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Empirical Study on Rural Residents' Document and Information Needs from the Perspective of Precise Identification of Cultural Needs: Based on a Survey of Six Counties in Anhui Province (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study investigates the literature and information needs of rural residents in six counties of Anhui Province, exploring their reading behaviors and types of literature demands, aiming to provide empirical references for precision services of literature and information resources in county-level libraries. [Method/Process] Targeting six counties in Anhui Province, this research adopts a questionnaire survey method to investigate and analyze the current status of literature and information needs among rural residents across four dimensions: reading frequency, information acquisition channels and content, local library (room) requirements, and types of literature and information needs. [Results/Conclusion] The study proposes precision service measures from four perspectives: optimizing physical collections, cultivating precision awareness, strengthening publicity efforts, and enhancing digital services, thereby optimizing county-level library services.

Full Text

Preamble

An Empirical Study on Rural Residents' Literature and Information Demands from the Perspective of Precise Identification of Cultural Needs—Based on a Survey of Six Counties in Anhui Province

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study investigates the literature and information demands of rural residents in six counties of Anhui Province, exploring their reading behaviors and types of literature demands to provide empirical references for precise services of literature and information resources in county libraries. **[Method/Process]** Using a questionnaire survey method across six counties in Anhui Province, this research examines and analyzes the current status of rural residents' literature and information demands from four dimensions: reading frequency, information access channels and content, local library demands, and types of literature and information demands. **[Result/Conclusion]** The paper proposes precise service measures from four aspects: optimizing physical collections, cultivating precise awareness, strengthening publicity efforts, and improving digital services to enhance county library services.

Keywords: precise identification; literature and information demands; Anhui Province; rural residents

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Introduction

China's cultural poverty alleviation is shifting toward a more precise direction. In participating in cultural precision poverty alleviation, public libraries should take precision as the prerequisite and equalization of public cultural services as the goal to narrow the gap between urban and rural cultural development. The *Public Cultural Services Guarantee Law of the People's Republic of China*, implemented on March 1, 2017, stipulates that "public cultural products such as books, newspapers, and films provided for rural areas should conform to rural characteristics and needs, and improve relevance and timeliness." Correspondingly, public libraries and grassroots libraries should provide rural residents with needed books and information to improve the utilization rate of literature and information resources in rural areas. Comrade Xi Jinping emphasized in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: "Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the main contradiction in Chinese society has been transformed into the contradiction between the people's ever-growing needs for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development." At this stage, the cultural needs in impoverished areas are still affected by rural economic development and cannot be effectively satisfied. To narrow the urban-rural development gap and balance development contradictions, the role of county-level public libraries in the equalization of cultural services has become increasingly prominent. The *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China*, implemented on January 1, 2018, clearly defines that county libraries should "improve digital and networked service systems and distribution systems, achieve interlibrary loan and return, and promote the extension of public library services to urban and rural grassroots levels." This

law points out the direction for public cultural service undertakings. Meanwhile, since there is still considerable room for improvement in the popularity, precision, and means innovation of China's current cultural precision poverty alleviation activities, the implementation of this law will further promote the practice of cultural precision poverty alleviation in impoverished areas.

Cultural precision poverty alleviation is a poverty alleviation approach derived from cultural poverty alleviation that better meets actual needs. Reviewing existing research on cultural precision poverty alleviation, scholars have already studied service gaps, connotations, measures, domestic and foreign cases, and public library participation in cultural precision poverty alleviation. Additionally, in research on rural residents' literature or information demands, Yu Liangzhi et al. reviewed relevant studies on rural information demands and services at home and abroad, comparing similarities and differences since the 1980s. Wang Hong et al. found that the complexity of farmers' reading demands is the root cause of their low reading rates after investigating reading conditions in ethnic villages in the Nenjiang River Basin. Wu Dezhi et al. found that insufficient subjective demand is the main crux of low rural reading rates through questionnaire surveys. Bai Liqiong investigated the proportion of demand types and acquisition channels for scientific and technological information in rural areas of high-tech industrial demonstration zones. Research on rural residents' information demands has covered individual provinces such as Hebei, Jiangxi, Shaanxi, and Shanxi. Studies on this specific direction of literature and information demands have mainly focused on university users, scientific researchers, and health service personnel. The identification of literature and information demands is the prerequisite for carrying out cultural precision poverty alleviation. However, the overall number of relevant studies is relatively small, which is not conducive to guiding public libraries in-depth to carry out cultural precision poverty alleviation work. Moreover, when reviewing research on rural residents' literature and information demands, this study found that such research mainly focuses on surveys of reading reasons or types of information demands, while specific investigations into rural residents' literature and information demands are relatively scarce. In terms of provincial coverage, empirical research on rural residents' literature and information demands in Anhui Province is missing. Libraries must deeply understand the information and reading demands of different types of readers to provide precise services and cultural poverty alleviation. Based on this, this study conducts an empirical investigation of the literature and information demands of rural residents in Anhui Province with different cultural levels and age groups from the perspective of precise identification of cultural demands, aiming to provide references for precise services in county public libraries.

Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Definition of Precise Identification of Cultural Demands

In research on cultural poverty alleviation, precise identification of culture is the prerequisite for subsequent work. Wang Yao defined “precise identification of cultural poverty alleviation” as “according to certain methods, identifying core elements to ensure that poverty alleviation resources can cover the truly impoverished population, enabling them to obtain sufficient resources, fully develop the effectiveness of cultural poverty alleviation resources, and enhance their self-development capacity.” This shows that precise identification of culture mainly includes two aspects: precisely identifying target groups and precisely identifying core elements. Precise identification of cultural demands is one of the core elements of precise cultural identification, referring to demands for culture-related resources, products, and services. The success of cultural precision poverty alleviation depends on whether it meets the cultural demands of the impoverished population. Based on a review of relevant research, this paper defines precise identification of cultural demands as: according to certain methods, investigating the cultural behaviors that have occurred and the unmet demands for cultural products and services among target groups or individuals, analyzing behaviors and demands to precisely identify demand content, and formulating corresponding cultural resource supply strategies to promote rational allocation and effective distribution of cultural resources.

2.2 Research Framework for Rural Residents’ Literature and Information Demands from the Perspective of Precise Identification of Cultural Demands

The basic approach to studying rural residents’ literature and information demands from the perspective of precise identification of cultural demands is: dividing target groups by occupation, age, and education level; analyzing their daily reading behaviors and information acquisition behaviors from a behavioral perspective; investigating rural residents’ demands for basic equipment, services, and literature and information content from a demand perspective; and precisely identifying the behaviors and content of literature and information demands among different types of rural residents. Combined with actual reading conditions, this study investigates rural residents’ occurred reading behaviors from the perspectives of reading material types and reading frequency to identify reasons inhibiting reading behaviors. Based on information acquisition methods and results, information acquisition behaviors are decomposed into information access channels and information acquisition content for research. According to the distribution and service methods of rural literature and information resources, demands are divided into library demands, library service type demands, and literature and information content demands.

Research Design and Implementation

To obtain literature and information demands of rural residents in Anhui Province and considering data accessibility and sample typicality, this survey selected six counties in Anhui Province: Wuhu County, Dangshan County, Wangjiang County, Lingbi County, Funan County, and Taihe County. Questionnaires were distributed to local rural residents. The sample characteristics are as follows: (1) wide geographical distribution, covering eastern, southern, western, and northern rural areas of Anhui Province, demonstrating broad representativeness; (2) large age span, covering rural residents from under 17 to over 61 years old; (3) diverse educational levels, ranging from illiterate to college degree and above; and (4) diverse occupational types, including business owners, migrant workers, self-employed individuals, employees, rural intellectual workers, rural managers, and agricultural laborers. The basic sample information is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

This study adopted a questionnaire survey method consisting of three parts: personal information collection, information acquisition behavior investigation, and assessment of different literature demand levels. The survey was implemented in July 2017. Rural residents in six counties of Anhui Province were selected as samples using stratified random sampling by age with a relatively balanced gender ratio. Due to low response rates for online questionnaires in the pilot survey, field paper-based questionnaire surveys were subsequently conducted. A total of 325 paper questionnaires were distributed, with 289 valid questionnaires recovered, yielding an effective response rate of 88.9%.

