

Students' Experiences In Accessing Bookless Library Services: A Phenomenological Study At Universitas Negeri Makassar



Human-Digital Experience dalam Layanan Bookless Library: Studi Kualitatif tentang Kemudahan Akses Mahasiswa di Universitas Negeri Makassar

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Abstract

Background: Digital transformation in higher education has encouraged the development of bookless library services as a flexible means of accessing academic information. However, previous studies have predominantly focused on service quality, technology acceptance, and user satisfaction, while students' lived experiences as primary users of digital library services remain underexplored. **Purpose:** This study aims to understand students' experiences in accessing bookless library services at Universitas Negeri Makassar. **Method:** This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. Eight students from different faculties and academic levels were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, limited participatory observation, and document review. Data analysis involved phenomenological reduction, identification of meaning units, theme development, and interpretation of participants' experiences. **Result:** The findings revealed four major themes: (1) digital access as an extension of learning space and time, providing greater flexibility in obtaining academic resources; (2) the need for orientation in navigating interfaces and information retrieval pathways, as students still encounter difficulties in understanding available features; (3) the institutional repository as the most meaningful academic resource for thesis preparation and reference searching; and (4) technical barriers and digital literacy disparities that influence the effectiveness of service utilization. **Conclusion:** The mobile library service plays a significant role in meeting the information needs of female inmates, but improvements are needed through collection diversification, increased procurement frequency, and the implementation of information literacy programs to make the service more relevant to their needs. Bookless library services have become an important part of students' academic experiences by supporting flexible access to information and learning resources. Nevertheless, interface simplification, infrastructure improvement, and continuous information literacy programs are needed to optimize service utilization and enhance user experience.

Keywords: bookless library, digital library, phenomenology, student experience, information literacy.

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Transformasi digital di perguruan tinggi mendorong pengembangan layanan *bookless library* sebagai sarana akses informasi akademik yang lebih fleksibel. Namun, sebagian besar penelitian terdahulu masih berfokus pada kualitas layanan, penerimaan teknologi, dan kepuasan pengguna, sementara pengalaman mahasiswa sebagai pengguna utama layanan belum banyak dikaji secara mendalam. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan memahami pengalaman mahasiswa dalam mengakses layanan *bookless library* di Universitas Negeri Makassar. **Metode:** Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi deskriptif. Delapan mahasiswa dari berbagai fakultas dan semester dipilih secara *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif terbatas, dan telaah dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan reduksi fenomenologis, identifikasi unit makna, pengembangan tema, dan interpretasi pengalaman. **Hasil:** Penelitian menemukan empat tema utama, yaitu (1) akses digital sebagai perluasan ruang dan waktu belajar yang memberikan fleksibilitas dalam memperoleh sumber informasi; (2) kebutuhan orientasi terhadap antarmuka dan jalur pencarian karena pengguna masih mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami fitur layanan; (3) repositori institusi sebagai ruang akademik

yang paling bermakna dalam mendukung penyusunan tugas akhir dan pencarian referensi; serta (4) hambatan teknis dan literasi digital yang memengaruhi efektivitas pemanfaatan layanan. **Kesimpulan:** *Bookless library* menjadi bagian penting dari pengalaman akademik mahasiswa karena mendukung akses informasi yang lebih fleksibel. Namun, penyederhanaan antarmuka, penguatan infrastruktur, dan peningkatan literasi informasi masih diperlukan untuk mengoptimalkan kualitas layanan.

Kata kunci: *bookless library*, perpustakaan digital, fenomenologi, pengalaman mahasiswa, literasi informasi.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background. Digital transformation in higher education has altered the way students interact with academic information sources. The library is no longer understood merely as a repository for print collections but rather as a service hub that connects students with electronic databases, online journals, institutional repositories, and open educational resources (Yan C et al. 2023). In this context, the concept of the bookless library becomes significant because it positions digital access at the core of library services. This shift also demands a new perspective: the success of a digital library cannot be adequately measured by the size of its available collections but rather by the student experience in seeking, finding, understanding, and using those information sources in everyday academic activities (Suharso et al., 2020; Jamil et al, 2026; Maulidia & Mutia, 2025).

