



## Enhancing student visits through library strategies: A case study of SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan

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### Abstract

**Background:** The issue of low student interest in visiting the library is considered a crucial and urgent problem in the field of education. School libraries play a vital role in increasing student visit interest by providing various types of reading materials and other educational resources.

**Purpose:** This study aims to identify, analyze, and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies implemented by the library of SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan in enhancing student visit interest, as well as to explore the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered.

**Methods:** This qualitative case study explores the strategies, challenges, and opportunities of the SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan library. Data were obtained from five purposively selected informants through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

**Results:** The library applied three strategies—social media promotion, friendly service, and collaboration with teachers—but these often overlooked key audience traits: vocational students' pragmatic, instrumental, and goal-oriented mindset.

**Conclusion:** The study reveals that the library of SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan employs strategies such as promoting collections through social media, providing friendly librarian services, and collaborating with teachers to increase student visit interest. Supporting factors include the enthusiasm of librarians and school support. Low student participation, lack of direct promotion, and limited collections serve as inhibiting factors. Therefore, strengthening strategies is necessary to further enhance student interest in visiting the library.

### Keywords:

Library  
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Supporting and inhibiting  
factors

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## INTRODUCTION

School libraries hold a fundamental and irreplaceable role within the ecosystem of modern education. They function as the intellectual heart of the institution—a learning resource center designed to support and enrich all student learning activities (Munawaroh et al., 2024). A library is not merely a repository of books, but a dynamic *third space*—a safe, comfortable, and engaging environment beyond the classroom and home—where students can independently access information, broaden their knowledge horizons, and sharpen critical literacy skills essential for the 21st century. It serves as a space for discovery, exploration, and reflection, laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

However, in the midst of the digital disruption era, this ideal role faces significant challenges. Paradoxically, despite living in a time of unprecedented access to information, the presence of physical libraries is often marginalized. The convenience of instant information through digital devices frequently creates an illusion of sufficiency, leading students to overlook the validated resources available in libraries. This challenge demands that libraries evolve and transform. To remain relevant and effective, libraries must no longer be passive; they must proactively implement innovative and well-planned strategies that can rekindle user interest in visiting, engaging with, and optimally utilizing the services offered.

The challenge of maintaining relevance has become a real and urgent issue in practice, specifically manifested at Vocational High School (SMK) Negeri

1 Percut Sei Tuan. Based on preliminary observations conducted as part of pre-research, a concerning phenomenon was identified: the level of student visits and utilization of the library is alarmingly low. This condition is reflected in the often-quiet atmosphere of the library space, minimal book borrowing activity, and low student participation in library-centered activities. Data obtained from the library's internal documentation strongly confirms these observational findings. SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan has a large student population of approximately 4,000, yet visit records for the 2023/2024 academic year show that only 565 students (around 14.13%) visited the library. Alarmingly, this figure declined in the following academic year (2024/2025), with only 508 students (around 12.7%) recorded as visitors. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent strong empirical evidence of structural issues related to the library's appeal and the effectiveness of its current strategies.

The issue of low student visit interest must be viewed as a critical and urgent problem that warrants immediate investigation, especially within the context of vocational education (Purwanti, 2020). For vocational students, the library is not merely a supplementary facility, but a vital support system for their academic and professional success (Cahyati & Amir, 2025). SMK students are expected not only to understand theory but also to master practical skills specific to their areas of expertise. A well-functioning library can provide access to advanced textbooks, technical journals, industry manuals, case studies, and various other

references that deepen their understanding beyond classroom instruction. Low library utilization directly risks creating knowledge gaps, hindering the development of critical thinking skills, and ultimately reducing their readiness to enter a competitive workforce. Therefore, a thorough investigation to identify the root causes and formulate strategic solutions is both an academic and practical necessity.

The conceptual framework of “strategy” is highly relevant in this context. Quinn defines strategy as a pattern or plan that integrates an organization’s major goals, policies, and actions into a cohesive whole (Suryani et al., 2024). In the context of school libraries, strategy is not merely a series of random activities, but a holistic and well-planned approach designed to achieve a specific goal—namely, increasing student interest in visiting and utilizing library resources. This strategy encompasses various dimensions, including collection management, physical space design, service development, and promotional programs and partnerships.

