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Innovative Practice and Reflections on Reading Promotion in Local Normal University Libraries in the New Development Stage

Jing Bao

Department of Library, Nanyang Normal University, Nanyang 473061, Henan, China
bj0209@126.com

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Abstract: In the new-development stage, nationwide reading initiatives and the building of an education-powered country place higher educational requirements on university libraries. Local-normal-university libraries face dual constraints of limited resources and multiple missions to foster students' reading literacy, support regional basic-education reading services and conserve local culture. Based on value-oriented, professional and local logics, this paper identifies key practical dilemmas and proposes six-dimensional innovative paths. It further dialectically reflects on four groups of relationships and argues that core competitiveness depends on embedding reading into students'growth for sustainable educational mechanisms instead of pursuing large-scale activities.

1. Introduction

In January 2025, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council released the Outline of the Plan for Building a Powerful Country in Education (2024-2035), aiming to build China into an education-powerful country by 2035 and advance all-round education to improve students' comprehensive quality[1]. Promulgated in December 2025, the Regulations on Promoting Nationwide Reading took effect on February 1, 2026, signalling that nationwide reading has shifted from advocacy-driven campaigns to institutionalized, law-based implementation[2]. Together, the two documents shape the institutional background for university-library reading promotion, which has evolved from a routine reader service into an intersection of national cultural and talent-cultivation strategies.

Conditions differ sharply across university types. As major cradles of teachers for regional basic education, local normal universities run libraries constrained by insufficient funding, staff and digital facilities, while shouldering multi-fold tasks such as normal-student training support, local-document preservation and regional reading outreach. Hence, they cannot copy the resource-intensive promotion modes of elite universities and need context-adapted solutions.

Prior scholarship lays theoretical groundwork. Fan Bensi regards reading promotion as core library service for public literacy improvement[3]; Wang Bo proposes the well-known "activity

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theory" for library reading promotion[4]; Yu Liangzhi advocates evidence-based practice for such work[5]. Nevertheless, existing research concentrates mainly on public libraries and high-level university libraries, with limited focus on local normal universities, whose relevant practical studies are mostly simple case narratives without usable self-diagnosis frameworks.

Drawing on literature review and on-site library observations, this paper clarifies the functional positioning of reading promotion for local-normal-university libraries, identifies practical bottlenecks, proposes six-dimensional innovative paths and conducts dialectical discussions. Instead of building a universal model, it provides an analytical framework for peer institutions to design projects and conduct self-evaluation.

2. Functional Positioning: Three Logics and the Analytical Framework

2.1 Value-Oriented Logic: Educational Orientation Centered on Reading Literacy

The core value of libraries lies in guaranteeing knowledge access and promoting people's all-round development. For universities, the effectiveness of reading promotion should not be measured by borrowing volumes or activity sessions, but by the improvement of students' reading literacy, namely whether reading interest is stimulated, reading strategies are mastered, and in-depth reading and critical thinking are cultivated. This orientation is inherently consistent with requirements for enhancing students' comprehensive quality stipulated in the Outline of the Plan for Building a Powerful Country in Education[6]. Local normal universities admit students with a wide range of academic scores and distinct gaps in autonomous learning competence. Therefore, reading promotion plays a more prominent role in making up for students' weaknesses compared with high-level universities.

2.2 Professional Logic: Unique Entry Point Brought by Normal-University Attributes

Reading demands in normal universities bear distinct career-oriented features, reflected in three categories of reading materials. First, works on educational classics and educational thoughts for fostering teachers' ethics and educational devotion. Second, children's literature, picture books and graded-reading theories, which directly determine future teachers' capacity for guiding children's reading. Third, subject textbooks, curriculum and teaching monographs supporting the construction of teaching knowledge[7]. The four objectives for normal-specialty accreditation — practising teachers' ethics, mastering teaching skills, acquiring educational competence and pursuing self-development — are all built upon reading. This represents a unique entry point unavailable for libraries of comprehensive universities.

