



## An evaluative study on the role of primary school library services in promoting student literacy

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### Abstract

**Background:** School libraries are often underutilised as centres of learning and literacy development, despite their great potential to support the educational process. The gap between the ideal function of libraries and the actual practice of library services in the field necessitates an evaluation that focuses on users' real experiences

**Purpose:** This study aims to evaluate the role of libraries in increasing students' interest in literacy at Labschool Elementary School UPI Bandung and to identify obstacles in the implementation of existing literacy programs.

**Methods:** This research used field research with an evaluative approach using a goal-free evaluation model. The research subjects included 20 fourth-grade students as survey respondents and library managers as interview informants. Data collection techniques included a three-level Likert-scale survey to measure students' literacy interest and semi-structured interviews to explore the condition of library services. Data analysis was conducted descriptively to interpret student responses and field findings.

**Results:** The results showed that most students responded neutrally to the school-organised literacy activities.

**Conclusion:** The literacy programs have not been fully able to foster students' interest in reading optimally. Library services are still dominated by the function of providing Reading materials without the development of innovative and participatory literacy programs.

### Keywords:

Elementary school  
Goal-free evaluation  
Librarian competency  
Library services  
Promoting literacy

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## INTRODUCTION

School libraries are often underutilized as centers of learning and literacy development, despite their considerable potential to support the educational process. The gap between the ideal function of libraries and the actual practice of library services necessitates an evaluation that focuses on users' authentic experiences. Based on this consideration, LabSchool Elementary School was chosen as the study location because it possesses representative school characteristics and is supported by an active library system. The study seeks to present an objective picture of library service quality based on user perceptions while also providing constructive input for future improvements.

This research was conducted at LabSchool Elementary School to evaluate the quality of library services without focusing on the institution's formal objectives. The evaluation employed a goal-free evaluation approach to examine the authentic experiences of service users, particularly students and teachers, and the extent to which library services support the learning process at school. This approach allows for an objective evaluation that is not influenced by program expectations, thereby better reflecting user needs (Youker, 2019). A goal-free evaluation approach is relevant because it enables a more open and comprehensive assessment of library services. The evaluation is not directed at achieving predetermined program targets but rather at the real impact on service users in their daily learning activities. Centralization of student and teacher experiences supports a more accurate

assessment of library service impact; this approach helps reveal aspects of the service that have not been formally identified, both its strengths and limitations. This evaluative approach also aligns with the needs of elementary schools, which require library services to be adaptive, responsive, and tailored to the characteristics of young library users.

The selection of LabSchool Elementary School as the study location was based on its representative characteristics and active library system. Previous studies have shown that the goal-free evaluation model is effective when applied in Indonesian elementary schools, as demonstrated by the evaluation of the reading literacy program at SD Negeri 1 Kedungjati (Nugroho & Mawardi, 2024). The study aims to obtain an objective picture of library service quality based on user perceptions and to provide constructive input for future service improvement. The application of the goal-free evaluation approach in this study enables researchers to identify various impacts arising outside the library's formal objectives, both positive and negative. This approach provides space to explore the authentic experiences of students and teachers as service users so that the findings are not only focused on planned program achievements but also on the reality of library service practices in the field. Research findings provide a foundation for decision-making by school and library managers in designing service development strategies that are more adaptive, sustainable, and responsive to elementary school library user needs.

Based on an interview conducted on May 24, 2025, with the informant with

initials T, children's visits to the library have varied backgrounds. Some visit because they enjoy reading activities, while others come for learning purposes. This pattern aligns with the concept of library learning, which supports students both physically and mentally in the process of learning and understanding information (Huda, 2020). Such a view is also supported by research (Inawati, 2022), which explains that libraries play a role in shaping a culture of literacy through strategies such as strengthening facilitators' capacity, providing a variety of reading sources, expanding access, involving the public, and enhancing governance. However, the interview results also show that students' motivation to visit the library is not entirely driven by independent literacy awareness but is still influenced by external factors, such as teachers' assignments or specific learning activities. Current practices indicate that the library's function as a learning space supporting literacy development has not been fully internalized in students' daily lives. The lack of sustainable, participatory literacy programs could limit the library's ability to foster consistent reading habits.