Amid the transition toward Library 4.0, the concept of the bookless library or a library without physical books has emerged as a discourse that is both revolutionary and pragmatic for higher education institutions. This concept challenges the traditional orthodoxy that the essence of a library is determined by the presence of large print book shelves that consume considerable space. Instead, the bookless library migrates the majority of its collections into electronic formats, thereby enabling access unconstrained by space and time. This migration not only addresses the need for managerial efficiency and space savings but also responds to changing learning patterns among contemporary generations, who demand that information be available quickly, flexibly, and continuously accessible.

In Indonesia, the modernization of academic libraries is not merely an aspiration for innovation but also a matter of institutional obligation. Regulation of the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia Number 5 of 2024 concerning National Standards for Academic Libraries mandates the strengthening of digital collections, service interoperability, and adaptive information governance. Consequently, universities are required to develop reference services that are not only available in digital form but also easy to use and relevant to the needs of the academic community. Universitas Negeri Makassar has developed a digital service portal that provides access to the OPAC, e-journals, e-books, a repository of scholarly works, and other supporting services. However, the availability of comprehensive digital infrastructure does not automatically guarantee a seamless access experience. For students, the process of searching for references can remain a tiring activity when interfaces are less intuitive, networks are unstable, or search results are too broad and unfocused (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2024; Himayah, 2023).

Problems. The primary issue underlying this research is the gap between the availability of digital services and the actual user experience. On one hand, the library provides numerous features and collections, but on the other hand, students still encounter obstacles when navigating the portal, selecting the appropriate menu, or understanding the best way to search for documents. Furthermore, an abundance of information can lead to

confusion when not accompanied by adequate literacy skills. This condition suggests that bookless library services are not merely a matter of technology but also a matter of experience, meaning, and study habits. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore how students perceive the ease and barriers of access within UNM's bookless library services, and how these experiences shape the ways they work academically (Hidayatullah et al., 2022; Cahyono & Masruroh, 2025).

Previous Literature Review. The literature review in this study draws upon three interrelated theoretical strands, namely phenomenology, information-seeking behavior, and the literature on digital libraries. Within the phenomenological tradition, human experience is understood as something that must be uncovered from the perspective of those who live it. Van Manen (2016) explains that phenomenological research seeks to understand the meaning of lived experience as it is directly experienced, rather than forcing that experience into predetermined categories. Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that phenomenological researchers must practice *epoche*, or bracketing, so that initial assumptions do not dominate the interpretive process. Framed by this approach, the present study views students' experiences of using the bookless library as experiences that are rich in meaning, multilayered, and tied to the academic situations they navigate.

Within the phenomenological perspective, access to a digital library is not merely a technical act of opening a webpage or downloading a document. Rather, access constitutes an experiential event involving intention, expectation, curiosity, time constraints, academic anxiety, and adaptive strategies. Saldaña (2021) emphasizes that the process of qualitative coding does not simply map words but also captures the nuances of meaning that emerge from participants' experiences. Thus, when students say that the digital library helps them study in the middle of the night or while off campus, such statements are not merely functional in meaning; they also demonstrate how digital space extends the rhythm of their academic lives. Phenomenology provides room for a holistic understanding of these experiences, including the accompanying feelings of relief, fatigue, confusion, and satisfaction (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The next literature pertains to the concept of the bookless library and digital libraries. Msauki (2021) views Library 4.0 as a framework that emphasizes technological integration, sustainability, and adaptive services. In this context, a digital library must not only provide electronic collections but also be capable of building a service ecosystem that facilitates user interaction with information (Onunka et al., 2023; Ramos & Alvares, 2024). Syahida, Wulandari, and Haristianti (2021) demonstrate that the elements of a smart library in academic settings need to be designed to support comfort, service flow, and user orientation. Accordingly, bookless library services can be understood as a synthesis of mutually reinforcing technology, governance, and user experience.

The literature on information literacy is also relevant to this study. Suharso et al. (2020) show that as academic libraries transition to digital services, the need for information literacy becomes increasingly critical because users must understand search strategies, source selection, and credibility evaluation of information. Jamil et al (2026) adds that the growth of digital books and electronic resources in Indonesia has not always been accompanied by users' readiness to read and search digitally in an effective manner. In such situations, students may be aware that resources are available, but they may not necessarily know how to utilize them optimally. Information literacy therefore serves as a bridge between system availability and successful service utilization (Zakir et al., 2025).

