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MULTIDISCIPLINARY TRENDS IN FAMILY LITERACY AND THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES: A BIBLIOMETRIC AND SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Marsya Rahima
Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia
Email : marsya23002@mail.unpad.ac.id*

Wina Erwina
Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia

Asep Saeful Rohman
Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia

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Abstract
This study maps multidisciplinary trends in family literacy research and identifies the position and role of library science within this literature. Although family literacy is studied across education, psychology, linguistics, sociology, and library science, few reviews have systematically compared the contributions of these fields, leaving library science position undocumented. To address this gap, the study combines a bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review of 43 documents retrieved from Scopus using a search string combining family literacy and library-related terms, published between 2015 and 2026. Metadata were processed with VOSviewer to generate keyword co-occurrence and overlay visualizations, while each document was coded for academic discipline and the extent of library involvement. Results show a fluctuating publication trend, with peaks in 2015, 2021, and 2025. Education accounts for the largest share of the dataset with 22 documents, followed by library science with 10 documents, ahead of psychology, linguistics, and sociology. Libraries appear as a central subject, an explicit reference, or an implicit mention in 21 of the 43 documents, and library-related keywords shift toward more recent publication years. These findings confirm that family literacy is a multidisciplinary field and that library science holds a consistent, visible position within it, alongside education and psychology as the dominant contributors. Future bibliometric work should expand beyond Scopus and apply citation-based methods to clarify this contribution further.

Keywords*: Family Literacy, Multidisciplinary Trends, Public Libraries, Bibliometric Analysis, Library Science*

INTRODUCTION

Family literacy shapes children's development well before they enter formal schooling. Parents and other family members who read together, tell stories, and share print materials at home give children early exposure to vocabulary, narrative structure, and print awareness, and this exposure carries forward into stronger reading outcomes and school readiness (Gagné et al., 2022). Beyond individual child development, family literacy practices also affect broader educational and social welfare outcomes: they narrow the gap between children who enter

school prepared to read and those who do not, and they strengthen the relationship between home and school that sustains a child's motivation to learn. Because these effects extend across cognitive, emotional, and social domains, researchers approach family literacy from several directions.

These directions reflect different disciplinary questions. Education scholars examine how family literacy programs improve parental involvement in early childhood education (Husni et al., 2020). Psychology researchers study parents' beliefs and behaviors about their children's literacy development (AlAhmari, 2022). Library and information science researchers examine library storytime programs, including how book selection addresses children's needs (Cahill et al., 2021). Sociology, linguistics, and health fields add lenses such as cultural identity, classroom discourse, and speech-language development.

Despite this recognized diversity, few studies have mapped these disciplinary contributions systematically enough to show where library and information science stands relative to the other fields engaged with family literacy. Most existing reviews summarize findings within a single discipline, such as education or psychology, without comparing the volume, timing, or focus of contributions across fields. As a result, the specific position of library science within the wider family literacy discourse, and the extent to which its contribution has grown or remained marginal over time, has not been established through a systematic, evidence-based mapping. This gap matters because library and information science both produces its own body of family literacy research and delivers family literacy programs through public library practice, yet its place relative to disciplines such as education and psychology remains largely undocumented.

Two recent reviews illustrate both the progress and the limits of earlier work. (Xiao et al., 2023) analyzed 1,208 Scopus documents on preschool literacy from 1992 to 2022, found steadily growing output, noted that the knowledge base is fragmented across education, psychology, and linguistics, and identified family-based literacy models and intervention models as emerging themes. Their search was built on preschool and literacy terms in titles, however, so libraries were not an analytic category. (Nurani et al., 2026) combined a bibliometric analysis of Scopus publications from 2015 to 2025 with a systematic review of mothers' roles in children's literacy, reporting a convergence of health, psychology, and education, a concentration of knowledge production in high-income countries, and a shift toward informal learning ecosystems. Its focus on mothers and policy, however, means that libraries are not examined as a distinct unit of analysis. Taken together, these studies show which topics and regions dominate family literacy research and acknowledge its multidisciplinary character, but they do not compare what each discipline contributes, nor do they ask how directly and in what role libraries appear in the evidence base. They also do not separate bibliometric patterns from a content-based synthesis of library involvement, or test whether library-related attention is growing over time. The present study addresses these gaps by combining keyword co-occurrence mapping of 43 Scopus documents (2015–2026) with full-text coding of primary discipline and of the level and role of library involvement, thereby positioning library science within the family literacy discourse.