Library services play an important role in constructing a culture of literacy and supporting the learning process in schools. School libraries not only provide a collection of reading materials but also serve as informal learning spaces that can foster students' reading interest. Library services are essential in providing diverse resources to support cultural literacy, facilitate learning activities, encourage engagement, and adapt to technology (Safitri & Ramadan, 2022). Literacy developed through the library environment not only builds a

culture of reading but also critical skills and active student engagement in learning (Merga, 2019). The effectiveness of library services in basic education is reflected in service responsiveness to student needs, collection relevance, participatory literacy activities, and integration with classroom learning. These elements contribute to the creation of an inclusive learning climate in the educational context (Hughes et al., 2014; Munawaroh, 2024).

However, evaluations of library services are still rarely conducted from the perspective of students as direct users. In the same environment, new findings show that children are not very enthusiastic about reading when filling out questionnaires. Schools view this issue as an obstacle to libraries serving as centers of information, education, and recreation for children. The main challenges include inadequate facilities, a shortage of quality book collections, a lack of professional librarians, and limitations in information technology (Mathar & Irawati, 2022; Rafiq et al., 2021). The study also highlights that implementing library technology, such as collection digitization, automated library management systems, and online library portals, continues to face obstacles related to infrastructure and system sustainability.

The role of librarians is also crucial to the success of libraries as learning resources, requiring librarians to have the competence to empower collaborative service innovations with teachers, as well as the development of participatory and sustainable literacy programs (Fitrianti, 2024). Library services do not always involve adapting technology but also require responsive approaches such

as regular reading programs, reading challenges, book reviews, and integration with the curriculum through collaboration with teachers, which can increase student participation and broaden their horizons (Buchanan et al., 2016; Yunus et al., 2024). In this context, librarian competence and library service innovation cannot be separated from efforts to develop inclusive services tailored to the needs of library users. Librarians play a key role in translating various literacy programs into adaptive services, both through technology and participatory, non-digital literacy activities. Synergy among librarians, teachers, and the school environment is a key factor in creating library services that not only support formal learning but also expand students' access, engagement, and literacy experiences.

Despite the growing body of literature discussing the role of librarians, service innovation, and school literacy development, previous studies have largely focused on normative standards, program design, or institutional objectives of school libraries. Limited attention has been given to evaluating library services based on the actual experiences of users, particularly students and teachers, in elementary school contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining library services at LabSchool Elementary School through a goal-free evaluation framework, with a focus on capturing users' lived experiences and identifying how library services support literacy and learning processes within the school environment.

In addition, inclusive and innovative library services, such as access to digital resources, information literacy training,

and comfortable, welcoming facilities, strengthen the library's role as a center of literacy. Libraries also play a role in bridging the digital divide by providing internet access and technology training, thereby supporting social and digital inclusion among students (Cooke et al., 2016; Jaeger et al., 2014; Ningsih, 2024; Yunus et al., 2024).

## RESEACRH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine library services at LabSchool Elementary School using a goal-free evaluation approach. In line with quality criteria and assessment standards, field research focuses heavily on the field being discussed, supported by specific assessment standards that cannot always be explained by universal concepts such as originality and reliability (Crump, 2020). Field research advances knowledge by bridging the gap between theory and application, as its nature serves as a platform for data collection and encourages collaboration for impactful research (Harvey & Spee, 2024). The techniques used in field research include observation, interviews, and document analysis (Gneezy, 2017). The informants in this study consisted of school librarians, students from class 4-B, and one teacher who were directly involved in library services. The interview process was conducted using a semi-structured format to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and roles in supporting literacy activities. The activities in this study lasted one month, with four meetings with librarians to complete the interview process and one assessment session for

one class lasting 25 minutes. The data analysis technique in this study also focused on assessing service completeness against applicable standards, developing perseverance, and triangulating interview and discussion results by examining other sources, such as archives and supporting observation results.