Survey Data Analysis

4.1 Reading Frequency Investigation and Cause Analysis

The survey on reading material types showed that 50.9% of rural residents mainly read digital materials, while 49.1% mainly read paper materials, with digital materials slightly exceeding paper materials, reflecting that rural residents increasingly use digital products for reading. The investigation of paper book reading frequency revealed that only 4.5% of respondents read books daily, 53.6% read occasionally, 15.6% read frequently, and 26.3% never read books. The reading frequency survey is shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

As seen in Figure 2, illiterate and barely literate groups almost never read books, while reading frequency among those with primary school education and above is mainly occasional. Among respondents, the proportion of frequent readers with college degrees or above is higher than other education groups. This indicates that rural residents' education level directly affects reading frequency. However, among rural residents with high school and technical secondary school education, occasional reading accounts for the largest proportion, and daily reading is almost nonexistent. To further understand these phenomena, the following analysis examines the relationship between reasons affecting reading and education levels.

Based on Gao Xiangrong et al.'s classification standards for reasons affecting reading and rural residents' daily reading conditions, reasons for not reading are divided into six categories (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]). Data analysis of reasons affecting reading revealed that “no time,” “no reading conditions,” and “no interest” are the three main reasons why surveyed rural residents do not read. Among illiterate groups, the main reason for not reading is “cannot understand.” For primary school-educated groups, “no time” is the main reason. For junior high school-educated rural residents, the main reason is “economic factors.” For high school and technical secondary school-educated rural residents, the main reason is “no time.” For college-educated groups and above, the reason is “no interest.” The survey data shows that respondents' education level directly affects reading frequency, and reasons for not reading vary among groups. To improve rural residents' reading rates in the future, joint efforts from the state and society are needed. On one hand, rural residents' education levels need improvement; on the other hand, different forms of reading promotion activities should be provided for rural residents with different education levels.

4.2 Information Access Channels and Content Analysis

According to Gao Xiangrong et al.'s classification standards for information access channels, these channels are divided into seven categories (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]). Regarding primary information access channels, internet, conversation, and broadcast television rank top three. Currently, an increasing number of people obtain information through the internet, reflecting the changing times in information access methods. The survey shows that 58.8% obtain information through the internet, 53.2% through conversation, and 52.8% through broadcast television. Only 21.1% obtain information through reading books, which is not a mainstream channel. The proportion obtaining information through newspaper reading is even smaller, accounting for only 11.6%. Different age groups also have different primary information access channels: those aged 17 and below mainly obtain information through broadcast television, internet, and reading; those aged 18-40 mainly use the internet; and those aged 41 and above mainly use broadcast television and conversation. Therefore, when providing information to rural residents, attention should be paid to different age groups' primary channels, emphasizing the combination of network terminals and broadcast television while also focusing on education for minors to provide them with educational books.

Referring to Yu Liangzhi et al.'s classification standards for “rural information demand” types, this study summarizes information acquisition types into 11 categories. Survey results on primary reading content show that entertainment information, education information, weather information, and life and health information are the main types obtained by rural residents, accounting for 49.4%, 37.3%, 37.3%, and 36.9% respectively. Agricultural information ranks fifth, accounting for only 28.2%. When investigating information types obtained by

rural residents of different occupations, this study divides rural residents' occupations into eight categories based on Lin Jian and Ma Yanli's classification standards. The survey reveals that agricultural laborers and rural managers mainly obtain weather information, agricultural information, and life and health information; rural intellectual workers mainly obtain entertainment and life and health information; employees and self-employed individuals mainly obtain entertainment and education information; migrant workers mainly obtain education and employment information. Due to limited survey data on business owners, their information acquisition behavior cannot be accurately reflected and is thus omitted. Information acquisition types are shown in Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper].