Another important aspect is the experience of searching for information in a digital environment. Hassoun et al. (2023) assert that Generation Z often encounters abundant information, yet the process of evaluating and selecting information requires distinct sensibilities, social orientation, and reading habits. Bouleimen et al. (2023) also demonstrate that online searching can encourage users to verify information but simultaneously presents challenges in discerning which sources are most relevant. These findings reinforce the notion that students' experiences within a bookless library must be

understood as a process of sense-making rather than merely a browsing activity. In other words, students are not simply searching for files; they are constructing understanding that is useful for their academic tasks (Case & Given, 2016; Wilson, 2020).

On the service design side, the literature on user experience and information architecture indicates that ease of access is strongly influenced by menu readability, navigational consistency, label clarity, and system stability. Jilani et al. (2026) emphasize that UX on library websites must provide clear orientation to users, while Utami et al. (2025) demonstrate that effective digital interface design should be grounded in users' actual needs rather than merely aesthetic appeal. Zakira et al. (2025) also underscore that digital user experience in libraries correlates with system responsiveness and the ease of finding needed resources. This body of literature helps to explain why students in this study experience both ease and confusion when interacting with the library portal. Digital access may be broadly available, yet the experience of utilizing it remains heavily shaped by the quality of service design.

Prior research on digital libraries in Indonesia has tended to focus on system benefits and service effectiveness, yet few studies have explored students' experiences phenomenologically (Ergun, 2025). Latifah & Nugraha (2023), for example, employed perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as primary variables in assessing interest in using digilib. Their study is important because it demonstrates that digital access does indeed influence usage intention. However, the quantitative approach means that students' subjective experiences have not been explored in depth. In the context of the present study, these findings serve as a starting point for understanding that ease is not merely a matter of system functionality but also a matter of the experience perceived by students when engaging with that system.

Cahyono and Masruroh (2025) examined the role of academic libraries in enhancing digital literacy among graduate students. Their study emphasized that students still experience confusion in selecting appropriate digital learning resources. Maulidia and Mutia (2025) presented a systematic review of the challenges and opportunities of digital library transformation in Indonesia, particularly concerning infrastructure and the digital competency gaps among library staff. Utami et al. (2025) highlighted the design of UI/UX for digital library applications through a Human-Centered Design approach, while Zakira et al. (2025) linked digital service quality to students' experiences in the library. Although relevant, these studies generally still position users as objects of evaluation rather than as subjects who directly experience and make meaning of the services.

Nasaruddin et al. (2024) discussed the Elfan bookless library and emphasized that digital services are capable of expanding access to information. Safarudin et al. (2025) demonstrated that student satisfaction with digital libraries is related to reading interest. On the other hand, Hidayatullah et al. (2022) showed that user experience in academic library spaces is also influenced by facility comfort and the quality of interaction with available services. Taken together, these prior studies indicate that digital libraries, both in terms of services and users, have been extensively researched. However, few studies have deeply explored the lived experiences of students across different faculties and academic semesters when using a bookless library within a phenomenological context.

State of The Art. The novelty of this study lies in its use of a phenomenological approach to understand students' experiences in utilizing bookless library services at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Unlike previous studies that have generally focused on service quality, technology acceptance, digital literacy, or digital library system design, this study explores in depth the meaning of students' experiences as service users. Through a phenomenological approach, this research reveals how students make meaning of ease of access, the process of information retrieval, the use of institutional repositories, and the

various challenges they encounter in using the bookless library as part of their daily academic activities.

Purpose. Drawing from the background and novelty outlined above, this study aims to explore, describe, and understand students' experiences in accessing bookless library services at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Specifically, this research is directed toward uncovering the meaning of ease of access, the process of orientation toward interfaces and search pathways, the utilization of institutional repositories as academic sources, as well as the technical and digital literacy barriers that influence the experience of using the services. In doing so, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences in interacting with digital library services and to serve as a foundation for developing services that are more responsive, inclusive, and user-centered.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. A phenomenological approach was selected because the research objective is to understand the meaning of students' experiences when interacting with bookless library services, rather than to test causal relationships among variables. Phenomenology enables the researcher to uncover how students make meaning of access, barriers, benefits, and changes in study practices that emerge when they use the digital library portal. In this sense, experience is not treated as technical data but rather as lived experience that is holistic and open to interpretation (van Manen, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted at the UPT Library of Universitas Negeri Makassar, with a focus on digital services available through the portal lib.unm.ac.id. The phenomenon examined is students' experiences in searching for references, accessing the repository, using the OPAC, browsing e-books, and downloading academic documents. The researcher applied epoche, or bracketing, by suspending initial assumptions regarding the strengths or weaknesses of the services so that interpretation remains grounded in the voices of the informants. This step is essential in phenomenological research because meaning must emerge from participants' experiences rather than from the researcher's preconceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2020).