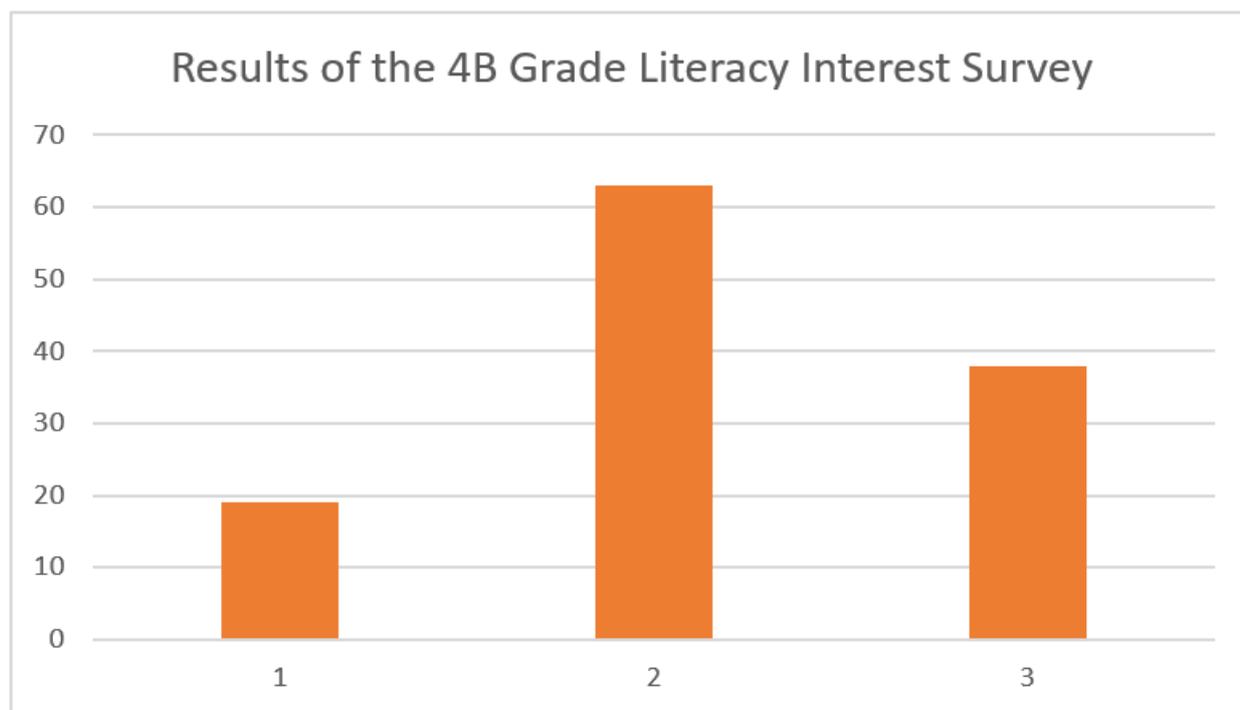
A three-point Likert-type scale was selected to accommodate the cognitive and developmental characteristics of elementary school students. The simplified response options were intended to reduce response confusion, support comprehension, and encourage consistent responses, particularly given the young age of the participants. This scale was considered appropriate for capturing general tendencies in students' perceptions while maintaining clarity and reliability in a small-scale, exploratory study. In addition to observation and interviews, the author also conducted a survey of fourth-grade students at LabSchool Elementary School to measure the extent to which this service influenced their interest in visiting the library and the extent to which the literacy program integrated into this subject made them enjoy visiting the library. This shows a correlation between the services provided to students and teachers and the orientation toward information needs in the library. Therefore, the results of this survey support several arguments that will be presented.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Library services have a service structure that significantly addresses all user needs. Given their scope in elementary schools, libraries are important learning centers

