

The role of libraries in promoting reading and literacy

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Libraries and literacy

- We need to dispel the myth that reading skills and literacy can only be achieved through formal education. There is another side – the role of libraries.
- The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto states that *The school library is integral to the educational process.*
 - One of the core services of school libraries: developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
- The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto includes the following amongst the missions of public libraries:
 - supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.

Libraries in Malta - background

This presentation will focus on the role of public and school libraries in promoting literacy and developing reading skills amongst their users.

- Over 50 public libraries in Malta and Gozo, including a Central Public Library, Regional Libraries and Branch Libraries.
- All secondary state schools and most primary schools have a library.
- The other libraries are:
 - The National Library
 - Special libraries
 - Academic libraries

School Libraries in Malta – current situation

- One of their primary objectives - provide adequate collections for reader development.
- A good number of teacher-librarians in secondary schools are now qualified with a University Diploma.
- Schools' Library Service provides the necessary support services required. One of its main services is:
 - **Advising the Education Division on the use of libraries to support the curriculum and as part of the on-going literacy campaign.**
- Reader Services depend mostly on initiatives by individual teachers and teacher-librarians.
- No specific budget and formal collection development policies.
- Quality of resources available is an issue in most school libraries.
- Opening hours depend on schedules of teacher-librarians in secondary schools and ad hoc arrangements in primary schools.
- Access to internet is mostly through classrooms or computer rooms and not through the library.

Potential of school libraries

- Research has shown that:
 - library provision in primary and secondary schools has an impact on student learning.
 - library provision can contribute to academic achievement, particularly in reading literacy, in primary level students.
 - the contribution to learning is dependent upon quantity and quality of collections and access to further resources and support from outside the school environment.
 - school library provision is dependent upon clear guidelines and standards, staff development training and support from authorities.

School libraries have an important role in developing reading literacy amongst children

- Evidence shows that properly funded and sustained school libraries have the potential to play a pivotal role in improving literacy and reading habits amongst children and young adults.
- More emphasis should be made on resource provision than on physical buildings.
- Specific services and programmes should be introduced in school libraries to help children with reading difficulties.
- School libraries should play an important role in the development of the “inclusive education”.
- The eLearning Strategy should include the automation of school library catalogues and maximising the potential of school libraries through the provision of necessary hardware and software to enable librarians to integrate ICT in readers’ services.

MaLIA recommendations on School libraries

- Full-time librarians in colleges and secondary schools. Roving full-time librarians in primary schools.
- There is a need for more collaboration between the teaching and library professions. This should enhance the quality and frequency of librarian input in support of teaching and learning.
- Teachers are provided training in library management, resource integration within the curriculum and selection of reading material. Training in curricular issues and resource integration is provided for librarians and volunteers working in school libraries.
- Use of ICT in the provision of library services in all school libraries.
- Introduction of specific programmes in reading literacy and well as information literacy.
- Specific budget for collection development managed by the SLS in line with a formal collection development policy to ensure quality.

Public libraries In Malta - current situation

- Central Public Library offers the following readers' services:
 - Story telling
 - Kemm inhobb naqra
 - Il-Pjacir taghna nitkellmu maghkom
 - Audio- Visual Library
 - Services to people with special needs
- Regional and Branch libraries offer very limited Readers' Services.
- All libraries have to operate on a shoe-string budget.
- Agreements with local councils have had a positive impact on libraries in certain localities – but not all.
- Collection development is sporadic: quality of resources is an issue.
- Opening hours have been increased in some localities but need to focus more on the needs of the users.

Potential of public libraries

- Internationally, public libraries have supported literacy and reader development for centuries. So much so that they were called the Universities of the social class.
- As highlighted in the first slide, public libraries should support literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiate such activities if necessary.
- Public libraries should be in a position to understand and support the community's literacy needs. This will enable them to provide literacy and outreach services.
- To achieve their potential, public libraries in Malta need to redefine themselves and move away from the traditional emphasis on book circulation and story telling.

A more central role for public libraries

- Public libraries have the potential to play an active and central role in promoting reading and combating illiteracy amongst the local communities.
- More emphasis on qualified and trained staff is needed for the delivery of professional services.
- Automation and collection development are fundamental basics that should be in place. Cooperative collection development and ILL will improve both the qualitative and the quantitative aspect of services to users.
- Access to and use of technology. This will maximise the potential of public libraries in service provision. Provision of Internet points, EIRs, Wikis, Blogs, social networking.
- Strategic direction and management of programmes is needed rather than idiosyncratic approaches.

MaLIA recommendations for public libraries

- Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners
- Introduction of new services:
 - Adult Literacy Library Service
 - Community-based literacy programmes
 - Homework Clubs
 - Books for Babies
- Community outreach – encouraging staff to connect with local groups and explore ways the library can help them.
- Fit for purpose product
 - Display of new books / older stock removed
 - Books/magazines/music for teenagers
 - Embrace technology

Recommendations for authorities

- Give libraries a chance – a non-tangible return on investment is guaranteed.
- A National Adult Literacy Survey is needed to quantify the number of adult illiterates – data will assist in programme preparation.
- Libraries should be an integral part of our educational system.
- Introduce public-private partnerships for major library projects.
- Make 2009 the National Year of Reading. This is being done in the UK in 2008.
- Allocate EU funds for specific library services mentioned in this presentation.
- Implement a new Libraries Act that provides the proper infrastructure for policy making and implementation.
- Bring all stakeholders together and discuss a strategic plan to improve reading literacy as well as functional literacy.

Thanks

- Contact us at info@malia-malta.org