The study involved eight students selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included active UNM students from different faculties, enrolled in semesters four through eight, and having at least two semesters of experience using digital library services. The eight informants consisted of INF-01, an eighth-semester student of Informatics Engineering; INF-02, a sixth-semester student of Psychology; INF-03, an eighth-semester student of Management; INF-04, a fourth-semester student of English Language Education; INF-05, an eighth-semester student of Biology; INF-06, a fourth-semester student of Public Administration; INF-07, an eighth-semester student of Civil Engineering; and INF-08, an eighth-semester student of Visual Communication Design. This diversity of backgrounds was intended to capture variation in experiences across different fields and levels of study.

Table 1.
List of Informants

Informant Code	Major/Faculty	Semester	Intensity of Access to the UNM Digital Portal	Primary Purpose of Access
INF-01	Informatics Engineering	8	Very often	Thesis writing and journal searching
INF-02	Psychology	6	Often	e-book access and paper references
INF-03	Management	8	Often	Literature review and thesis

Informant Code	Major/Faculty	Semester	Intensity of Access to the UNM Digital Portal	Primary Purpose of Access
INF-04	English Language Education	4	Occasionally	Assignments and academic references
INF-05	Biology	8	Ocasionally	Repository access and final project
INF-06	Public Administration	4	Often	Article searching and policy references
INF-07	Civil Engineering	8	Often	Thesis references and engineering journals
INF-08	Visual Communication Design	8	Often	Digital archive access and project references

Souces : Researcher Data

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, limited participatory observation, and field notes. The interviews focused on students' experiences when accessing the portal, searching for references, navigating menus, encountering network constraints, and making meaning of the institutional repository for their academic needs. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, was recorded with the informants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Participatory observation was conducted to examine how informants navigated the portal, selected keywords, used filters, and executed the document download process. Meanwhile, field notes were employed to record expressions, pauses, and nonverbal responses that emerged during the interview process.

Data analysis was conducted through phenomenological procedures, including repeated reading of transcripts, identification of significant statements, grouping of meaning units, theme formation, and the construction of textual and structural descriptions of the experience. This process was integrated with thematic coding to facilitate data organization, as recommended by Saldaña (2021) and Braun and Clarke (2021). To ensure validity, the researcher employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and limited member checking with several informants. Trustworthiness criteria were also maintained through transparency of the analytical process, consistency of interpretation, and reflexive note-taking throughout the research (Nowell et al., 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical considerations were addressed by assigning codes to informants and withholding real names. All quotations included in the findings section were approved for use as academic data. With this framework, the study aims to present students' experiences clearly, deeply, and in a scientifically accountable manner.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that students' experiences in using UNM's bookless library services form four main phenomenological themes. These themes are not presented as technical indicators but rather as meanings that emerge from students' lived experiences in the context of learning, completing assignments, and searching for references. The four themes are: digital access as an extension of study time and space; interfaces that require a process of orientation to understand; the institutional repository as the most meaningful academic space; and technical barriers and digital literacy challenges that affect the sustainability of service use. In the following discussion, each theme is presented narratively with direct quotations from informants so that their experiences remain as the primary voice of the study.

Figure 1. Discussion Room Facilities at the UNM Library

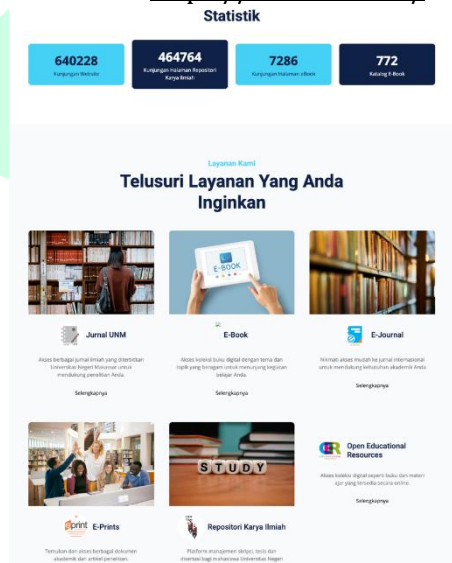


Sources : Researcher Data

In general, students interpret the bookless library as a facility that helps them adapt to increasingly demanding academic rhythms. However, this convenience does not always come without conditions. They still need to understand the menu structure, adjust their search strategies, and work around network disruptions that sometimes occur at certain times. On the other hand, the greatest value of the service emerges when the institutional repository helps students find examples of scholarly work, methodological references, and supporting materials for their research arguments. This shows that the bookless library is not merely an information system but rather a part of the learning experience that shapes how students work academically.