for increasing reading interest through programs such as book clubs and storytelling sessions. Libraries need to provide access to a variety of reading services to foster early reading interest as an important step in children's formative years (Mahendra et al., 2024). This opinion is supported by Arisandi et al. (2024), who states that libraries support the school curriculum and help students develop information literacy skills, such as searching for and using information effectively, based on the concept of goal-free evaluation. However, the phenomenon observed at LabSchool Elementary School is not yet in line with some of the concepts presented earlier, which suggest that children's interest in literacy tends to be limited to formal activities or to occur only during learning sessions.

Development of sound library contributes to the creation of common friendly space that encourages students to visit more often and to use the facilities for collaborative learning actively. To explore how these conceptual roles of the library are reflected in students' experiences, a survey was conducted to capture students' responses to the literacy services provided at the school. The predominance of neutral responses (score 2) suggests that the literacy activities and library services are perceived as moderately engaging, yet not consistently experienced as highly stimulating by all students. The presence of responses in both the disagree (1) and agree (3) categories indicates variation in students' experiences, which may be influenced by differences in access to reading materials, levels of teacher support, and the extent of students' interaction with library services.



**Figure 1. Survey Diagram of Literacy Interest Results for Class 4B,**

Source: Research results, 2025

The dominant response from children in the survey in Figure 1 results was 2, which is “just okay.” In addition, a percentage of responses remains in categories 1 (not interested) and 3 (interested), indicating differences in students’ literacy experiences. This pattern suggests an initial indication that the current literacy activities may have a limited influence on students’ literacy interest. Variations may influence this in access to reading materials, teacher support, and the role of libraries in providing collections appropriate to students’ levels and developmental needs. The results of this survey provide an important basis for evaluating and improving the management of school libraries as literacy centers that are more attractive, inclusive, and responsive to students’ characteristics. The survey results offer exploratory insights that may inform further evaluation of school library services and literacy programs within the studied context.

An attractively designed library program opens many learning opportunities, increasing student visits and active engagement. This concept describes the Learning Commons, specifically a collaborative space emerging in school libraries. This model combines information technology and social services (Gómez-Valverde & Calderón Jiménez, 2024). As an integrated approach, libraries can combine traditional library services with technological support, academic consultation with stakeholders, and skill development for each library staff member (Wang et al., 2016). The Learning Commons tends to involve students and teachers more in using library resources and in collaborative learning than the traditional library concept (McCunn, 2023).

The interview results indicate that library services and programs are still limited to circulation and information; this orientation was still evident at the time of

the interview. This situation shows that school libraries are not yet positioned as a strategic part of the learning ecosystem but are still understood as merely administrative support units. The limited services that focus solely on providing reading materials mean that libraries are not yet able to create meaningful, contextual learning experiences for students. In fact, the concept of Learning Commons encourages creative interaction and collaboration between students, teachers, and librarians. Initiatives to develop services tend to remain mere discourse and are not realized sustainably without encouragement from school policies and institutional support. Furthermore, the lack of collaboration between stakeholders reinforces the stagnation of library services. The library system becomes marginalized and is not integrated into the overall school culture when literacy programs are left entirely to subject teachers. This results in a low level of understanding among students of the library's role as a center for learning resources, a space for exploring knowledge, and a place for developing literacy interests and talents. The weak circulation system and enforcement of book borrowing rules also reflect the lack of systematic library management, which ultimately hinders the sustainability of the collection and the overall quality of services.

Thus, these findings reinforce the need to develop school libraries that encompass not only improvements in facilities and collections but also a transformation of the service paradigm toward a more collaborative and participatory model. The implementation of the Learning Commons concept can be a strategic

alternative to address these issues by strengthening librarians' roles, fostering active collaboration with teachers and school officials, and using technology to support literacy learning that is relevant to students' needs. "Due to limited funds and lack of experience, the services here are still focused on providing reading materials only. There are no other services yet. Actually, we want to hold a literacy competition, but there has been no encouragement from the school" (Mr. Tn, interview, April 21, 2025). This statement shows that the development of library services still faces significant obstacles, namely, limited funds and a lack of experience in managing literacy programs.

