

Middle School Libraries as Active Agents of Risk Awareness: Post-disaster Knowledge Curation and Public Engagement in Thailand

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Abstract

Following the March 28, 2025, magnitude 7.7 earthquake centered in Myanmar—which triggered long-period ground motion (LPGM) and serious disruption in Bangkok—this study explores how a Thai middle school library responded educationally to the event. It presents a case where the library served as a pilot site for youth-centered disaster learning during and after the 15th Pre-Book Fair (April–July 2025). The library launched a three-part program titled “Survive and Be Safe from Disasters,” focusing on earthquake and tsunami awareness. With support from disaster experts, librarians co-designed hands-on activities such as evacuation drills and tsunami simulations using virtual reality (VR). Students also joined risk mapping using colored Post-it notes to mark safe and hazardous zones inside the library. A key element was storytelling, where students shared personal experiences of the March 28 earthquake. Accounts—from confusion in high-rises to chaotic evacuations—offered insight into how youth perceive and react to disaster risk. Their stories highlighted gaps in disaster education and increased awareness of local vulnerabilities. This paper argues that middle school libraries could serve as decentralized disaster risk reduction (DRR) nodes. By curating local knowledge, enabling experiential learning, and fostering civic dialogue, libraries can become active players in community-based DRR. Rather than passive information holders, school libraries should be integrated into national DRR education strategies. We advocate for recognizing school librarianship within disaster governance and propose a model for embedding libraries into DRR planning through outreach, learning design, and collaboration.

Keywords: school libraries, disaster education, youth engagement, disaster risk reduction (DRR), Thailand

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Introduction

Natural disasters such as earthquakes pose a significant risk to children and schools in urban areas, especially in developing countries where preparedness and awareness programs are unevenly implemented. While national disaster plans often emphasize structural safety and emergency drills, the role of educational institutions in cultivating risk awareness through information literacy remains underexamined. This paper presents a case study of one middle school in Thailand during the post-earthquake period following the 2025 Mandalay earthquake. It explores how librarians assumed proactive roles in curating information, engaging students, and contributing to community resilience.

Case Context: The 2025 Mandalay Earthquake and Its impacts in Thailand

On March 28, 2025, a magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck central Myanmar. Although the epicenter was far from Bangkok, long-period ground motion (LPGM) was observed in several high-rise buildings across the capital, causing public concern, particularly among students, parents, and the education sector.

Following the event, educational authorities implemented urgent measures, such as postponing entrance examinations at certain levels to allow time for school building safety inspections. This response underscored the importance of safety and preparedness in educational settings.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study design and employs participatory observation to examine disaster-related learning activities conducted in the library of a public middle school in Thailand. The school library served as a pilot site for youth-focused Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) learning activities carried out during and after the 15th Pre-Book Fair, held between April and July 2025.

Qualitative data were collected from multiple sources, including field observations conducted during the activities, photographs documenting the implementation process, and activity-related documents produced throughout the study period.

Results

This section summarizes the outcomes of the library-based disaster learning activities conducted at a public middle school following the March 28, 2025 earthquake. The activities were implemented as part of a three-part program titled *“Survive and Be Safe from Disasters,”* carried out during and after the 15th Pre-Book Fair between April and July 2025.

The program combined expert-supported sessions and student-centered learning activities. Disaster specialists were invited to speak with students, explain basic concepts related to earthquakes and tsunamis, and respond to student questions. These sessions were complemented by hands-on activities designed and facilitated by librarians, including evacuation drills and tsunami simulations using virtual reality (VR).

Students also participated in risk mapping activities using colored Post-it notes. They marked areas they considered safe or hazardous within the library space and discussed their choices

with peers. Through this activity, students identified concerns related to building layout, evacuation routes, and crowded spaces.

Another core activity involved storytelling, where students shared personal experiences related to the March 28 earthquake. Many described feelings of confusion, fear, and uncertainty, particularly in high-rise buildings or during evacuation. These stories reflected how students understood and interpreted disaster risk based on their own experiences and the information available to them at the time.

Field observations indicated active student participation across all activities. Students engaged in discussions, asked questions during expert sessions, and exchanged views with peers during mapping and storytelling exercises. The library environment supported open communication and allowed students to move between individual reflection and group interaction.

Overall, the activities produced a range of learning materials and interactions that captured how students experienced, understood, and discussed disaster risk. The results show that the school library functioned as an active learning space where disaster-related knowledge, personal experience, and dialogue came together during the post-earthquake period.

Discussion

This case illustrates the potential role of school libraries in disaster-related contexts. The findings suggest that libraries can function as decentralized knowledge hubs within broader disaster risk reduction (DRR) systems by translating complex risk information into forms that are accessible to young people, providing spaces for reflection and learning, and connecting schools with disaster experts. However, such roles remain limited within current formal DRR policies and educational frameworks.

In the context of Southeast Asia, where earthquake risks are increasingly shaped by rapid urbanization and infrastructure vulnerability, educational institutions play an important role in community-level disaster risk reduction. The experience of this Thai middle school highlights the importance of building localized capacity for knowledge sharing and learning during crisis periods, particularly when formal instruction is constrained.

Conclusion

The response of the middle school library to the 2025 Mandalay earthquake draws attention to the role that librarians can play within disaster-related learning environments. This case suggests that, beyond providing information, school libraries may support localized disaster risk reduction (DRR) education and offer learning opportunities for young people in post-disaster settings.

The findings indicate that school libraries could be considered more carefully within discussions on disaster education and preparedness. Recognizing the contributions of librarians in areas such as disaster communication, learning activity design, and community engagement may help strengthen educational responses to disaster risk. In this context, professional development opportunities related to disaster education, as well as collaboration with disaster science experts, could support similar initiatives in other schools.

Overall, this study highlights the value of engaging students with risk-related knowledge in ways that are sustained and sensitive to local contexts. As familiar and trusted spaces within schools, libraries may provide a practical setting for such engagement, particularly where formal disaster education is limited.

Future Work

Future research should further examine how librarians and other information professionals can develop a deeper understanding of disaster risks, such as earthquakes, and translate this knowledge into practical guidance for library users. Strengthening the capacity of librarians to support safe evacuation, provide clear risk information, and promote preparedness before disasters occur remains an important area for continued study.

In addition, future work may explore the development of training programs, guidelines, and collaborative frameworks that enable libraries to function more effectively as supportive spaces during emergencies. By enhancing librarians' risk awareness and preparedness skills, libraries may better assist users in understanding evacuation procedures and necessary pre-disaster measures, thereby contributing to safer and more resilient communities.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The authors further declare that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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