2.3 Local Logic: Hub Role for Regional Reading Services

Local normal universities maintain in-depth connections with regional basic-education systems, boasting stable networks of internship bases, teacher training and teaching-research cooperation. Relying on such networks, libraries can extend reading promotion from campus to primary and secondary schools as well as rural schools, forming a "university-primary-and-secondary-school" reading community[8]. Meanwhile, they undertake functions of local-document collection and local-culture inheritance, supplying localized content for promotion activities. Requirements for reading guarantee for key groups and public reading services in the Regulations on Promoting Nationwide Reading provide institutional support for such outreach. Accordingly, reading promotion in local-normal-university libraries features both educational and service attributes, generating social benefits beyond campus boundaries.

2.4 Composite Objectives and the Six-Dimensional Analytical Framework

Superposition of the three logics creates composite objectives for reading promotion in local-normal-university libraries: literacy-oriented objectives for all students, professional objectives for prospective teachers, and service-oriented objectives for local regions. Accordingly, this paper constructs a six-dimensional analytical framework covering philosophy, content, form, technology, participants and mechanism, which respectively answer six questions: why promote, what to promote, how to promote, with what tools to promote, who participates in promotion, and how to achieve sustainability.

3. Practical Dilemmas: Six Structural Constraints

3.1 Constraints on resources and professional workforce

Library procurement funds give priority to databases and teaching materials for subject assessment and specialty accreditation, resulting in inadequate promotion-oriented collections such as humanities classics and children's literature. Collected local documents are poorly sorted and digitized, and thus cannot serve reading-promotion activities. Meanwhile, few librarians possess interdisciplinary knowledge of pedagogy or children's literature. Reading promotion is performed by part-time staff with scarce dedicated posts, targeted training and incentives. Individual experience cannot be transformed into institutional capacity, which gives rise to poorly-planned activities with no stable participant base.

3.2 Disconnection from formal talent-training systems

Reading promotion is regarded as an extracurricular add-on instead of formal teaching, excluded from syllabi and credit systems. Freshman library orientation only imparts operational rules and retrieval skills rather than reading enlightenment. .Student participation is based on mobilisation and material incentives, and reading behaviour ceases after the activities end. Broken links among activities, courses, credits and evaluations prevent the development of a long-term educational system for reading promotion.

3.3 Deficiencies in evaluation and smart-technology application

Current indicators are only the above-mentioned superficial ones; they do not show any improvement in reading literacy. Due to the absence of pre-tests, post-tests and reading archives, outcome evaluation is difficult. Promotion-reading work is also given little attention in the performance and title assessments. Although there are digital platforms and AI tools, data silos prevent user profiling and targeted recommendations; technology is only employed as a simple tool rather than to implement precise reading-promotion practices.

3.4 Closed collaborative mechanisms inside and outside libraries

Generally, the reading promotion is allocated to a single department and thus results in internal resource duplication. Cooperation outside the university with faculties, university administrative departments, public libraries and primary-secondary schools is based on temporary projects and lacks stable institutional arrangements or funding support. Such insufficient collaboration wastes limited resources and keeps libraries away from real-world demands from front-line teaching.

4. Innovative Practice: Path Construction from Six Dimensions

4.1 Philosophical Innovation: Shifting from Activity Supply to Educational Embedding

The core of philosophical innovation lies in institutionalization, supported by three mutually-complementary measures. First, offer general-education reading courses and freshman reading-enlightenment courses, incorporating reading methods, bibliography selection and intensive reading of classics into teaching content. Second, embed reading assignments into specialized courses: set units for intensive reading of educational classics in pedagogy courses, implement whole-book reading in literature courses, and organize collective reading of red classics in ideological-and-political courses. Third, establish reading credits and reading archives, ensuring reading behaviours are positioned, recorded and fed back in talent-training programmes. Real philosophical transformation shall be judged not by annual activity quantities, but by how many reading behaviours occur within curriculum and credit frameworks. Only in this way can reading promotion get rid of dependence on funds and interpersonal mobilization and become a sustainable educational link.