This condition may also be influenced by the lack of collaboration between library managers, schools, and stakeholders in developing literacy programs. In addition, libraries have not yet conducted surveys on the needs and satisfaction of library users as a mandatory standard, as required by the SNP, which refers to the Regulation of the Head of the National Library of Indonesia in 2024 and the Decree of the Head of the National Library of Indonesia No. 300 of 2022. The informants also stated that literacy programs are held by teachers, especially in Indonesian language classes, which, after further interviews with teachers and three students, are still only activities to fulfill the learning process. In fact, the children's responses suggest that these literacy activities do not foster their desire to visit the library. Knowledge of the library's functions remains very limited and is not fully understood by the school. The orderliness of students in borrowing books also reflects the school's lack of firmness in

imposing fines when books are lost or not returned, even when children forget, which is a problem in the circulation service at the school.

The evaluation reveals the full range of effects of library services, both positive and negative. The main positive impact of the library concept, still in effect today, is its focus on providing reading materials. Even though library services are limited, the provision of reading materials continues to provide important benefits in meeting the needs of library users. This is also supported by Abbas (2023), who emphasizes that libraries are a source of research. Furthermore, other opinions emphasize that existing libraries continue to provide students with learning opportunities to access information and learn independently.

However, observations at SD LabSchool UPI suggest that the development of the library as a comfortable and friendly learning space has not yet functioned at an optimal level, as children's literacy interest remains largely confined to normal learning lessons (Merga, 2019). These limitations can also hinder the learning process and reduce students' reading interest. The lack of facilities and information technology makes services less efficient and less attractive, especially for children, and this may be why children's responses to literacy activities are not memorable (Rafiq et al., 2021). The lack of facilities for children not only makes the library seem unattractive but also shapes unfamiliar patterns of information seeking among children when they visit. Furthermore, children often feel unfamiliar when visiting the library and see it only as a place for books.

It is undeniable that libraries need librarians with a background in Library Science, in accordance with applicable standards. Libraries must have at least three librarians if they have more than six study groups, and library staff must have a minimum academic qualification of a Diploma III in Library Science or another field from an accredited university (Nurmalina, 2021). Based on the information provided by the source, the librarians' educational backgrounds are non-library-based. The source further explained that the librarian position is not a field they had previously pursued, as they came from an administrative background. The lack of experience and training in librarianship affects the quality of services provided, so the library has not been able to function optimally as a center for learning and literacy (Khurshid, 2013). The lack of librarians among the staff also raises a significant question for the school: whether there was prior readiness to manage the library. This issue is not minor, as the impact would be enormous if the librarian lacked basic orientation.

Other impacts of the lack of competent librarians include librarians without an educational background and minimal training finding it challenging to manage collections, provide appropriate information services, and develop simple but effective literacy programs (Sahabi & Ootobo, 2022). The lack of librarian competence makes the adoption of information technology and new methods in library services difficult, resulting in stagnation in the existing system (Jbeen et al., 2025). "At that time, UPI students also helped classify the books, and I myself did not really understand the

numbers, but I gradually realized where to place them, starting from the largest to the smallest,” said Mr. Tn, in an interview, April 21, 2025. One of the most noticeable impacts on collection management is the classification system, which librarians poorly understand. Conditions in libraries are increasingly complex due to the lack of management and inaccurate inventory in libraries (Sukiasyan, 2020).