A bibliometric analysis combined with a systematic literature review addresses this gap more directly than either method alone. Bibliometric analysis quantifies publication trends and maps how key terms cluster and relate to one another across a large body of literature, a method that has already proven effective for tracing how other literacy-related fields, such as digital health literacy, have developed over time and across disciplines (Yang et al., 2022). A systematic

literature review complements this quantitative mapping by allowing closer reading of individual documents, which is necessary to determine not only how often a discipline appears but also from what perspective it engages with the topic and how directly libraries are involved. Combining both methods in this study makes it possible to move beyond a single-discipline summary and instead produce a comparative, evidence-based picture of family literacy research as a multidisciplinary field.

Building on this rationale, this study aims to map the developmental trends of family literacy research across academic disciplines and to identify the position and role of library science within this multidisciplinary landscape, using a bibliometric analysis combined with a systematic literature review. Specifically, this study seeks to (1) identify publication trends, in terms of volume and year, in global family literacy research; (2) identify the academic disciplines that contribute to family literacy scholarship; (3) analyze the perspective from which each discipline examines family literacy; and (4) examine the extent to which library science contributes to family literacy discourse and the role libraries play within it, both as an academic discipline and as an institution.

Family literacy practices begin shaping children's literacy well before formal schooling. Story-focused exchanges between parents and children predict children's reading abilities, although the benefit depends on conditions in the family environment, such as parenting stress (Gagné et al., 2022). Family literacy programs equip parents and carers with strategies to foster pre-school children's language development, and an analysis of six such projects sought good practices that support equal opportunities (Breeze & Halbach, 2024). In this study, family literacy is treated as a broad set of home-based practices and supporting programs, not a single fixed intervention.

Because family literacy touches reading, parenting, education policy, and community services at once, researchers study it from several disciplinary positions. Education scholars examine how family literacy programs improve parental involvement in early childhood education (Husni et al., 2020). Psychology researchers study parents' beliefs and behaviors about their children's literacy development (AlAhmari, 2022). Library and information science researchers examine library storytime programs, including how book selection addresses children's needs (Cahill et al., 2021). Sociology, linguistics, and health fields add lenses such as cultural identity, classroom discourse, and speech-language development. A single program can therefore be read as a language-acquisition intervention, an educational strategy, or a community service. A systematic review of programs for English-as-a-second-language families found programs in homes, schools, and a library, with reading activities foremost across all studies (Ishak et al., 2025), though it compares program characteristics, not disciplines.

Libraries appear in this literature as more than a setting. The Bedtime Story Shelf program in Finland, a lending-library model run by teachers in early childhood education centers and schools, with books drawn partly from public libraries, was used by almost all participating families, and the roughly half who borrowed more often rated it as more meaningful (Aerila et al., 2023). The study shows how a library's lending function can support family literacy outside library buildings, which makes the contribution of library science a question worth testing across fields.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study combines a bibliometric analysis and a systematic literature review to examine multidisciplinary trends in family literacy research and the role of libraries. The researcher retrieved data from the Scopus database on 4 September 2026. The initial search, ("family literacy" OR "literasi keluarga"), returned 17,222 records. Searching within these results for ("library" OR "libraries" OR "perpustakaan") left 444 records, and limiting these to documents published between 2015 and 2026 left 43. Documents without a library-related term (16,778) and documents published outside 2015 to 2026 (401) were excluded. The 2015 to 2026 window captures the most recent research up to the retrieval date. The researcher placed no restriction on document type or language so that book chapters, conference papers, and non-English studies would not drop out. The final set contains 34 articles, 7 book chapters, 1 conference paper, and 1 review, written in English (40), Croatian (2), and Bosnian (1). Three were articles in press, and 2026 was incomplete at retrieval. Only one database was searched, so no duplicates were removed, and no record was excluded manually: all 43 were retained for full-text coding. Figure 1 shows the selection flow, which follows the PRISMA 2020 reporting structure (Page et al., 2021). The analysis used author keywords, full counting, and a minimum threshold of five occurrences per keyword, generating three visualizations: network, overlay, and density (Donthu et al., 2021).