4.3 Local Library Demands Analysis

4.3.1 Library Demand and Behavior Investigation In the survey on whether it is necessary to establish libraries (rooms), over 70% of rural residents chose "necessary," indicating support for establishing libraries (rooms) in rural areas. Similarly, when asked whether they would be willing to go to local libraries (rooms), 82.0% of respondents chose "willing," showing strong demand for local libraries (rooms). However, in the behavioral survey on whether they know about or have visited libraries (rooms), 48.5% of respondents chose "don't know and have never been," 33.9% chose "know and have been," and 17.6% chose "know but have never been." Comparing rural residents' willingness and behavior reveals that at the consciousness level, rural residents are willing to go to libraries (rooms), but in actual practice, they lack certain action power. When investigating reasons for "not going to libraries (rooms)," 46.3% of respondents chose "don't know the library address," 43.3% chose "library is too far away," and 30.3% chose "no interest." The main reasons are twofold: first, inadequate publicity and management of local libraries result in nearly half of rural residents not knowing library addresses; second, even when knowing the address, rural residents' actual demands for libraries (rooms) are not strong enough.

4.3.2 Analysis of Library Usage Purposes When investigating "purposes for going to libraries (rooms)," 98 respondents who "knew and had been" to local libraries (rooms) were selected, accounting for 33.9% of the total sample. The investigation of these 98 people's purposes for using libraries found that learning is the primary purpose, accounting for 55.1%; reading books and journals is the second purpose, accounting for 42.9%; and borrowing and returning books ranks third, accounting for 33.7%. Among other purposes, "leisure and entertainment" accounts for 21.4%, "using digital resources" accounts for 10.2%, and "participating in reader activities" accounts for 9.2%. Analysis by education level shows that rural residents with primary school and junior high school education use libraries (rooms) primarily for learning, while those with high school education and above use them primarily for reading books and journals.

4.3.3 Analysis of Library Service Type Demands When surveying which types of services rural residents hope local libraries (rooms) will add, ranked by selection frequency, the desired service types are: free internet access, reader activities, book lending services, reference consultation, and CD lending. Among them, 51.6% of rural residents hope to add free internet service, indicating strong demand for network services and that demands for libraries are no longer limited to paper literature acquisition. Secondly, 38.7% hope to add reader activities, which have strong appeal to rural residents and can stimulate their reading demands while popularizing basic knowledge to improve rural residents' cultural literacy. Following in ranking are book lending services (36.3%), reference consultation services (32.7%), and CD lending services (15.7%). Therefore, grass-roots libraries should both promote themselves to expand their influence and do well in basic lending work, improve digital services, and carry out different forms of reading promotion activities. Figure 6 [Figure 6: see original paper] shows the situation of desired service types.

4.4 Literature and Information Demand Type Analysis

4.4.1 High-Demand Literature Types By comparing demand levels, this paper categorizes the top five types with high “need” proportions as high-demand literature types, ranked as: medical and health, youth education, agricultural knowledge, entertainment and life, and children's books.

Medical and health literature ranks first, with “need” as high as 66.4%. For rural residents, medical and health information can help them eliminate superstitions and choose correct methods and approaches for treatment and health preservation. Education literature such as youth education ranks second, and children's books rank fifth. Rural residents attach importance to cultural education, thus having high demand for youth and children's education literature. Agricultural knowledge literature ranks third, with “need” accounting for 51.5%. Rural areas rely on agricultural planting and breeding, and farmers need agricultural knowledge literature to prevent and reduce threats from pests and diseases to crops. Entertainment and life literature ranks fourth and is also one of the most needed literature types. To meet rural residents' demands for entertainment literature across different age groups, county libraries should provide suitable, educational entertainment and life literature to correctly guide rural residents' values and behaviors. Figure 7 [Figure 7: see original paper] shows the proportion of each high-demand literature type.

4.4.2 Medium-Demand Literature Types The top two types with high “relatively needed” proportions are law and current affairs propaganda, classified as medium-demand literature types. The “relatively needed” proportion for law literature is 41.9%. As Chinese laws become more complete, rural residents' awareness of law-abiding constantly strengthens, requiring more legal knowledge to protect their rights and interests. However, due to the strong professionalism of law literature and small daily demand for legal knowledge among rural

residents, this demand level remains medium. The “relatively needed” proportion for current affairs propaganda literature is 34.9%. Current affairs literature often contains rural policies, three rural issues, and other content of high concern to rural residents. However, due to strong professionalism and written, standardized expression that is not easily absorbed and understood by rural residents, such literature should be concise and easy to understand in publicity and promotion.