The implementation of an effective strategy aims to create a comprehensive positive experience for users. This aligns with Dahlan’s perspective, which emphasizes that factors such as the comfort of the physical environment and the quality of services provided by librarians are key determinants that make users feel welcome and motivated to return (Ibrahim, 2017). Furthermore, visit interest itself, as stated by Hasanah, is the result of a growing “sense of attraction” to various aspects offered by the library (Hayati et al., 2023). This attraction may be triggered by relevant collections, a conducive learning atmosphere, modern

facilities, or warm and helpful interactions with library staff. Thus, the primary task of a library strategy is to design and manage all these elements synergistically to build strong and sustainable appeal.

Previous studies have made important contributions to understanding strategies for increasing visit interest in school libraries. One stream of research consistently highlights the importance of service quality as a key pillar. Studies conducted by Nurul Wahdahniah (2016), reinforced by Badriahanum (2023) show that the implementation of excellent service—manifested through friendly, proactive, and helpful librarian attitudes—significantly enhances students’ positive perceptions of the library. Another research stream focuses on the role of communication and promotion. Research by Hamidah et al. (2024) and Rangkuti (2016) emphasizes that effective interpersonal communication between librarians and students, along with intensive and creative promotional programs, can encourage students to actively utilize the library. Additionally, Kusuma’s (2019) empirical study demonstrates that well-planned promotional strategies can drastically increase visit numbers.

Despite the valuable insights from existing research, a deeper analysis of the literature reveals a significant research gap. Nearly all of the aforementioned studies are set in the context of senior high schools (SMA) or elementary schools (SD), with very little attention given specifically to vocational high schools (SMK). This gap is critical to address, as there are fundamental differences between the information needs of SMA and SMK students. SMK students have a highly pragmatic and goal-oriented

learning orientation. Their information needs are driven not only by general academic curricula but also by the demands of mastering specific and applicable technical skills. They may be more interested in machine repair manuals, the latest design software guides, or industry case studies than in classic literature analysis or general history. Therefore, strategies that prove effective in SMA—such as promoting fiction novels—may not hold the same appeal for SMK students.

The novelty of this research lies in its sharp focus on filling this gap by analyzing the dynamics of library strategies within the unique context of vocational education. Accordingly, this study is specifically designed to address the need for a deeper understanding of library strategies in SMK environments. Through an in-depth case study approach at SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan, this research aims to identify, analyze, and evaluate the effectiveness of currently implemented strategies. Furthermore, it will explore the unique supporting and inhibiting factors within the vocational context. The findings are expected to contribute not only theoretically to the literature on school library management but also to generate concrete and actionable practical recommendations. These recommendations can be utilized by the management of SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan and other vocational school libraries to design more relevant and impactful strategies, ultimately optimizing the role of libraries as strategic partners in producing competent and job-ready graduates.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed using a qualitative approach and a case study research type. The qualitative approach was deliberately chosen because the primary goal of this research is to gain a deep, rich, and contextual understanding of a complex phenomenon—namely, library strategies to increase student visit interest. In line with Anderson's view, the qualitative approach enables researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret descriptive and narrative data that cannot easily be reduced to numerical values (Arioen, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant as the Ali & Yusof research questions that focus on the “why” and “how” a strategy succeeds or fails—areas that cannot be fully explained through statistical procedures (Arioen, 2023).

Furthermore, the case study method was employed to conduct an intensive and focused investigation of a single “case” within its natural setting. In this context, the “case” refers to the dynamics of strategies, challenges, and opportunities in the library of SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan. This design allows for a holistic exploration of various interrelated variables, ranging from internal policies to user perceptions.

The research site was set at the library of Vocational High School (SMK) Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, located at Jalan Kolam No. 03, Medan Estate, Deli Serdang Regency. The selection of this site is essential and irreplaceable, as it is the authentic setting where the phenomenon under study occurs. Field data collection was conducted intensively over a three-month period, from March to May 2025, to ensure data saturation and accurate reflection of the actual dynamics.