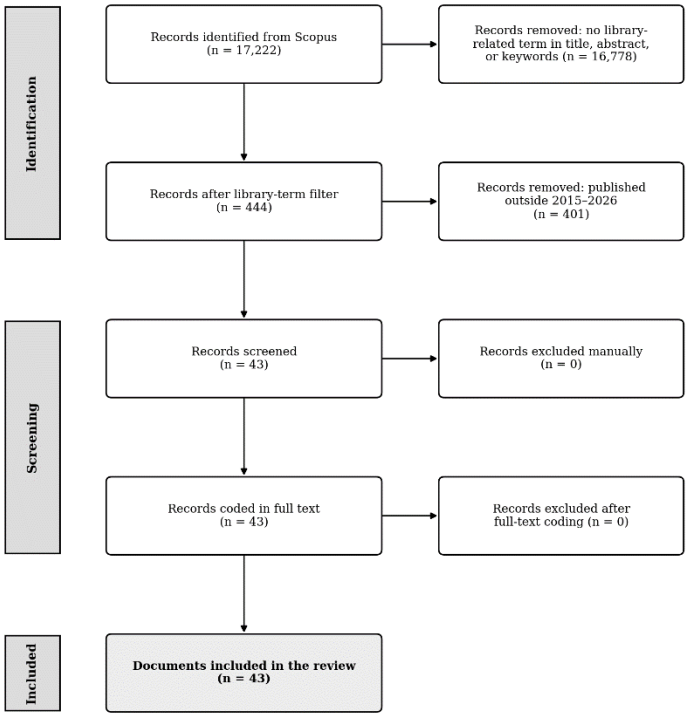


Figure 1. *PRISMA Flow Diagram of Document Selection*

The library-term filter is a deliberate scope decision: the study asks how library science is positioned among the disciplines that study family literacy, so the corpus had to contain research that engages libraries. Guidance for systematic reviews and bibliometric studies calls

for comprehensive, transparent, and reproducible sampling (Gusenbauer & Gauster, 2025); this strategy is transparent and reproducible but deliberately narrower, so it trades coverage for focus. Disciplines appear here only through documents that mention libraries, so the results describe this library-linked subset, not family literacy research as a whole. The term also matched the program name “Imagination Library” in four documents, which were retained and coded as no mention of libraries.

The researcher complemented the bibliometric mapping with a systematic literature review of the 43 documents. Each document was read in full and coded according to its primary academic discipline, secondary discipline where applicable, and the extent of library involvement in the reported program or study. The coding scheme classified library involvement into four categories: central role, explicit mention, implicit reference, and no mention. The researcher cross-checked this manual categorization against the keyword clusters produced by VOSviewer to verify consistency between the quantitative mapping and the qualitative content analysis. This mixed approach allowed the researcher to identify not only which disciplines contribute to family literacy research, but also the specific perspective each discipline brings to the topic and the position of library and information science within this multidisciplinary landscape.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data for this study were retrieved from the Scopus database using the search query ("family literacy" OR "literasi keluarga") AND ("library" OR "libraries" OR "perpustakaan"), applied to the title, abstract, and keyword fields. After screening for relevance and removing documents unrelated to the topic, the search yielded 43 documents published between 2015 and 2026. The metadata of these documents were processed with VOSviewer to generate a keyword co-occurrence map, and the full text of each document was reviewed and coded to determine its primary academic discipline and the extent of library involvement reported. The results are presented in three figures and two tables, followed by an interpretation of each in relation to the research questions of this study. Findings from the bibliometric mapping (Figures 1–3) are reported separately from findings derived from the full-text review and coding (Tables 1–4), and each set is interpreted according to its own evidence base.