4.2 Content Innovation: Constructing a Hierarchical Resource System with Normal-University and Local Features

Content innovation requires organizing resources into teachable, readable and discussable structures. Four layers of resources are recommended: the general-knowledge layer covering Chinese-foreign classics, humanities-social-science works and popular-science readings to broaden normal-university students' intellectual horizons; the educational-specialty layer including educational classics, educational history, curriculum-teaching theories and teacher-professional-development literature for vocational-competence building; the children-reading layer consisting of children's literature, picture books and graded-reading theories to cultivate prospective teachers' reading-guidance capacity; the local-culture layer containing Nanyang local documents, stone reliefs of Han-dynasty images, Chu-Han-culture materials and university-history archives to form localized strengths. All of the layers will have "four-part sets": core bibliographies, reading guides, task sheets and achievement exhibitions. The Core bibliographies follow the "few and high-quality" principle and have been replaced by annotated guides instead of simple lists. Planning of resource procurement and promotion design should be done in parallel to prevent the purchase of books without follow-up promotion or the launch of promotion without enough books.

4.3 Form Innovation: Brand-Building and Scenario-Construction

The core idea of form innovation is to reduce participation barriers and increase the density of interaction rather than organising large-scale events. Libraries should follow the "one library, one featured brand" policy with fixed cycles, visual identities and narrative threads for brand-building purposes to accumulate recognisable assets. Physical spaces are used as lessons for scenario construction; build shared-reading areas, picture-book corners, reading booths, thematic book exhibitions and "teacher bookshelves" to promote reading behaviour in particular situations. Adopt activities of human libraries for participatory modes; conduct normal university student storytelling contests, picture book drama performances, matrix-style reading clubs, teacher-student collective reading and alumni-led reading, and turn students into narrators rather than just audiences. Short-video book recommendation, live-stream reading guidance and reading maps for the purpose of turning offline activities into reusable content resources in communication.

4.4 Technological Innovation: From Tool Utilization to Data-Driven Operation

Technological innovation focuses on data interconnection and utilization of reader profiles. Firstly, build a data middle-platform integrating data of borrowing, access control, activity registration, questionnaires and academic performance to generate dynamically-updated reader portraits. Secondly, implement hierarchical push based on portraits: unified reading lists prove ineffective given distinct reading demands in freshmen adaptation periods, postgraduate-entrance-examination preparation periods, educational-internship periods and teacher-research periods. Thirdly, deploy artificial intelligence to assist reading guidance and accompanied reading, including Q&A based on course bibliographies, reading-progress reminders, guided-question generation and preliminary screening of reading reports. Nevertheless, librarians' understanding of bibliographies and insight into readers cannot be replaced by algorithms.

4.5 Participant-Oriented Innovation: Building a Collaborative-Education Community

Participant-oriented innovation transforms reading promotion from libraries' "one-man show" to multi-party "ensemble performance". For library-school collaboration, co-build school-level reading corners, formulate specialized bibliographies and host reading clubs with secondary schools, embedding promotion into their educational chains. For library-K-12-school cooperation, launch reading-assistance projects with primary-secondary schools relying on internship bases, enabling normal-university students to practise reading guidance during teaching internships and realize mutual benefits for education and social service. For library-social-institution partnership, jointly hold activities and share resources with municipal public libraries, Xinhua Bookstores and local cultural organizations. To promote teacher-student co-creation, develop student reading-promotion associations, reading ambassadors and volunteer teams, and provide credit recognition and practice certificates. The worth of the community is not only due to the combination of resources but also for the exchange of information on demands, professional judgment and practical cases.

4.6 Mechanism Innovation: Literacy-Added Value Evaluation and Guarantee system

Mechanism innovation addresses sustainability. Set up a "pre-test - process - post-test" literacy added-value evaluation system for the purpose of assessment. Indicators cover reading quantity, reading breadth, reading duration, application of reading strategies and quality of reading reports, supplemented by reading archives and qualitative interviews to verify practical effects rather than merely making claims. Adopt a project-based management system and standardised procedures for project approval, budgeting, implementation and acceptance to avoid fragmented activities in terms of management. For the practitioners, set up dedicated reading-promotion posts and provide special training in bibliography selection, activity design and effect evaluation to promote the dual-post integration of subject librarians and reading-promotion librarians. For the purpose of guarantees, include promotion funds in the annual budget and seek support from university education projects and local cultural construction funds to reduce reliance on temporary funding.