Digital Access as an Extension of Study Time and Space. The first theme concerns students' experience of digital access as an extension of study time and space. Nearly all informants emphasized that digital services free them from the need to come to the physical library during specific service hours.

Figure 2. UNM Library Online Service Facilities <https://lib.unm.ac.id/>



Sources : Researcher Data

For final-year students, this experience is especially important because thesis work often takes place outside normal working hours. INF-01 stated that they can search for references from their boarding house at night without having to wait for the library to open, and this makes the literature search process more efficient.

"I find it most helpful when working on my thesis because I can access the library portal from my boarding house at night without waiting for service hours, so I don't waste time just traveling to campus." (INF-01, Informatics Engineering, 8th semester)

A similar experience was expressed by INF-02, who is from the Faculty of Psychology. The informant shared that access to international e-books allows them to read theoretical references from various publishers without having to carry heavy textbooks or confine themselves to a specific reading space.

"For me, what stands out most is the flexibility. I can read e-books on my laptop when I'm away from home, and that makes it easier for me to track down references that aren't available in print." (INF-02, Faculty of Psychology, 6th semester)

Digital access is understood not only as efficiency but also as a form of freedom of movement that fits with today's student life.

The Need of Orientation to Interfaces and Search Pathways. The second theme concerns the experience of orienting oneself to the interfaces and search pathways. Although the informants acknowledged that the library portal provides many features, some of them felt that they needed time to understand the differences between the available menu functions. INF-06, from the Faculty of Public Administration, explained that at first they had difficulty distinguishing between the search menus related to OPAC, e-prints, and the repository.

"When I first used the portal, I had to try out several menus first because I didn't immediately understand which one was for books, which one was for theses, and which one was for journals." (INF-06, Faculty of Public Administration, 4th semester)

This experience shows that ease of access does not always mean ease of understanding. INF-08, from the Faculty of Visual Communication Design, added that the front page does look quite neat, but conducting a specific search still requires extra steps that are not always intuitive for new users.

"The interface looks clean enough, but when I search for a specific document, I still need to learn how to use the right filters and keywords so that the results are not overwhelming." (INF-08, Faculty of Visual Communication Design, 8th semester)

These two experiences show that students need some initial orientation in order to make effective use of the digital portal. In a phenomenological context, this need for orientation is part of what access means, because good access is access that can be understood and used without unnecessary burden.

The Institutional Repository as the Most Meaningful Academic Space. The third theme is the institutional repository as the most meaningful academic space. For final-year students, the repository is not just a place to store scholarly works but a learning space that helps them understand writing structure, methodological logic, and how to build research arguments. INF-03, from the Faculty of Management, stated that they often open past theses to understand how the introduction and methods chapters are structured.

"The UNM repository really helps me because I can look at senior theses from Chapter 1 to Chapter 3, so it's easier for me to develop my own research framework." (INF-03, Faculty of Management, 8th semester)

The repository is understood as a space for dialogue across cohorts that facilitates academic learning. INF-05, from the Faculty of Biology, expressed a similar view, but he also raised the issue of access restrictions on certain documents. According to him, the repository is very useful for finding initial references, although some parts of documents are not always fully accessible.

"I find it very helpful when looking for previous research references, but sometimes there are files that cannot be accessed in full, so I have to look for other sources to complete the discussion." (INF-05, Faculty of Biology, 8th semester)