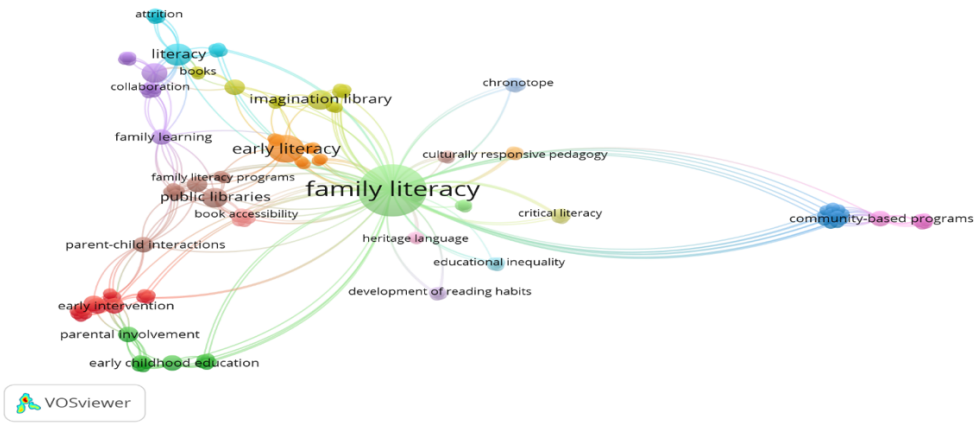


Figure 2. *Network Visualization*

Figure 1 shows six keyword clusters, each represented by a distinct color, that reflect the disciplinary spread of family literacy research. The green cluster centers on "family literacy" and connects to "early childhood education," "parental involvement," and "early intervention," reflecting the dominance of the education and developmental psychology perspective in this field. The brown cluster groups "public libraries," "family literacy programs," and "book accessibility," forming a distinct node that represents the library and information science perspective. A third cluster in purple links "literacy," "collaboration," and "family learning," pointing to a community-partnership perspective, while the yellow cluster around "imagination library" and "books" reflects book-gifting programs as a recurring intervention model. Smaller, loosely connected terms such as "chronotope," "critical literacy," and "educational inequality" indicate that linguistics and educational policy also contribute to the discourse, though with a narrower footprint than education or library science. This distribution of clusters supports the multidisciplinary character of family literacy research and situates library science as one of its most visible sub-fields, alongside education and psychology (Donthu et al., 2021).