Primary data sources consisted of



**Table 1. Informant Sources in the Study**

No.	Name	Position	Interview date	Initial in this article
1	IDR	Librarian	March 19 2025	Informant 1
2	ADP	Librarian	March 19 2025	Informant 2
3	NDR	Student	March 19 2025	Informant 3
4	UHP	Student	March 19 2025	Informant 4
5	AH	Student	March 19 2025	Informant 5

Source: Research, 2025

library staff and students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique most suitable for qualitative research where the aim is not statistical generalization but depth of information. The criteria for selecting staff informants included those directly responsible for planning and implementing library strategies. Student informants were chosen to represent diversity, including students from different grade levels (X, XI, XII), various vocational programs, and varying visit frequencies (frequent, occasional, and never) to capture a broad spectrum of perceptions.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher (human instrument), whose role was crucial in interacting with informants, observing the context, and flexibly interpreting the data. To support this role, the researcher utilized several prepared supplementary instruments, including: (1) an Interview Guide, which contained a series of semi-structured questions to guide conversations while remaining focused on the research objectives, yet open to exploring emergent topics; (2) an Observation Sheet, which included a checklist and note-taking columns to systematically record the physical conditions, facilities, social interactions, and user behavior within

the library; and (3) Documentation Tools, such as a camera and a voice recorder, to capture visual and audio evidence. The data collection process was conducted using technique triangulation, which combined three primary methods: in-depth interviews to explore the subjective perspectives of the informants, direct observation to validate interview data against field realities, and a documentation study to gather supporting data, such as visitor statistics and promotional materials.

All collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, which is a cyclical and continuous process. This analysis involved three main interrelated activities. First, data reduction, where raw data from interview transcripts and field notes were selected, simplified, and organized through coding to identify key patterns and themes relevant to the research questions. Second, data display, where the reduced data were systematically presented in the form of dense descriptive narratives, enriched with direct quotations from informants, and supported by matrices or thematic tables to facilitate understanding and conclusion drawing. Third, conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, the researcher drew preliminary conclusions from the presented data, which were then

continuously tested and verified by referring back to the raw data and conducting source triangulation (comparing data from staff, students, and documents) to ensure that the research findings were credible, trustworthy, and robust.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings at the SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan library present a microcosm of a greater challenge facing vocational education in Indonesia: how supporting institutions, such as libraries, can evolve to meet the specific demands of competency-based learning. Far from being a simple issue of a lack of reading interest, the data collected from in-depth interviews and participant observation reveal a complex and multifaceted dynamic. This dynamic shows a constant friction between the implemented librarianship strategies—based on good intentions and common practices—and a series of supporting and inhibiting factors deeply rooted in the institutional, cultural, and psychological realities of vocational education.

The library has adopted three main strategies that are the focus of this research: modernizing promotion through social media, emphasizing friendly and personal service, and initiating collaboration with teaching staff. However, this study shows with incontrovertible evidence that the effectiveness of each of these strategies varies greatly and often misses the mark. This occurs because the strategies frequently fail to account for the crucial variables that define their audience: the pragmatic orientation, instrumental needs, and goal-centered mindset of vocational high school

students. This vocational context becomes the fundamental analytical lens through which every finding must be interpreted. It radically transforms the expectations and function of a school library, from its traditional role as a center for general literacy and intellectual recreation to a hub of technical, practical, and applicative resources vital for students' academic and professional success. An in-depth analysis of each strategy and the factors influencing it will reveal the gap between intention and reality, while also offering a roadmap for transformation.

The first strategy identified is the effort to modernize promotion. The librarians have consciously tried to reach students in their digital domain:

“We usually promote new book collections through the school's Instagram and the homeroom teachers' WhatsApp groups.” (Informant 1, Interview, March 19, 2025)

In general, this step is commendable. It demonstrates an awareness of the shifting communication landscape and aligns with global trends in library services that seek to reach digital native generations on the platforms they frequent (Maretno & Marlini, 2021). However, field data, voiced directly by the information consumers themselves, indicates a significant gap between the effort (output) and the impact (outcome). A student's perspective was revealed in a straightforward sentence from an 11th-grade student:

“I've seen posts about new books on the school's Instagram, but not very often.” (Informant 3, Interview, March 19, 2025).

