kesalahan, Meraih Hak."

b. **Pekanbaru Special Children's Development Institute (LPKA), Riau**

The condition of fulfilling the right to reading materials at LPKA Pekanbaru shows that although there are initiatives to provide a library as a self-study facility, this has not been accompanied by a complete understanding from the institution regarding the importance of adequate learning facilities as part of the rehabilitation process for child inmates. This is reflected in the minimal collection of reading materials and the limited space and operating hours of the library, which is only open until 12:00 PM WIB.[20]

Furthermore, the lack of adequate educational facilities and literacy materials also indicates that policymakers at LPKA—both the head of the institution and the officers—have not fully realized that reading and learning are not merely rights, but also fundamental means of reshaping the character of correctional children. Reading activities tend to be positioned as supplementary, not as a core element in the development process.

This situation confirms that despite good intentions and efforts from LPKA to provide reading materials and supporting facilities, without strong awareness of their urgency, and adequate structural support and resource availability, the fulfillment of literacy rights for child inmates will remain symbolic and partial. Consequently, correctional efforts fail to touch the rehabilitative essence that should be the main foundation of the child development system in correctional facilities.

c. **Class IIA Correctional Facility Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara**

Class IIA Correctional Facility Kupang has shown initial commitment to fulfilling inmates' right to reading materials and access to unrestricted mass media. One form of implementation is by providing a mini-library that contains various types of books, ranging from books on Pancasila, civics, motivation, to religion. Additionally, access to mass media is provided through televisions available in the residential blocks, with supervision to ensure that the broadcasts watched comply with applicable regulations.[21]

However, the fulfillment of this right has not been fully effective in promoting the inmate development process. Although facilities have been provided, not all inmates are interested in reading or utilizing media broadcasts as a means

[20] Johar dkk., "Pelaksanaan Hak Pendidikan Terhadap Narapidana Anak Di Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Pekanbaru."

[21] Napu dkk., "IMPLEMENTASI HAK-HAK NARAPIDANA BERDASARKAN UNDANG-UNDANG NOMOR 22 TAHUN 2022 SERTA HAMBATAN-HAMBATANNYA DI LEMBAGA PEMASYARAKATAN KELAS IIA KUPANG."

of expanding their knowledge. This indicates that providing facilities alone is not enough if it is not accompanied by a more personal and educational approach.

In practice, correctional officers have endeavored to be actively involved in guiding inmates, even providing explanations when inmates have difficulty understanding the content of reading materials or broadcasts. Nevertheless, without a more systematic development strategy supported by internal motivation from the inmates themselves, the potential of literacy as part of the rehabilitation process cannot be maximized.

This condition once again emphasizes that the provision of reading materials and media should not stop at quantitative aspects alone, but must be supported by a qualitative approach in the form of guidance, motivation, and appropriate content curation. Without these, the correctional system risks becoming merely an administrative routine, rather than a space for human transformation for inmates.

The three case studies analyzed—Rutan Class IIB Pinrang, LPKA Pekanbaru, and IIA Kupang Correctional Facility—generally indicate that the fulfillment of inmates' right to reading materials is still suboptimal, both in terms of quality, quantity, and its rehabilitative utilization. Yet, the right to reading materials is an inseparable part of the right to education and self-development explicitly guaranteed within the national legal framework.

The fact that libraries and mass media access are indeed provided shows institutional intent to fulfill legal obligations. However, when the facilities provided are not accompanied by the provision of decent reading materials, meaningful content curation, and educational guidance, the fulfillment of these rights tends to be formalistic and symbolic, not yet reaching the essence of the right itself.

This condition is not unique to Indonesia. In the United States, the existence of libraries in almost all federal and state correctional facilities reflects similar institutional efforts to provide access to reading materials for inmates. As explained by Lehmann,[22] correctional libraries in the US are developed following the public library model and function in various capacities—from self-learning centers to supporting rehabilitation and recreational activities. However, behind this diversity of functions, challenges arise that reflect similar problems: the quality of library services is often difficult to measure, access to information and reading materials is often delayed, and not all institutions have adequate library space or are managed by professional librarians.

[22] Vibeke Lehmann, "Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries," *Library Trends* 59, no. 3 (2011): 490–508, https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0001.

Furthermore, although philosophically, library services in the US uphold the right to freedom of reading and equal access to information for the general public, their implementation remains limited by strict security regulations. Some states even prohibit inmates from using standalone computers, even though such technology is crucial for education and personal development. Additionally, state regulations prohibiting reading materials containing elements of violence, hatred, and pornography are often inconsistently applied. Curation policies that should prevent misuse or arbitrary restrictions have not been uniformly enforced across all jurisdictions.[23]

Thus, the fulfillment of the right to reading materials should not merely be viewed as a symbolic administrative obligation, but rather as an essential element in actualizing the true purpose of the correctional system—namely, the dignified and productive rehabilitation and social reintegration of inmates. Both in Indonesia and in other countries like the United States, the availability of facilities does not always guarantee the effectiveness of their utilization.