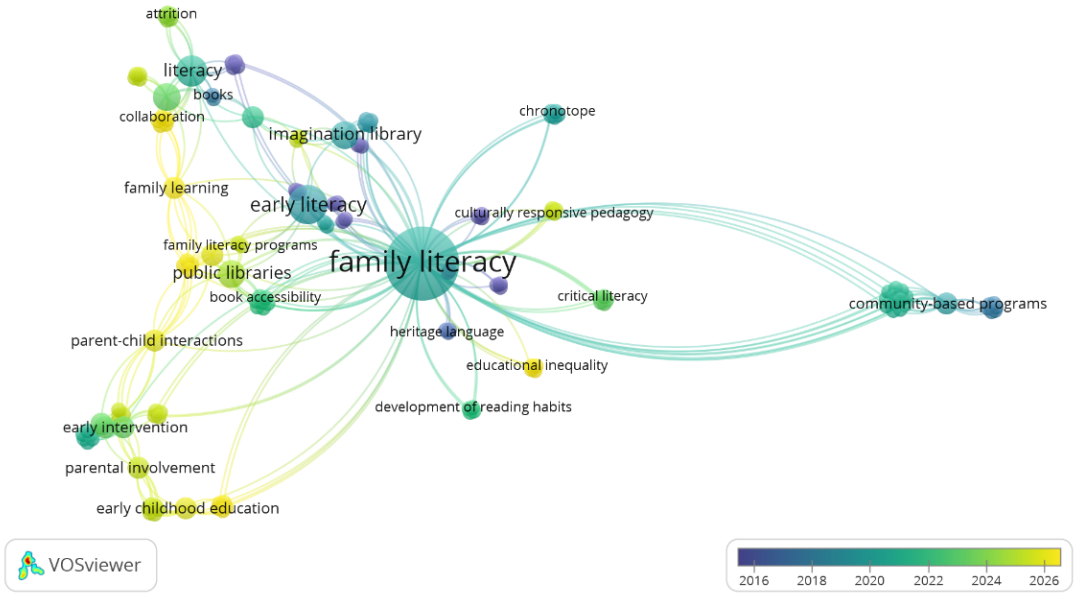


Figure 3. *Overlay Visualization*

Figure 2 adds a temporal dimension to the same keyword network, with color indicating the average publication year of each term, from purple/blue (around 2016–2018) to yellow (around 2023–2026). Terms such as "chronotope," "heritage language," "critical literacy," and "imagination library" appear in cooler tones, indicating that these topics were more prominent in earlier years of the reviewed period. In contrast, library-related terms including "public libraries," "book accessibility," and "family literacy programs," together with "educational inequality," "parental involvement," and "early childhood education," appear in warmer yellow-green tones, showing that these topics have gained more attention in recent years. This overlay indicates that library-related terms are associated with more recent publication years in the keyword network. Because overlay colors reflect average publication years of terms that occur relatively few times, they are treated here as a descriptive signal that is tested against document-level data in Table 5.

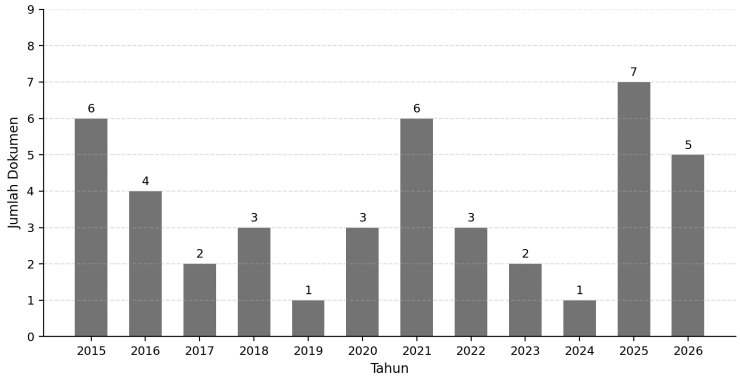


Figure 4. *Number of Publications on Family Literacy per Year (2015–2026)*

Figure 3 presents the annual distribution of the 43 reviewed documents. Publication output fluctuates across the period rather than following a steady upward trend, with peaks in 2015, 2021, and 2025 (six, six, and seven documents respectively) and troughs in 2019 and 2024 (one document each). This pattern indicates that research attention to family literacy has not grown in a linear manner but has instead responded to specific windows of scholarly interest. The relatively high count in 2025 suggests renewed attention to the topic in the most recent years, though the 2026 figure should be read with caution, as data collection for this review was conducted before the year concluded and therefore does not capture a complete annual count.

Table 1. *Distribution of Reviewed Documents by Academic Discipline*

Primary Academic Discipline	Number of Documents
Information Science	1
Health Sciences/Speech-Language Pathology	1
Library Science	10
Linguistics	1
Digital/Media Literacy	1
Education	13
Education (multidisciplinary)	1
Early Childhood Education	1
Education/Applied Linguistics	1
Education/Literacy Studies	2
Education/Psychology	2
Education/Publishing Studies	1
Education/Children's Literature Studies	1
Psychology	2
Sociology/Gender Studies	1
Media Studies	1
Museum Studies	1
Book History	1
Children's Literature/Library Studies	1
Total Documents	43

Source: *Compiled by the authors from Scopus data analysis (n = 43 documents), 2026.*

Eight documents carry a combined or multidisciplinary label and therefore overlap with more than one discipline. Seven of them include Education as one component (Education/Applied Linguistics, Education/Literacy Studies ×2, Education/Psychology ×2, Education/Publishing Studies, Education/Children's Literature Studies) and one combines Children's Literature with Library Studies. Education (multidisciplinary) is counted with Education. Row counts are not additive across disciplines.

