



Identifying and Classifying the Roles of the Public Library in the Development of Small Businesses: A Meta-Synthesis Approach

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this study is to identify and classify the roles of public libraries in supporting the growth and development of small businesses.

Methodology: The meta-synthesis method was employed to synthesize and interpret existing studies in this field. This research adopts a qualitative approach for data collection and is fundamental in purpose. To achieve the study's objectives, the seven-stage model of Sandelowski and Barroso was applied to obtain a comprehensive synthesis of the research topic based on qualitative studies.

Findings: The findings indicate that public libraries play seven effective roles in the development of small businesses: educational services, literacy enhancement, human skills development, information provision, consulting and reference services, technology support, and the provision of space and facilities.

Conclusion: Based on the results, public libraries can facilitate major transformations and shift toward an economic impact model by revising their service processes. This enables them to secure an appropriate role in development programs and contribute to the self-sufficiency of small businesses. Libraries today have the potential to serve as gateways to business and commerce, leveraging their existing facilities and resources.

Value: To date, no comprehensive meta-synthesis has been conducted to identify the full range of public library services for small business owners over an extended period. Most prior studies have examined only a limited number of these services, highlighting the novelty and importance of this research.

Keywords: *Public Libraries, Economic Growth, Economic Development, Small Businesses, Library Services.*

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Extended Abstract

Introduction: Development encompasses improvements in lifestyle, efficient utilization of resources, and the creation of favorable conditions for the well-being of all people. It can be achieved through various means, including education, research, services, and public goods. Public libraries, through their mission and objectives—such as education and research, information provision and dissemination, creating entertainment and hobbies, organizing book fairs and conferences, promoting reading, and fostering cultural engagement—can be among the most influential institutions in driving development. Today, given their public functions and services, libraries serve as tools to positively impact economic indicators.

Public libraries empower different segments of society by providing free education and access to information. Key factors in economic development include human development, poverty reduction, income equality, and the welfare and quality of life of community members. Skilled human resources, with expertise and capabilities, can establish and manage businesses, contributing to societal development and progress. Public libraries play a significant role in empowering individuals through educational programs, supporting business development by linking skills to market needs, saving time, and reducing training costs.

Purpose: This study aims to identify and classify the roles of public libraries in the growth and development of small businesses.

Methodology: Given the multi-dimensional and extensive nature of public libraries' roles in supporting small businesses, the meta-synthesis method was employed to integrate findings from existing studies based on interpretation and translation. This research adopts a qualitative approach for data collection and is fundamental in purpose. To achieve the study's objectives, the seven-stage model of Sandelowski and Barroso was utilized to obtain a comprehensive synthesis of qualitative research on the topic. The steps included clear problem definition, systematic literature review, text search and refinement, extraction of information from texts, analysis and synthesis of findings, quality control, and presentation of results.

Findings: The inclusion criteria for selecting studies for meta-synthesis focused on their relevance to the research question regarding the role of public libraries in the development of small businesses. The selection process was carried out in three stages:

1. **Title Screening:** Out of 211 retrieved articles, 105 were excluded based on title relevance.
2. **Abstract Screening:** 106 abstracts were reviewed, and 21 articles were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria.
3. **Full-Text Review:** 85 full-text articles were examined, and 61 were excluded as their content did not match the research question. Ultimately, 24 studies were selected for meta-analysis.

Through content analysis, the 24 selected articles were coded into 7 major roles and 18 components reflecting the contributions of public libraries to small business development. The findings indicate that public libraries exert influence through seven key roles:

1. **Educational Services** – Offering training and skill-building opportunities.

2. Literacy Enhancement – Promoting reading, information literacy, and knowledge acquisition.
3. Human Skills Development – Supporting the development of managerial, technical, and entrepreneurial skills.
4. Information Provision – Offering access to relevant data, industry knowledge, and research materials.
5. Consulting and Reference Services – Providing guidance, mentoring, and expert advice to small business owners.
6. Technology Support – Facilitating access to digital tools, online platforms, and technological resources.
7. Space and Facilities – Providing physical infrastructure such as workspaces, meeting rooms, and event venues.

These roles collectively demonstrate that public libraries can play a significant role in fostering the growth and sustainability of small businesses. Figure 1 presents the algorithm illustrating the review and selection process for the eligible articles included in this meta-synthesis study.



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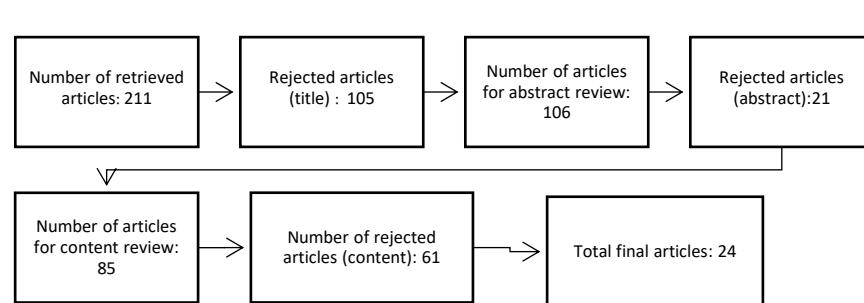


Figure 1. Search results and selection of appropriate articles

Conclusion: The results of the study indicate that libraries play a significant role in the development of small businesses. As central institutions within society, libraries provide information and educational resources accessible to all, which can support small business owners seeking income generation and economic advancement. The presence of entrepreneurs in libraries also contributes to neighborhood and local development, as a thriving local economy benefits the entire community. In this regard, libraries can actively participate in strengthening the local economy and transforming communities and living environments into more dynamic and desirable places.

This outcome also aligns with the interests of libraries themselves. The more libraries demonstrate that their resources contribute to local economic growth and that individuals can initiate businesses through library support, the greater public recognition and support libraries will receive. This, in turn, enhances the success of libraries in implementing their programs and sustaining their services. To achieve this goal, librarians need to adopt new perspectives on economic development and reconsider the nature of information and library services, while also acquiring the necessary training in business-related fields. Simultaneously, public libraries should reassess their traditional roles, strengthen strategic management and planning, and expand cooperation with commercial and economic institutions. By equipping themselves with appropriate physical and virtual infrastructure, libraries can move toward becoming dynamic contributors to a growing society. Ultimately, public

libraries play a vital role in developing the local economy by strengthening human capital.

Value: To date, no comprehensive study using a meta-synthesis approach has examined public library services for small business owners over an extended time frame. Most existing studies have identified only a limited number of such services through traditional library research methods and literature reviews. Therefore, the present study, by applying a meta-combination of prior research, identifies and categorizes the roles of public libraries in supporting small businesses. This contributes to raising librarians' awareness of the diverse roles and services that public libraries can offer in fostering small business development.



Keywords: *public libraries, economic growth, economic development, library services, small businesses.*

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