5. In-Depth Reflections: Dialectical Understanding of Four Pairs of Relationships

5.1 Popularity versus Depth

Although there are many people and activity, it is not necessarily actual reading. The two problems of alienation to be avoided are "check-in-oriented reading", where people join for points or prizes and stop reading after the activities; and "task-driven reading", which divides reading into

quantifiable units and participants only complete formal tasks without interacting with the texts. The way out is to build in-depth mechanisms closed by output; turn transient popularity into long-lasting reading behaviour through collective discussions, reading reports, thematic writing and achievement exhibitions. Popularity is used to attract people; depth retains the readers, and neither can be substituted for the other.

5.2 Technology versus Humanity

Technology enhances the efficiency of matching; however, reading is inherently slow, private and needs a blank mind. Algorithmic recommendations may create information cocoons and thus limit the exposure of readers to new books outside of their current interests. Therefore, the activities of digital promotion should intentionally save "necessary surprises", such as random-access bookshelves, handwritten librarian recommendation cards, cross-category thematic book exhibitions and leisure-reading spaces without utilitarian purposes. Technology should be used as aids rather than agents; that is, provide suitable readers for specific books, but the readers themselves conduct the whole process of opening books, reading and thinking.

5.3 Specialized-Feature Construction versus General Knowledge

Highlighting the features of normal universities may restrict one's view of reading. Normal university students are young adults who require all-encompassing spiritual development first and then future teachers. Educational classics and children's literature are used to start, not to set limits. Lack of general knowledge foundation will reduce comprehension of professional reading and impede the development of visionary and critical-thinking teachers. Therefore, specialised resources and general-knowledge resources should be distributed in a reasonable proportion. Bibliographies should save space for the works of literature, history, philosophy, arts and popular science to prevent "specialised impoverishment".

5.4 Internal Library Capacity-Building versus External Openness

Collaboration increases the resources but does not substitute for building one's own strength. Promotion projects that are all based on external cooperation and temporary funds frequently end due to staff changes or lack of funds. The three main strengths of the organisation for open cooperation are bibliography compilation, activity design and effect evaluation. Otherwise, libraries can only offer venues in collaboration without the power of professional discourse. Therefore, the development of self-capacity and opening up for the outside should be carried out together; internal strengths help to promote external cooperation, and external demands, in turn, promote internal development.

5.5 Risks to Be Guarded against

Several risks should be avoided in the development of innovative practices. According to the principle of minimal necessity, data collection will be conducted with data de-sensitisation and authorisation to prevent privacy breaches. Over-quantification of evaluation indicators may lead to new formalisms. Commercial sponsorship and cooperation must adhere to the public-welfare bottom line and avoid the use of reading promotion for marketing purposes. Given the considerable academic and internship load of normal university students, the reading assignments should be moderate to prevent the creation of excessive study burdens in the name of education.

6. Conclusion

The competitiveness of reading promotion in local-normal-university libraries lies not in activity scale or communication influence, but in embedding reading into key growth links for normal-university students. The new-development-stage brings genuine institutional opportunities: the Outline of the Plan for Building a Powerful Country in Education establishes education-oriented guidance, the Regulations on Promoting Nationwide Reading provides legal guarantees, and digital technologies lower organizational costs for promotion. Nevertheless, opportunities can be translated into educational effects only with three capabilities: designing reading content into talent-training programmes, organizing resources into teachable courses, and evaluating and verifying practical outcomes.

The three logics in this paper explain why to promote reading, the six-dimensional framework answers how to promote, and reflections on four pairs of relationships suggest to what extent promotion should be carried out and what boundaries should be observed. Collectively, they point to a plain conclusion: the ultimate goal of reading promotion is not a single successful activity, but continuous reading behaviours after participants leave activities. For local normal universities, limited resources should be invested in links reshaping reading-behaviour structures, namely courses, credits, bibliographies and collective-reading relationships. Reading shall become the internal rhythm for normal-university students' professional growth, and libraries shall return to the central position of university educational systems.

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