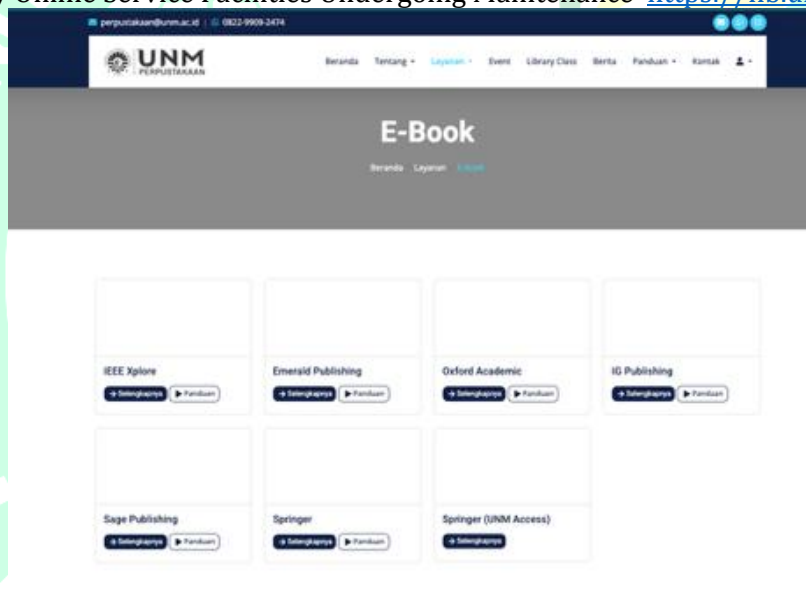
Students view the repository as a highly valuable resource, but they are also aware of the ethical boundaries and access policies that come with it. In a phenomenological reading, the repository is a space full of benefits but also full of negotiation.

Technical Barriers and Digital Literacy. The fourth theme concerns technical barriers and digital literacy. INF-07, from the Faculty of Civil Engineering, reported that access to the portal sometimes slows down when many students are using it at the same time, especially around assignment deadlines.

"When it's busy, the portal can be slow, and that makes me have to wait quite a while before I can download the document I need." (INF-07, Faculty of Civil Engineering, 8th semester)

System stability is an important part of the student experience. For them, a slow digital service does not just hinder the technical process but also disrupts the academic workflow that is already in progress.

Figure 3. UNM Library Online Service Facilities Undergoing Maintenance <https://lib.unm.ac.id/>



Sources : Researcher Data

INF-04, from the Faculty of English Language Education, highlighted digital literacy as an important factor. He admitted that he only learned about some of the library's subscribed resources after a lecturer pointed them out, so prior to that he had mostly relied on general web searches.

"I only found out that the university provides access to certain resources after my lecturer explained it, so in my opinion, outreach from the library still needs to be strengthened." (INF-04, Faculty of English Language Education, 4th semester)

Challenges in using the services arise not only from technological aspects but also from differences in knowledge and information-seeking habits. Thus, bookless library services require ongoing literacy support so that the full potential of digital resources can be optimally utilized.

Discussion of Research Findings. From the findings above, these four themes reveal a dualism in students' experiences with the bookless library: there are real benefits alongside limitations that still need to be addressed. In the digital access theme, students view the library as a space that goes beyond physical operating hours. This finding aligns with

Suharso et al. (2020), who showed that digital services extend the reach of library users in situations that demand high flexibility. However, this study adds a more concrete dimension to the lived experience, namely the feeling of relief that comes with being able to study anytime and anywhere. This confirms that good digital access is not just about content availability but also about how it changes the rhythm of student learning (Susanto, 2024).

On the theme of interfaces, students' experiences remind us that digital systems need to speak a language that users understand. Jilani, et al. (2026) and Zakira et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of clear navigation and system stability in the user experience of digital libraries. This study reinforces that view through students' accounts of needing time to understand the differences between menus and to adjust their search strategies. In other words, a good interface is one that reduces users' cognitive load, not one that adds to their confusion. Here, phenomenology shows that the experience of confusion is part of the reality of use, not merely a standalone technical issue.

On the theme of the institutional repository, students interpret academic archives as a highly valuable learning resource. Jamil et al (2026) emphasizes that digital books and electronic sources do make access easier, but they also require different reading and searching habits. The findings of this study clarify that the repository is not merely a storage space but rather a cross-generational learning space. Students learn from previous works, trace methodological patterns, and adapt writing styles from available documents. For this reason, the institutional repository becomes a space that gradually shapes students' academic identity, especially when they are in the phase of working on their final projects.

The theme of technical barriers and digital literacy shows that technology never works on its own without social support. Maulidia and Mutia (2025) emphasize the importance of infrastructure and digital competency in library transformation, while Cahyono and Masruroh (2025) show that students need guidance in navigating complex digital resources. This study agrees with those findings but adds that students' experiences are also shaped by the time of use, deadline pressures, and individual study habits. When the portal is slow or when information is not well communicated, students perceive the service as not yet fully user-friendly. For this reason, strengthening information literacy and ensuring system stability must be understood as part of creating a fair and inclusive academic experience.