Therefore, comprehensive improvements are needed, including enhancing the quality and relevance of reading materials, strengthening library management capacity, and adopting a more directed and participatory literacy approach. Without a literate and integrated development strategy, the correctional system will continue to be trapped in administrative routines, failing to touch the core of human transformation that forms the foundation of a modern criminal justice system—namely, rebuilding better, empowered individuals ready to rejoin society.

B. Obstacles and Opportunities for Enhancing Literacy and Access to Reading Materials in Correctional Facilities

Although the existing legal framework explicitly guarantees inmates' right to reading materials, the reality on the ground shows that the substantial fulfillment of this right has not been fully realized. The obstacles that arise are not only technical aspects of providing facilities but also a lack of orientation towards the purpose of the right itself—which is to enlighten inmates as part of the development and rehabilitation process.

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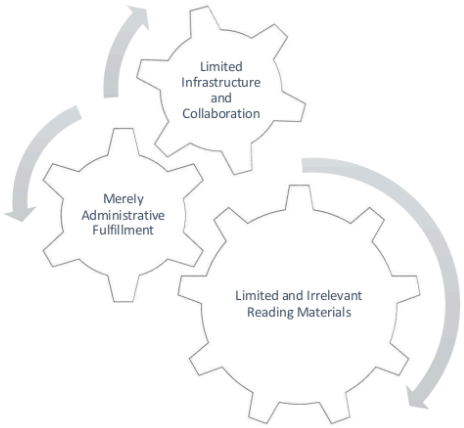
[23] "Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries," diakses 5 Juli 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236789743_Challenges_and_Accomplishments_in_US_Prison_Libraries.



One of the main obstacles is the minimal availability of relevant, quality, and varied reading materials in many correctional facilities. The available reading collections are often limited, not updated regularly, and not tailored to the needs and backgrounds of the inmates. Yet, Article 27 of PP 32/1999 explicitly mandates that every correctional facility provide reading materials and mass media, in both print and electronic forms. In this regard, the utilization of electronic media could actually be a significant breakthrough in addressing the limitations of physical reading materials—due to their easy accessibility, quick update capability, and ability to present a wider and more adaptive variety of content to the needs of inmates. However, this potential has not been maximized due to limited infrastructure and the absence of integrated policies in many correctional facility.

Furthermore, there is still an administrative-only approach to fulfilling this right, where the mere existence of a library or provision of reading materials is treated as a formality to comply with regulations, rather than a real instrument in the social reintegration process. The lack of training for officers, the absence of a curriculum or integrated literacy program, and the suboptimal involvement of external parties such as literacy communities, NGOs, and academics, further exacerbate this situation.

Nevertheless, this situation is not without hope. Potential improvements can be found through several strategic approaches:

First, it is crucial to adopt a new paradigm in viewing the right to reading materials—not merely as fulfilling an entertainment need or legal formality, but as an educational right that addresses the spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects of inmates. By positioning reading as an integral part of the development program, the provision of reading materials must be directed to support the development of

critical thinking skills, empathy, and a future orientation for inmates.

Second, cross-sector collaboration is a vital key to optimizing the fulfillment of this right. The government can establish cooperation with publishers, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and literacy communities to supply diverse, relevant, and contextual reading materials. Additionally, training for correctional officers on literacy management and reading guidance methods needs to be developed so that the development process truly has an impact.

Third, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of fulfilling the right to reading materials need to be carried out. Success indicators are no longer sufficiently measured by the number of books available, but must include aspects of inmate participation, behavioral changes, and intellectual achievements that arise through reading activities. Only in this way can the principle of corrections as a rehabilitation process be fully realized.

Thus, the fulfillment of the right to reading materials for inmates should not stop at an administrative level or merely be a symbol of regulatory compliance. It must be positioned as an essential means in the process of education, character building, and the restoration of human dignity for those serving sentences—as a true reflection of the constitutional mandate and civilized values of justice. In this context, libraries in correctional facilities are not just places to store books, but serve as community spaces that support lifelong learning. It is there that inmates can find constructive ways to interpret and utilize the one thing they certainly have: time.[24]

4 CONCLUSION

Providing inmates with access to reading materials is a fundamental right and a strategic instrument for realizing a rehabilitation-oriented correctional system in Indonesia, as mandated by the 1945 Constitution and reinforced in Correctional Law. This study confirms that, despite normative guarantees, implementation remains limited: correctional facilities often lack relevant and quality reading materials, and literacy initiatives are predominantly administrative rather than transformative. To address this gap, the right to read should be operationalized as an educational tool targeting the intellectual, spiritual, and social development of inmates. Strategic measures include expanding the use of electronic media to diversify content, strengthening cross-sector collaboration, enhancing officer capacity, and systematically evaluating program outcomes to measure reductions in recidivism. By embedding reading as a core component of rehabilitation, the correctional system can

[24] *How Prison Libraries Support Rehabilitation Efforts. UIL Policy Brief 11* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2020), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED612492.

fulfill its constitutional mandate to prepare inmates for reintegration into society as responsible and self-reliant citizens.

Rehabilitation through Reading

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