Table 1 details the disciplinary distribution underlying the clusters shown in Figure 1, and its categories overlap in ways that affect how disciplines can be compared. Eight documents carry a combined or multidisciplinary label, so a single document can speak for more than one field. When every label containing education is grouped together (Education, Early Childhood Education, Education (multidisciplinary), and the six Education combinations), education accounts for 22 of the 43 documents, 51% of the dataset. Fourteen of these carry a single education label, while eight are combined with another field or labeled multidisciplinary. Library science accounts for 10 documents under its own label and for 11 when the document labeled Children's Literature/Library Studies is included, about 23% to 26% of the dataset. The two fields are therefore much closer when only single-label documents are compared (14 for education and 10 for library science) than when overlaps are included (22 and 11), which shows that part of education's lead comes from its frequent combination with other fields rather than from a larger body of work conducted from a single disciplinary standpoint. The same logic applies to smaller fields. Psychology holds two documents under its own label and four when Education/Psychology is included, and linguistics holds one and two when Education/Applied Linguistics is included, so these fields enter the dataset largely through education-oriented studies. Library science shows the least overlap: ten of its 11 documents (91%) carry no second label, compared with eight of 22 education documents (36%). The remaining categories, including information science, digital/media literacy, media studies, museum studies, book history, and health sciences/speech-language pathology, appear once each, and sociology/gender studies appears once, indicating that these fields engage with family literacy from the margins. This spread answers the second research question by showing that family literacy is multidisciplinary at the level of the field, while library science contributes a larger and more self-contained body of work than most fields outside education and psychology.

Table 2. *Level of Library Involvement in Reviewed Documents*

Level of Library Involvement	Number of Documents
Central Role	10
Explicit Mention	6
Implicit Reference	5
No Mention	22

Source: *Compiled by the authors from Scopus data analysis (n = 43 documents), 2026.*

Table 2 addresses the fourth research question by quantifying how directly libraries appear in the reviewed literature. Ten documents treat the library as the central subject of the study, such as evaluations of library-initiated programs or descriptions of library services for families. Six additional documents mention libraries explicitly as part of a broader intervention, and five more refer to libraries implicitly, for instance through references to book access points or digital library resources without discussing the library as an institution in depth. Combined, these three categories account for 21 of the 43 documents, close to half of the dataset, while the

remaining 22 documents make no reference to libraries at all. This near-even split indicates that libraries are neither peripheral nor universally central to family literacy research; rather, they occupy a substantial and recurring, though not dominant, position within the wider multidisciplinary landscape identified in Table 1 and Figure 1.

To clarify how libraries specifically engage with family literacy, the 21 documents identified in Table 2 as having a central, explicit, or implicit library involvement were further classified by the type of role the library performs. Table 3 presents this classification.

Table 3. *Roles of Libraries in Family Literacy Research and Practice (n = 21)*

Role of the Library	Description	No. Of Documents
Direct Program and Service Delivery	Public libraries design and run structured family literacy activities, such as storytelling sessions, book-bag lending programs, and grant-funded outreach for families.	5
Digital Resource and Information Provision	Libraries deliver literacy content through digital toolkits, information literacy instruction, and digital library resources for families.	4
Institutional Partnership	Libraries collaborate with schools, museums, or other community institutions to jointly support family literacy.	3
Policy, Advocacy, and National Campaigns	Library associations and public libraries lead or take part in national or international reading campaigns and policy discourse on family literacy.	3
Book Access and Distribution	Libraries function as access points for book-gifting and book distribution programs reaching families.	2
Library as Research Setting or Variable	Studies treat library visits or library-based storytelling as one variable or venue within a broader family literacy practice, rather than as the central focus.	2
Program Evaluation	Studies assess the outcomes and effectiveness of library-initiated family literacy programs.	1
Outreach Services for Special Populations	Libraries provide bookmobile services and specialized materials to reach underserved or hard-to-reach families.	1
Total (documents involving libraries: central, explicit, and implicit)		**21**