4.4.3 Low-Demand Literature Types The top two types with high “not needed” proportions are business investment and literature and history, each accounting for 31.5%, thus classified as low-demand literature types. Influenced by experience, environment, and education, most rural residents have little actual demand for business investment, so only a minority need business investment literature. Most rural areas have suboptimal economic development, with income levels and education degrees having certain gaps compared with cities. Rural residents lack certain motivation in cultural and spiritual demands, resulting in low demand for literature and history literature. However, primary and secondary school students are in the knowledge absorption and storage period, and literature and history literature has strong educational functions and significance, making it suitable for reading promotion at this age stage. Libraries also need to pay more attention to guiding and activating literature and history reading for school-age children and adolescents.

Recommendations for County Libraries to Precisely Identify Rural Literature and Information Demands

Survey analysis shows that literature and information demands in rural areas are diverse and follow certain patterns. To achieve equalization of public cultural services and enable the public to benefit from national development achievements, county libraries, as public libraries close to rural areas, can gain first-hand precise information through in-depth practice and shoulder the responsibility of grassroots public cultural education. The following are four recommendations for county public libraries to do well in precise identification of literature and information demands.

5.1 Target Actual Literature Demands and Optimize Physical Collection Structures of Rural Libraries (Rooms)

The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television organizes annual solicitations for key publications for rural bookrooms (including books, audio-visual products, electronic publications, and newspapers) from provinces, relevant departments, and publishing units as standards for selection and procurement of rural bookrooms. While using key publications for rural bookrooms as main reference bibliographies, county libraries can send grassroots librarians or recruit trained volunteers to go deep into rural areas to

investigate literature demand types and levels among rural residents of different ages and occupations, and compile bibliographies that meet rural residents' demands. County libraries can purchase paper books, journals, etc., based on demand bibliographies to provide more appropriate literature resources for township libraries (rooms) and mobile libraries. Meanwhile, factors such as rural residents' demand levels and actual reader numbers obtained from surveys can serve as standards for literature copy allocation. Literature resources allocated according to demand connect supply with demand, optimize rural library (room) collection resources, and further promote effective resource utilization.

5.2 Emphasize Precise Identification and Cultivate Grassroots Librarians' Sense of Responsibility for Precise Identification

Currently, some public libraries have clearly realized that their reader service levels and quality remain low and should take readers' needs as the foothold and starting point. This requires public libraries to generally establish precise service awareness, center on user demands, and transform from passive information services to proactive knowledge services. Provincial libraries should take the lead in actively carrying out education and training on precise services for public library librarians throughout the province, studying and practicing the *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China*. They should not only strengthen assessment of librarians' professional knowledge and skills but also enhance library ethics construction at the consciousness level. County libraries should incorporate identification of rural residents' demands into daily work, following three basic steps of literature precise identification in grassroots work: first, judging whether users have literature and information demands; second, judging whether the library can meet their reasonable literature and information demand types; third, for reasonable demands that can be met, providing them timely, and for those that cannot be met, reporting them to higher authorities promptly.

5.3 Connect Upper and Lower Level Libraries and Strengthen County Library Publicity

The *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China* clearly stipulates that a main-branch library system should be established according to local conditions, with county public libraries as main libraries and township (street) comprehensive cultural stations, village (community) bookrooms, etc., as branch libraries or grassroots service points. Anhui Provincial Library also requires establishing a provincial public library service system of "strong helping weak, upper leading lower, and upper-lower linkage." County libraries should undertake more responsibilities and obligations, further play a linking role, actively coordinate business relationships between upper and lower level libraries, strengthen supervision and business guidance for branch libraries such as township (street) comprehensive cultural stations and village (community) bookrooms, conduct regular spot checks on branch library work, and establish certain reward sys-

tems to recognize excellent branch libraries. The survey found that nearly 50% of rural residents don't know library (room) addresses. Therefore, while doing well in linking work, county libraries should expand publicity and influence of county libraries and branch libraries. Through promotional activities and reading clubs, they should promote county libraries and branch libraries, enabling public culture to benefit those with literature demands but no access channels, and achieve equalization of public cultural services.