This statement, though brief, is the tip

of an iceberg of a deeper problem. First, the phrase “not very often” speaks not only to frequency but also to impact or breakthrough power. In the dense sea of social media content—where the library must compete with influencers, memes, and peer interactions—sporadic promotion will easily be drowned out and fail to create top-of-mind awareness.

Second, and more crucially, the implementation of this strategy remains one-directional. It is an “advertisement” or “announcement” model, a “push” information model that fails to apply the principles of interactive “content marketing” or “engagement.” The library merely announces, “Here are our new books,” rather than engaging in dialogue or sparking curiosity by asking, “How can this book help you complete your final project?” This gap is directly related to the failure to build a “sense of interest,” which, according to Hayati et al. (2023), is the fundamental spark for fostering visitation interest.

A sense of interest in this unique context has a very different definition. It cannot be triggered by general announcements about the latest novel or popular science book. Effective promotion demands content that is directly relevant and resonates with their vocational needs. Imagine a promotion that does not just display the cover of a motorcycle service manual but features a short video on Instagram Reels showing a student (or teacher) demonstrating one step from that manual. Imagine an infographic on an Instagram story summarizing the five latest color trends from a collection book for Visual Communication Design students. Promotion must shift from a “catalog” paradigm (“what we have”) to a

“solution” paradigm (“what you can do with what we have”). Without this pragmatic relevance, social media promotion will only become more noise in the students’ already saturated timelines.

The second strategy, a major focus and source of pride for the library staff, is the emphasis on friendly service. The librarians consciously strive to create positive, supportive, and humane interpersonal interactions. This noble intention and practice were explained directly and sincerely by a librarian:

“If a student comes, we help them find the book and provide recommendations. We always strive for friendly service so they feel comfortable while in the library.” (Informant 1, Interview, March 19, 2025).

This effort is essential and should not be underestimated. It builds the foundation for a positive user experience and aligns with the research by Mustofa et al. (2024), which emphasizes the importance of psychological comfort in the library environment. The presence of approachable librarians can reduce “library anxiety” and make students feel welcome. This finding was confirmed directly by students, but with a critical note that is profound and effectively dissects the hierarchy of needs for vocational school library users. An interview with a 10th-grade student revealed:

“The library staff is friendly, they once helped me find a book I needed, but if the book I’m looking for isn’t there, I just leave immediately.” (Informant 4, Interview, March 19, 2025)

This direct statement is exceptionally rich qualitative data. It gives rise to a new understanding that can be termed the “Friendly Service Paradox.” For vocational

students, friendly service is a necessary but entirely insufficient condition. It functions as a hygiene factor in Herzberg's motivation theory: its absence would cause extreme dissatisfaction, but its presence does not automatically create satisfaction or loyalty.

This student's experience illustrates a clear "library hierarchy of needs" for vocational learners. At the most basic and fundamental level is the availability and relevance of information (a collection that meets the needs of the technical curriculum). Only if this basic need is met will students move to the next level, which is the efficiency of access and comfort of service (including the friendliness of the librarian). A librarian's friendliness cannot compensate for the failure of the library's core function: to provide the resources needed to complete an assignment or solve a practical problem. The student's act of "leaving immediately" is analogous to a high "bounce rate" in web analytics; the user arrives, does not find what they are looking for, and leaves promptly, regardless of how beautiful the user interface (in this case, the librarian's friendliness) is. Friendliness becomes a powerful and appreciated differentiator only when it accompanies a solid collection, where the librarian is not only friendly but also competent in helping students navigate potentially complex technical resources.

The third strategic pillar is the effort to establish collaboration with teachers. The existing practice was revealed directly by the librarian, indicating an initiative to integrate the library into teaching and learning activities:

"We have collaborated with the Indonesian language teacher; she asked

her students to read books from the library for an assignment." (Informant 1, Interview, March 19, 2025).