Source: *Compiled by the authors from Scopus data analysis, 2026.*

Table 3 shows that libraries engage with family literacy most often through direct program and service delivery, accounting for five of the 21 documents, followed closely by digital resource and information provision with four documents. Institutional partnerships and policy or advocacy work each account for three documents, showing that libraries also act beyond direct service delivery, coordinating with schools and other institutions or shaping public discourse on reading. Book access and distribution, together with studies that treat library visits as a research variable rather than a central focus, account for two documents each, while program evaluation and outreach to special populations appear once each. This distribution indicates that the library's contribution to family literacy is concentrated in hands-

on program delivery and digital resource provision, with a smaller but consistent presence in partnership-building, advocacy, and evaluation work.

The eight roles in Table 3 can be read as expressions of four conceptual functions rather than as a list of activities. Access functions, which combine book access and distribution (2), digital resource provision (4), and outreach to special populations (1), account for seven of the 21 documents. Mediation functions, which combine direct program delivery (5) and program evaluation (1), account for six. Partnership and policy and advocacy account for three documents each, and two documents treat the library only as a research setting. This regrouping suggests that the library's distinctive contribution lies in organizing access and mediating it through staff-led programs. It also connects the data to library and information science scholarship that treats public libraries as meeting places and as institutions supporting social inclusion, including efforts to reduce the digital divide (Audunson et al., 2019). The present findings suggest that this infrastructural view is mobilized for family literacy mainly through access provision and staff mediation.

The clustering identified in Figure 1 aligns with established theoretical frameworks in family literacy research rather than reflecting an arbitrary grouping of terms. The dominance of the green cluster, anchored by parental involvement, early intervention, and early childhood education, reflects a funds of knowledge perspective, which treats what families already know and do at home as a resource that educators and researchers can build on rather than a deficit to correct (Fenech et al., 2025). Viewed through this lens, the volume of education-focused documents in Table 1 signals more than a simple count: it shows that education researchers have adopted a framework that positions the family itself, rather than the library or the school, as the primary site of literacy development, which helps explain why library-related terms form a smaller, more specialized cluster instead of sitting at the center of the network. The brown, library-centered cluster in Figure 1, together with the central role that ten documents in Table 2 assign to libraries, corresponds instead to the concept of the library as a third place, a setting distinct from home and school where families access books, programming, and social interaction on informal and equal terms (Kofi & Van Melik, 2026). This theoretical distinction clarifies why library involvement in the reviewed literature clusters around service delivery and access, such as book accessibility, family literacy programs, and public libraries, rather than around the developmental processes that dominate the education cluster: libraries contribute to family literacy chiefly by providing the third place in which funds of knowledge informed practices can unfold, a contribution whose conceptual character is examined in the paragraphs that follow.

Among the 43 reviewed documents, ten were classified with library science as the primary academic discipline. Table 4 breaks down the specific sub-topics these ten documents address, showing which aspects of the library's work in family literacy attract the most direct research attention from library science itself.

