

## What is a school library? : International Guidelines

Report prepared by the Research Team, Research SIG,  
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**An appropriate description of a school library and a school library program.** Team members of the IASL Research SIG agree that it is important to consider and communicate the purpose, mission and intent of school libraries, not only to those who work in the Library and Information Science (LIS) discipline, but also to those who are concerned with the provision of educational quality to all students throughout the world: government administrators, school leaders, educators and others who are not members of the LIS community. An appropriate definition should be relatively simple, and clearly understood, encompassing the various types of school libraries across the globe, and should be used as a benchmark so that school libraries that fall below the standard will strive to reach the ideal. Furthermore the document should complement existing concepts presented in other well-known documents, for example the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (1999).

Also, an appropriate definition for a school library at international level is essential before meaningful international research about school libraries can be carried out.

Images and concepts of the function of a school library vary from place to place, from state to state and from country to country. School libraries throughout the world come in many different shapes and sizes. Some school library collections are inadequate with insufficient books for all the students in the school; books are often outdated, old and dirty. Books and information in the students' mother tongue are unavailable.

Furthermore, some schools do not have a room or special space for the school library. There is no central accommodation which provides access to books, information, audio-visual materials, other media, and reliable Internet access. Some have no electric power.

Also, people who run school libraries are often teachers, parents, volunteers and sometimes the children themselves, who have received various levels of (or virtually no) training in library and information science. A review of the literature has shown that in many countries, a school librarian / teacher librarian is actually a teacher who has been put in charge of the school library, often on top of a full teaching load. The term “school librarian” or “teacher librarian” can be used for qualified personnel, but is also be used to refer to anyone manning the school library, even a clerk. Team members agree that library staff members should be encouraged to take advantage of available training programs whenever possible, thus enhancing their qualifications so that they will eventually become trained (accredited) school librarians/teacher librarians.

While there is a great variety in school libraries and school library staff, as described above, is true, they all have a common purpose - a focus on student learning. The learning environment which school libraries provide will certainly vary, however it is that common purpose which inspires school librarians to constantly improve and to connect with the school community.

**What are the basic requirements of a school library?** The research team recognizes the need to distinguish between defining a school library and setting standards or guidelines for basic requirements of school libraries. In May 2012, all members of the research team were invited to submit their comments. It has been agreed that an incomplete description would at least contain some of the following aspects:

- School libraries have a number of critical functions / central roles, but perhaps the most important are:
  - Promoting the love of learning.
  - Supporting the school curriculum; expanding resources to support teaching and learning. It offers advice, professional development and knowledge of appropriate learning and teaching material, digital and non-digital, in traditional and emerging forms.
  - Teaching learners media and information literacy skills, while at the same time thoughtfully introducing and integrating available information and communication technologies. This function includes

supporting inquiry and ensuring that all learners are effective and ethical users and producers of information.

- Promoting literacy (on all platforms). The school library assists with literacy development and promotes the concept of reading as a pleasurable, voluntary activity, which contributes to an individual's quality of life.
- The school library program supports learning and teaching for the entire school community; it should be a constructivist learning environment, supporting the school curriculum and promoting resource-based learning.
- The school library is a learning environment that provides space (physical or virtual), access to resources, and services to encourage and support student and teacher learning.
- The school library program provides expertise in both pedagogy and Media and Information skills.
- School libraries throughout the world are run / managed by school librarians / teacher librarians who have been educated to carry out this work and have received an applicable accreditation. School librarians/teacher librarians have an orientation to this service profession, continuously contributing to quality teaching and authentic learning. School librarians offer advice, professional development and knowledge of appropriate learning and teaching materials, digital and non-digital, (Phillips, 2011) in traditional and emerging formats. Their behavioural attitude enables them to actively engage the students and teachers.

Does the lack of qualified personnel deny it the status of a school library? Qualified personnel is the norm, however many enthusiastic people who are managing school libraries are still attempting to reach this norm (see above).

- The school library and the school library staff draw attention to the expanding resources available for teaching and learning, supporting the curriculum, supporting teaching and learning, however, team members agree that in many parts of the world school library resources are mostly books and other print

media, as well as a variety of audiovisual resources.

- Most conventional definitions emphasize the collection as the heart of a school library, describing a library as a collection of books and other resources organized for use.
- Accommodation, a space for the school library, is also important, not only central school libraries but also classroom library corners and portable libraries that provide school library services in many parts of the world.

An international school library toolkit would provide instruments and services for school libraries throughout the world and should be appropriate for (full or partial) usage in many different learning situations. It must therefore rely on an international definition or description of what a school library actually is. It should be possible to apply this description to school libraries in developing, emerging and developed countries, in all the IASL world regions.