5.4 Enrich Information Provision Channels and Improve In-Library Digital Services

According to the survey, primary information acquisition methods differ among different age groups. Minors and young adults who prefer internet and reading are more willing to use digital products to obtain information, while middle-aged and elderly people who prefer broadcast television and conversation obtain information more through informal communication. Information provision channels should be emphasized and differentiated for different groups. For minors and young adults, libraries can provide information through in-library digital equipment. For middle-aged and elderly people, various information exchange meetings, manual consultation services, or broadcast communication can be used. Survey data shows that over 50% of rural residents hope libraries can provide digital services such as internet access, and 58.8% already obtain information through the internet. Therefore, county libraries or rural libraries (rooms) should connect to the internet and accelerate the improvement of their digital collections under the premise of complying with relevant intellectual property laws, building audio, video, and image libraries on cultural education, political history, and social interaction, and maximizing library resource utilization through building library websites and opening self-media platforms. As the main carrier of digital services, digital equipment in libraries (rooms) should undertake functions that paper books cannot achieve, such as providing readers with network data retrieval, real-time news browsing, and e-book reading. As public equipment, the use and management of electronic terminals in libraries (rooms) should pay attention to two points: first, network supervision must be well done to strictly comply with the *Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China* to prevent residents from using public networks to obtain improper resources and information; second, computer talents should be recruited to regularly inspect and maintain electronic terminals.

Research Findings

The study found: (1) Rural residents with different education levels generally have low reading frequency. The reasons are: illiterate and barely literate groups "cannot understand," primary school-educated groups have "no time," junior high school-educated groups have "economic reasons," high school and technical secondary school-educated groups have "no time," and college-educated groups and above have "no interest." Related studies found that poverty in

reading demands is the fundamental reason for low rural reading rates, but few studies have examined reasons for low reading demands among different groups. This study supplements the reasons for low reading demands among different groups, preparing for further investigation. (2) Broadcast television, internet, and conversation are rural residents' primary information acquisition methods. Age differences in primary information acquisition methods are: those aged 17 and below mainly obtain information through broadcast television, internet, and reading; those aged 18-40 mainly use the internet; those aged 41 and above mainly use broadcast television and conversation. Related cultural precision poverty alleviation studies believe that public institutions should allocate rural reading services according to demand but have not mentioned how to provide precise literature and information services for different demands. Investigating rural residents' information acquisition methods can guide public libraries to adopt differentiated information provision means. Existing rural information demand research indicates that different information dissemination channels should be provided according to demand but has not applied demand surveys to rural libraries (rooms). (3) High-demand literature types are mainly medical and health, youth education, agricultural knowledge, entertainment and life, and children's books. The investigation and classification of high-demand, medium-demand, and low-demand literature can provide reference standards for rural libraries (rooms) to purchase books. In cultural precision poverty alleviation research, literature demand levels for rural residents have not yet been classified. In summary, to further improve public libraries' precise service levels, we should not only discuss rural residents' own demand dilemmas but also deeply explore precise demands to find external solutions from predicaments and keep rural libraries (rooms) vibrant.

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Author Contributions

Yan Beini: Determined the paper's topic and framework, wrote and revised the paper;

Meng Wenjing: Collected and organized materials and data.

The Empirical Research on Rural Residents' Demands of Literature and Information in the Perspective of Cultural Demand Precise Identification: Based on the Investigation of 6 Counties in Anhui

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] By investigating rural residents' demands of literature and information of 6 counties in Anhui, the paper explores rural residents' reading behavior and types of literature demands, in order to provide

empirical references for county libraries' precise services. [Method/process] Using questionnaire survey in 6 counties of Anhui, this paper investigates and analyzes the status quo of rural residents' demands from four dimensions: reading frequency, information access and content, local library demands, and types of literature demands. [Result/conclusion] The paper proposes optimization measures from four aspects: optimizing physical collections, training precise awareness, strengthening publicity, and improving digital services.

Keywords: precise identification; literature and information demands; Anhui Province; rural residents

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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