Table 4. Sub-Topics Addressed by Library Science Documents (n = 10)

Sub-Topic Focus	Representative Document Title(s)	No. of Documents
Program Description and Delivery	Talking, Thinking, Making : How IMLS Grants Help Libraries Facilitate Family Literacy and Learning; Supporting Parents in Early Literacy Through Libraries (SPELL); Reading Is Grand! A Family Literacy Program of	4

	the Black Caucus of ALA; Encouraging Reading in the Family Circle through the "Bag of Stories" Program	
Institutional Partnership and Policy	Identifying Key Factors in Library-School Partnerships to Deliver a Family Literacy Programme in Western Australia; The Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Reading within the Family; National Reading Campaign "Read to Me!"	3
Program Evaluation	Evaluation of Family Literacy Programs: A Case Study of Better Beginnings	1
Digital Resource Implementation	Using the Smithsonian's Digital Talk with Me Toolkits to Support Family Engagement in Public Libraries	1
Outreach and Access Services	Reaching Library Patrons with Special Services and Materials	1
Total (Library Science as primary discipline)		**10**

Source: Compiled by the authors from Scopus data analysis, 2026.

Table 4 shows that library science research on family literacy concentrates most heavily on describing and delivering specific programs, accounting for four of the ten documents, ranging from grant-funded initiatives to community storytelling programs. Institutional partnership and policy work follow with three documents, covering library-school collaboration, the broader role of public libraries in promoting family reading, and national reading campaigns. Program evaluation, digital resource implementation, and outreach services for special populations each account for a single document. This pattern shows that library science scholarship on family literacy is oriented mainly toward documenting and implementing programs, and that program evaluation is a comparatively underdeveloped sub-topic.

To test whether library involvement has increased over time, the 43 documents were grouped into three periods (2015–2018, 2019–2022, and 2023–2026), and the share of documents with central, explicit, or implicit library involvement was calculated for each period (Table 5). Library-involving documents accounted for 12 of 15 (80.0%) in 2015–2018, 11 of 13 (84.6%) in 2019–2022, and 12 of 15 (80.0%) in 2023–2026. Shares are used instead of counts because annual output fluctuates (Figure 3). Given the small dataset and the incomplete 2026 data, these figures are descriptive and should not be read as a statistical trend.

CONCLUSION

This study mapped multidisciplinary trends in family literacy research and examined the position of library science within it, using a bibliometric analysis and a systematic literature review of 43 Scopus-indexed, 43 Scopus-indexed documents published between 2015 and 2026. Within this corpus, publication output fluctuated, with peaks in 2015, 2021, and 2025. Education contributed the most documents (22), followed by library science (10). Education and psychology examined developmental outcomes and parental involvement, library science addressed program delivery, partnerships, and book access, and linguistics and sociology analyzed discourse and gender. Libraries appeared in 21 of the 43 documents and were the central subject in 10. The study contributes a disciplinary reading of this corpus through two lenses. The education-centered clusters fit a funds of knowledge view, which treats the family as the main site of literacy development, while the library-centered cluster fits a third place

view, in which libraries provide access, programs, and social space beyond home and school. Together they suggest that library science contributes mainly to the institutional and access dimension of family literacy. This is an interpretation of the 43 documents, not a tested theory. The findings apply to these 43 documents only. The data came from one database, Scopus, which may omit library and information science journals indexed elsewhere. The search string required library-related terms, so the dataset favors studies that mention libraries and likely underrepresents family literacy research from other disciplines; the share of library involvement describes this corpus, not the field. The sample is small and 40 of the 43 documents are in English, so the results should not be generalized to family literacy research as a whole.

SUGGESTION

The recommendations for the future are (1) researchers should search multiple databases, such as Web of Science, ERIC, and LISTA, and run the search without library-related terms, then classify library involvement afterward, to test whether the share of library-focused studies holds when the search string does not select for it; (2) library and information science scholars should conduct more empirical studies that document library-initiated family literacy programs in non-Western contexts, given that most documents identifying libraries as a central subject originated from public libraries in the United States, Australia, and Croatia, leaving the practices of libraries in other regions largely absent from the current literature; and (3) future bibliometric studies should apply co-citation and bibliographic coupling analysis alongside keyword co-occurrence mapping, as these methods would reveal which authors and institutions shape the intellectual structure of family literacy research and clarify how strongly library science scholarship is cited across other disciplines.

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