This collaboration was then confirmed from the students' perspective:

"Our teacher once took us to read books together in the library. Sometimes there are also assignments from books in the library." (Informant 5, Interview, March 19, 2025).

Although this collaboration is positive, it highlights two weaknesses. First, the initiatives tend to be limited to normative-adaptive subjects, not productive-vocational subjects. Second, these activities are not yet systemic and are more sporadic actions dependent on the initiative and goodwill of individual teachers, rather than an integrated institutional strategy. This is not a model of "embedded librarianship" where the librarian is proactively involved in curriculum planning, co-designing assignments with vocational teachers, and mapping the library collection to align with each basic competency. Instead, it is a reactive and unsustainable model. The framework by Quinn and idealism call for a much deeper integration, where the library is no longer a peripheral entity but an inseparable part of the school's pedagogical machinery (Suryani et al., 2024).

Despite facing these fundamental challenges, the implementation of these strategies is still supported by several crucial internal factors. The most valuable asset the library possesses is its proactive and dedicated staff. This is evident from their direct statement regarding what they consider to be the main internal supporting factor:

"The supporting factor is that we, as



library staff, always try to be friendly and ready to help students find books and information.” (Informant 2, Interview, March 19, 2025).

This proactive effort aligns with the view of Baihaqy & Masruri (2024) regarding the importance of librarian competence. The attitude of the librarian plays a significant role in increasing student visitation interest (Fiantika et al., 2024). Furthermore, support from the school, although limited, indicates institutional recognition.

“The school also provides support for the library by providing bookshelves, reading tables, and chairs. Although the facilities are not as complete as a large library, we still try to utilize them as much as possible.” (Informant 1, Interview, March 19, 2025).

These supporting factors provide an important foundation. However, their strength is significantly undermined when confronted with a series of massive inhibiting factors rooted in the gap between the library’s offerings and the specific demands of its students.

The most fundamental inhibiting factor, the epicenter of all these issues, is low student participation due to a collection that does not match their interests. An honest admission from the librarian, expressed in a direct quote, is key to understanding this problem:

“Actually, many students come to the library, but most of them are just looking for textbooks. It’s very rare for them to have an interest in reading the other books because our collection of fiction or teen storybooks is indeed still limited.” (Informant 2, Interview, March 19, 2025)

This statement, while accurate,

indirectly highlights a conceptual misunderstanding of what a “non-curricular collection of interest” means in a vocational school context. The problem is not a lack of *Harry Potter* novels or *One Piece* comics, as might be relevant in research like Karomah’s (2020) for a general school context. For vocational students, an “interesting collection” has a much more specific, instrumental, and pragmatic meaning. It means up-to-date engine repair manuals, comprehensive guides to the latest Adobe Creative Cloud software, reference books on industrial electrical standards (PUIL), or magazines and journals discussing innovations in hospitality and tourism. The absence of this “para-curricular” collection that supports and enriches vocational learning is what creates the deep chasm between the library and the students’ learning ecosystem. A library collection intended for patrons must certainly have a standard quality in terms of both its physical condition and the information it contains, as this will greatly influence the perception of users who utilize the collection in any type of library without exception (Cahyani & Khadijah, 2023).

This collection issue is then exponentially compounded by other inhibiting factors. The librarian openly acknowledged these weaknesses in the following direct statements:

“I feel that the promotion system we are currently using is not yet effective in reaching all students,” (Informant 1, Interview, March 19, 2025).

and also regarding physical and technological facilities:

“our library facilities are still inadequate, such as a hot reading room and a lack of technological facilities.”

(Informant 1, Interview, March 19, 2025).

