

School Libraries – Gateways to Development

A Statement from the [School Libraries Section](#), International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

School libraries around the world, in their many forms, share a common purpose: the enhancement of “teaching and learning for all.”

“The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens.”

[IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto](#)

Education challenges

Economic and educational inequality continues in many countries (the top 1% or 10% can afford to give their children private education with top quality school libraries). To improve everyone's lives, the benefit of a quality school library needs to be extended to all.

Education is changing through changes in curricula and through enhanced technology (e.g., cloud computing, gaming, smartphones, 1:1 computing). The number of high school graduates is increasing worldwide but the number of tertiary graduates is still lagging in many countries. Economic and social changes are increasing the number of foreign students and second language learners in schools and universities. The ubiquity of technology has changed the way that learners access information and interact with others.

Libraries are being affected by the digital agenda and by trends such as “open” access data, learning initiatives, and convergence. Many governments have developed planning documents similar to the [European Union's The Digital Agenda](#).

The goal of school libraries

The goal of all school libraries is to develop information literate students who:

- are responsible and ethical participants in society;
- competent self-directed learners, who are aware of their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas;
- display confidence in their ability to solve problems and know how to locate relevant and reliable information;
- are able to manage technology tools to access information and to communicate what they have learned;
- are able to operate comfortably in situations where there are multiple answers or no answers;
- hold high standards for their work and create quality products;
- are flexible, able to adapt to change and able to function both individually and in groups.

The role of school libraries in supporting development through access to information

The school library operates as:

- a dedicated physical and digital space in a school that is open and accessible to all;
- an information space providing equitable and open access to quality information sources across all media, including print, multimedia and curated digital collections;
- a safe space where individual curiosity, creativity and an orientation toward learning are encouraged and supported and where students can explore diverse topics, even controversial topics, in privacy and safety;
- an instructional space where students learn the capabilities and dispositions for engaging with information and for creating knowledge;
- a technological space providing a diverse range of technology tools, software and expertise for the creation, representation and sharing of knowledge;
- a literacy center where the school community nurtures reading and literacy development in all its forms;
- a center for digital citizenship where the learning community learns to use digital tools appropriately, ethically and safely, and learns strategies to protect identity and personal information;
- an information environment for all in the community through equitable access to resources, technology, and information skills development that are not always available in homes;
- a space open for cultural, economic professional and educational events (e.g. events, meetings, exhibits, resources) for the general community.

The school librarian as a key component of development

The school librarian is responsible for the school's physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to teaching and learning. More than fifty years of international research collectively (see, for example, Haycock, 1992, *School Libraries Impact Studies* identifies:

- the size and quality of a school library's teaching and support staff and its collections are the best school predictors of academic achievement;
- students who score higher on standardized tests tend to come from schools with more school library staff and more access to services and resources such as books, periodicals, and online material, regardless of other factors such as economic ones. (see, for example, *IASL Research Abstracts*, Kachel & Lance, 2013).

Schools with teacher-librarians were more likely than those without to incorporate specialized technology applications into teaching practices. Such applications included spreadsheets, databases, software applications supporting creative works and software for special needs and desktop publishing.

Schools with at least one teacher-librarian devoted to the school library were roughly three times more likely than those with less than one full-time teacher-librarian to have links to the library on the school's informal Web site.

When compared with schools which had only a part-time teacher librarian, principals reported that in schools with at least one full-time teacher-librarian, the teacher-librarian was more likely to play an important or very important role in developing or contributing to the school Web site.

School libraries help close the achievement gap for poor children, minority children, and children with disabilities—and in countries with deep gender gaps, for girls.

Students in schools with qualified librarians are more likely to have access to locally produced materials in home or mother tongue languages and to current materials -- benefits civic engagement, social cohesion, positive self-identity.

Good school libraries prepare students for success in postsecondary studies and in the world of work, the world of work involves ill-defined problems that require collaborative work.

Examples

A teacher-librarian in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in a school with many immigrant and refugee families invites the families into the school library and then takes them on a school-funded field trip to the local public library and bookstores as part of helping parents to support the literacy development of their children (and of the adults as well).

Where schools do not have the resources to create and staff libraries, the community library with staff specially trained to support literacy development of students and their families (rural Ethiopia) can fill the gap. Critical in these community libraries are their connection with teachers in the schools and the library and education infrastructure of the region. (Asselin, Abebe & Doiron, 2014, *IFLA library*).

The following examples are taken from *Global Perspectives on School Libraries: Projects and Practices* (Marquardt & Oberg, 2011):

- Camels, burros, elephants, boats and trucks are used to bring books and literacy to children in remote communities in Azerbaijan, Columbia, Ethiopia, Finland, Kenya, Norway, Thailand, and Venezuela (Doiron);
- The Lubuto Library Project provides culturally relevant resources and educational experiences to orphans and other vulnerable children and youth in Zambia (Lagner, Meyers, & Wagner);
- The annual Readathon in Namibia promotes a reading culture by providing children with stories in their home languages (Namibia has 13 written languages) and has been the impetus for publishing children's books in the home languages for schools and libraries (Töttemeyer);
- A school staff in works with library school faculty, a government ministry and an international development agency to develop a model school library in a rural area of Indonesia (Zain, Marwiyah, & Zulaikah).

Recommendations

While the range of school library facilities and operations varies throughout the world, school libraries everywhere are focused on supporting and advancing student learning. Legislation and sustained funding ensures:

- A school librarian qualified in librarianship and teaching with the professional expertise required for the complex roles of instruction, reading and literacy development, school library management, collaboration with teaching staff, and engagement with the educational community;
- A targeted high-quality diverse collections (print, multimedia and digital) that support the school's formal and informal curriculum;
- An explicit policy and guidelines for ongoing growth and development of the resources needed to support student's intellectual development and skill advancement;
- Information and communications technology (ICT) services that extend the reach of the library to all areas of the school and to the home. A networked information technology infrastructure provides access to collections, community resources, curated digital collections, and the tools for undertaking research-based inquiry and the construction, presentation and sharing of knowledge.