

AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF
SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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The aims of this study were to establish a framework for the comparison of school libraries, and then to use the framework to assess the current state of school libraries internationally. The relationships between selected socio-economic variables and school library variables were also examined, as well as factors that had encouraged and hindered the growth of school libraries.

The framework for comparison, which consisted of a series of indicators and variables, was established by surveying a panel of thirty experts on school librarianship in twenty-nine countries. The five highest ranked indicators were the existence and extent of school libraries, personnel, facilities, materials and equipment, and the role of the school library and the teacher-librarian.

The indicators were then used as a basis to survey the current state of school libraries internationally. Sixty-four countries responded to the survey. Among the major findings were that although centralized school libraries existed in most of the responding countries, the library was seen as either a supplementary or a non-essential service. In more than 75% of the responding countries, the typical school library had a person in charge, but he or she was often without a defined role or had

a basic role of making the resources available. The typical library contained printed, audio and visual materials; computers and communication equipment were present in less than 25% of them.

Two strong relationships were observed. The presence of libraries in primary schools had a strong positive correlation with the gross national product per capita of the country, but had a strong negative correlation with the percentage of the population in a country under the age of 15.

The most frequently mentioned factors encouraging growth of school libraries were the availability of funds, the role of a central organization, and the education/training of teacher-librarians, whereas the most frequently mentioned factors hindering growth were the inadequacy or total absence of funds, the lack of trained personnel, and problems related to physical facilities.

The appendices include the two survey instruments and a list of official sources of information on school libraries in the responding countries.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Role of the School Library in a Changing World

In the past two decades, three major changes in the world's social structure have converged. Global interdependence has rapidly increased, western dominance has eroded, and American hegemony has declined. The convergence of these changes is globalizing many facets of American society, including its economy, polity, demography, and culture (Anderson 1990, 32-33). The United States and many other countries are today at critical crossroads. In every direction there are new economic, political, cultural, ecological and technical realities. To face these realities, the populace and leaders need attitudes and behaviors that recognize and promote interdependence and cooperation among nations, and schools have a major role to play in this process of adaptation (Tye 1990, 1).

We also now live in what has been termed an 'information society'. People need information to meet a wide range of personal, business and citizenship needs. The amount of information produced is expanding rapidly, and enormous strides are being made in organizing, storing and accessing it. A person needs to be able to recognize when information is necessary, locate it, evaluate it, and use it effectively

(American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy 1989, 1-5).

In order to function effectively in an information society, an individual needs a higher quality education which includes not only basic skills, but also higher order intellectual skills such as analytical, evaluative, inferential and problem solving skills (Liesener 1985, 11-12). One major challenge facing educational systems in most countries today is how to meet these demands for higher quality education within increasingly severe national financial constraints. Faced with severe economic pressures, many countries must find new financial resources, accept quality and equity deterioration, and/or increase the efficiency with which educational resources are used (Chapman and Carrier 1990, 3).

One factor which has been linked to increasing the internal efficiency of education is the school library¹. The presence and active use of a school library is one resource that can significantly influence student achievement (Didier 1985, 33; Haycock 1987, 28; Woolls 1990; Haycock 1992). The relationship between library resources and programs and student achievement has been documented not only in the United States, but also in countries like Indonesia (Mahar 1983, 19). In a review of studies on factors that raise student achievement in third world countries,

¹ The term 'school library' is used here in a generic sense to refer to an area or system of areas in a school where an organized collection of books and other media, related equipment, and services by a designated person or persons, are made available to pupils, teachers and other staff of the school. Other terms which are used internationally include 'school library media program', 'instructional materials center', 'school resource center', or simply 'school library'. The term 'school library' is used henceforth in this dissertation for uniformity.