These two issues are symptoms of the core problem (the collection) but also create their own negative cycles. Promotion becomes ineffective because there is no content strong and relevant enough to promote. It must be emphasized that loyalty is the ultimate goal. Therefore, the library must work hard on its marketing activities (Hanum, 2021). Meanwhile, inadequate facilities—especially the lack of air conditioning, which makes the space uncomfortable, and minimal technological infrastructure like fast Wi-Fi and sufficient power outlets—directly reduce the library's appeal as a physical space. This is no longer just an inconvenience but a critical functional barrier in the 21st century. For vocational students who may need to watch technical tutorial videos on YouTube, collaborate on digital projects, or search for online references, the absence of these facilities makes the library an unfunctional and even counter-productive place.

Overall, the findings of this study crystallize into one unavoidable primary conclusion: to significantly increase visitation interest and, more importantly, to become pedagogically relevant, libraries in vocational school environments must undergo a radical paradigm shift. They must move from the obsolete, generic “general school library” model to a dynamic, specific, and specialized “Vocational Learning Resource Center” model.

This shift demands a planned revolution in three main areas, which can serve as a roadmap for transformation: 1) A Revolution in Collection Development Based on Departmental Needs: The first and most

fundamental step is to completely overhaul the collection acquisition philosophy. This must begin with a systematic information needs analysis for each field of expertise. Librarians must proactively collaborate with heads of departments and productive-subject teachers to identify the most relevant supporting textbooks, technical manuals, industry standard operating procedures (SOPs), trade magazines, and subscriptions to online databases. The budget must be specifically allocated for these non-traditional resources, even if it means reducing the acquisition of general fiction. 2) Transformation of Promotion Strategy into Value-Added Content Marketing: The promotion strategy must evolve from merely “announcing” to “demonstrating value.” Librarians must become content marketers. Social media should be used to share practical tips drawn from the collection (“5 steps to clean a carburetor based on book X”), showcase the best student projects that used library resources, or even create short tutorial videos. Engagement can be increased by holding competitions or small workshops based on the existing technical collection. 3) Redesign of Space Functionality and Enhancement of Technological Infrastructure: The physical library space must be redesigned to support 21st-century learning modes. This is more than just adding air conditioning. It means creating different “zones”: a silent study zone for individual concentration, a collaborative zone with whiteboards and large tables for group work, and perhaps a “digital corner” with a few computer units equipped with major-specific software. Most importantly, investment in technological infrastructure

such as reliable high-speed Wi-Fi and an abundance of power outlets is non-negotiable. This will change the perception of the library from a passive book space to an active and productive workspace.

Only through this holistic and user-centered approach can the SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan library—and thousands of other vocational school libraries across Indonesia—transform. They can shift from being a quiet space on the periphery of school activities to the beating heart of the vocational learning ecosystem; an irreplaceable strategic partner that actively contributes to preparing a competent, informed, and competitive workforce for the future.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the strategies of the SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan library to increase student visitation interest—which include promotion via social media, friendly service, and collaboration with teachers—have not achieved optimal effectiveness in practice. Although based on good intentions and basic institutional support, these strategies are hindered by a fundamental factor: the mismatch between the general-nature collection and the students' highly specific, vocationally-oriented information needs. This directly answers the research objective by demonstrating that the implementation of existing strategies is not robust enough to overcome the low relevance of the collection in the eyes of the students. Theoretically, this finding has important implications for library studies, challenging the application of a “one-size-fits-all” general school library

model and underscoring the need for a new framework: the “Vocational Learning Resource Center,” which prioritizes pragmatic and instrumental information needs. The practical implication demands a paradigm shift for vocational school library management: from being merely a provider of books to a strategic partner in competency-based learning. This must be realized through collection development focused on technical resources, promotion oriented towards task solutions, and a redesign of the space that supports collaboration and technology utilization.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged. As a single case study, its findings may not be directly generalizable to all vocational high schools in Indonesia, which have different departmental contexts, funding levels, and school cultures. Therefore, future research is highly recommended in several directions. First, conducting comparative studies between several vocational school libraries with different fields of expertise to test the validity of these findings in a broader context. Second, a longitudinal study could be designed to measure the long-term impact of implementing the strategies recommended in this research on visitation interest and even student academic achievement. Finally, a more in-depth study of the specific information-seeking behavior of vocational school students could provide richer insights for librarians in designing services and collections that are truly relevant and effective.

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