The findings of this study support the idea that the bookless library must be understood as an ecosystem of experience, not merely as an information system. Digital books, repositories, OPAC, and online services do not stand alone; they are all inhabited by students with different needs, limitations, and adaptive strategies. Within a phenomenological framework, the meaning of access emerges when students are able to connect digital services with their academic goals. When the service helps them write, read, find, and understand, the digital library truly becomes a valuable academic space. Conversely, when the system is slow or confusing, the access experience turns into an experience of negotiation. That is where it becomes important to view the bookless library as a human experience that must continually be refined.

The ease of access offered by bookless library services shows that digital libraries have become an important means of supporting students' academic activities. This finding aligns with studies by Latifah & Nugraha (2023), Nasaruddin et al. (2024), and Safarudin et al. (2025), which demonstrate that digital libraries can enhance student access to various academic information sources. More flexible access allows students to obtain references quickly to support both coursework and final project completion. However, this study extends understanding by showing that digital access is not only seen as convenience in finding information but also as an experience that supports students in their learning, assignment completion, and thesis writing. In this sense, the bookless library serves not merely as a technological tool but as an integral part of the academic experience that offers real, practical benefits to students.

Students' experiences in using digital services also highlight the importance of interface quality and ease of system navigation. This finding aligns with research by Utami et al. (2025) and Zakira et al. (2025), which affirm that user experience is shaped by the quality of digital service design. Although the library portal provides various features to support information searching, some students still encounter difficulties in understanding menu functions, choosing the right keywords, and making full use of the search features. This condition reinforces the view that the success of digital services depends not only on the availability of technology but also on the usability of the system and users' ability to interact effectively with the services provided.

The use of the institutional repository as a source of academic references also reinforces the findings of Cahyono and Masrurroh (2025), Maulidia and Mutia (2025), and Jamil et al. (2026), who emphasize the importance of digital literacy in using electronic information sources. The institutional repository is one of the most widely used services among students because it provides access to various scholarly works that are relevant to their academic needs. However, this study finds that the function of the repository is not limited to simply storing digital documents. It also serves as an academic learning space that helps students understand the structure of scholarly writing, research methods, and the development of academic arguments. Therefore, ongoing efforts to strengthen information literacy and improve the quality of digital services are necessary so that the full benefits of these services can be realized.

What sets this study apart from earlier research is its focus on how students interpret the bookless library as part of their everyday academic lives. Unlike the studies by Zakira et al. (2025), Safarudin et al. (2025), and Nasaruddin et al. (2024), which place greater emphasis on ease of access, service quality, user satisfaction, and system implementation, this study centers on students' subjective experiences as service users. Through a phenomenological approach, the experience of using the bookless library is understood as a process that involves adapting to technology, finding meaning in the use of information sources, and employing strategies to overcome various obstacles. This perspective shows that the bookless library is not merely an information system but also contributes to shaping how students learn, write scholarly work, and develop their academic abilities. These findings expand the scope of digital library research, which has largely focused on technical aspects, toward a deeper understanding of users' lived experiences within the context of higher education.

Research Limitations (Disclaimer). The main limitation of this study is the relatively small number of informants, limited to eight students from a single university, meaning that variations in experience from other institutional contexts have not been fully captured. In addition, the data were obtained only through in-depth interviews, limited participatory observation, and document review, and thus have not been compared with portal usage logs or system analytics. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings, so that the results are understood as a picture of contextual experience rather than as a generalization

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the bookless library services at Universitas Negeri Makassar represent a meaningful academic experience for students. This experience is primarily characterized by the freedom to access learning resources without spatial and temporal constraints, the usefulness of the institutional repository as a source of academic inspiration, and the support of the digital portal for final project needs and reference searching. However, this study also found that students' experiences are not always seamless. Interfaces that are not yet fully intuitive, system slowness during peak hours, and disparities in digital literacy continue to affect how students utilize these services.

From a methodological standpoint, this phenomenological study shows that students' experiences must be placed at the core of digital library evaluation. Service success depends not only on collection size or system sophistication but also on the degree to which students

can experience access in a comfortable, clear, and meaningful manner. On a practical level, this study points to the need for simplified portal navigation, increased server capacity during peak usage periods, and better-structured information literacy initiatives. Theoretically, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on bookless libraries in Indonesia by positioning user experience as a primary source of meaning rather than as just additional data.

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