This situation directly affects the use of the collection by library users, especially elementary school students who are still in the early stages of literacy. The irregularity of the classification and inventory system makes it difficult for students to find reading materials that suit their ability and interests, so that the library does not function optimally as a learning resource due to unsystematic and poorly documented access to information. Furthermore, weak competencies also affect the sustainability of school literacy programs, as they lack an adequate understanding of book storage management and fail to function as an active and dynamic center for literacy activities. Study results emphasize the importance of increasing librarians' capacity through formal education and continuous training to align library management with student needs and future development.

Library promotion is an important indicator of library services. Librarians need to actively inform students about new collections, such as textbooks, reference books, and popular reading materials, so that students can make effective use of them (Buchanan et al., 2016). Responsive information services from librarians help students quickly and accurately find the reading materials they need. This also has an

unexpected positive impact, as good service can increase students' reading interest. One way to support this is by integrating the school library into learning activities simply, for example, encouraging teachers to direct students toward library books, research materials, and interactive tools as key learning resources or utilizing library services to enhance students and the school community. Based on the interviews, the library has already done this by facilitating learning activities outside the classroom, with the library as the venue of choice. Librarian education, as one initiative, can help create a space for librarians to explore and provide more complex information about the library to students.

Improved understanding of the library's functions enables students to use library services more effectively in support of learning activities, no longer seeing libraries as places to borrow books but as alternative learning spaces that support the exploration of knowledge. This also strengthens the librarian's role as an active literacy facilitator rather than simply a collection manager. Thus, library promotion does not stop at conveying information but becomes a process of fostering a sustainable literacy culture in the school environment. “Sometimes there are children here who don't want to go to class; they just want to stay in the library reading books. I know the books they like, and they listen to me a little more, so when I tell them to go to class, they do,” said Mr. Tn in an interview on April 24, 2025. Unfortunately, the library is not yet ready to promote itself either physically or through the school's social media. Mr. Tn explained that monitoring and evaluation activities

are also among the efforts that can be made to ensure schools pay more attention to the welfare of libraries. Promotions can involve programs, new collections, and others, but active collaboration from the school is needed to support these efforts. This is also an important note for schools to pay attention to details, such as library call numbers or other library identifiers, as a form of the library's existence as an information institution within schools. The impact of this existence is expected not only to be promotional but also to provide helpful information to every member of the school community for accessing all library information and resources.

## CONCLUSION

The LabSchool Elementary School Library has not yet played an optimal role in increasing students' literacy interest. This is evident from the survey results, which showed a predominance of neutral responses and a lack of literacy programs with a significant impact. Limited funds, a lack of collaboration, and the absence of librarians with a background in Library Science are the main obstacles to effective service management. Library services are still limited to circulation and the provision of reading materials, without Learning Commons-based innovations or technological integration. Library promotion has also not been maximized, either physically or digitally. This article further emphasizes the need to increase librarians' capacity, develop relevant literacy programs, and obtain full support from the school to realize the library as an effective, child-friendly literacy center. This

study has limitations in the interpretation process of the results of the approach. The approach used in the class did not assess overall attitudes but rather the performance process carried out by the library using a single-class assessment scale. In the future, this study is expected to be able to assess in more detail, especially the selection of presentation of results and discussion, and a more structured assessment based on the evaluation model used.

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## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.N.A.P, A.H, and Y.W.; Data curation, S.N.A.P and A.H, Y.W; Formal analysis, A.H., and Y.W.; Investigation, S.N.A.P,A.H,Y.W.; Methodology, S.N.A.P,A.H.,Y.W.; Project administration, S.N.A.P; Resources, A.H, Y.W.; Supervision,A.H. and Y.W. Visualization, S.N.A.P; Writing - original draft, S.N.A.P, A.H. and Y.W.; Writing - review & editing, S.N.A.P, A.H, and Y.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## AI Declaration

The Authors declare that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Grammarly, were used solely to assist with language editing, grammar corection and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript. These tools were not involved in the study design, data collection, or interpretation of results. All substantive intellectual contributions remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

### Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from coresponding author. Due to privacy and ethical considerations, data cannot be made publicly available.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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