Ocnos
Revista de Estudios sobre lectura
http://ocnos.revista.uclm.es/

School libraries: systematised bibliographic review and analysis of scientific production (2010-2019)

Bibliotecas escolares: revisión bibliográfica sistematizada y análisis de la producción científica (2010-2019)

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Abstract

This article is a bibliographic review of the scientific production published internationally from 2010 until the middle of 2019 on the concept of School Library. The objective was to establish an updated status of the issue on the most relevant research in the school library area. In order to achieve this, a systematic methodology of bibliographic selection was applied in four search engines using descriptors related to the research objective. Therefore, a document bank consisting of 70 titles was obtained. This bank served as the basis of the scientific evidence of the review. The results obtained indicated that the main tasks of the school library are to promote the reading habit, to offer various reading media and to facilitate metacognitive learning in any area of the school curriculum. To achieve this, teachers and librarians must unify efforts in order to turn the school library into a pillar of the school's educational project. Likewise, it is necessary to look for alliances in the social environment and to develop activities that boost the school library and in which families are also involved.

Resumen

Este artículo es una revisión bibliográfica de la producción científica que desde el año 2010 hasta la mitad de 2019 se publicó a nivel internacional sobre el concepto de Biblioteca Escolar. El objetivo fue establecer un estado de la cuestión actualizado sobre las investigaciones más relevantes en dicho ámbito. Para ello, se aplicó una metodología sistematizada de selección bibliográfica en cuatro motores de búsqueda usando descriptores relacionados con el objetivo de investigación. Así, se obtuvo un banco de documentos formado por 70 títulos que sirvieron de base de la evidencia científica de la revisión. Los resultados obtenidos indicaron que los principales cometidos de la biblioteca escolar son fomentar el hábito lector, ofrecer diversos soportes de lectura y facilitar el aprendizaje metacognitivo en cualquier área del currículum escolar. Para ello, docentes y bibliotecarios deben unificar esfuerzos a fin de convertir la biblioteca escolar en un pilar del proyecto educativo del centro. Asimismo, se requiere buscar alianzas en el entorno social y desarrollar actividades de dinamización de la biblioteca escolar en las que se implique también a las familias.

Ocnos (2020), 19 (1): 32-42
DOI 10.18239/ocnos_2020.19.1.2152

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Introduction

The concept of School Library is used by the specialised literature (García, 2010) to refer to the educational space whose *raison d'être* is to facilitate teaching and learning processes linked to the use of educational resources, both on paper and in digital format. In this sense, the interest regarding school libraries within the specialised scientific community both at a national and international level is reflected in research that studies the role and evolution of school libraries in the last decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century (e.g. Durban, 2010; Neuman, 2003). However, none of these studies is a systematised bibliographical review on school libraries, and that precisely is what we want to develop in this paper. Hence the need for our research.

Outlook

Objectives, sources and methodology

The objective of this literature review, completed in July 2019, is to establish an updated status of the most relevant international research on school libraries in Early Childhood and Primary Education in the second decade of the 21st century in order to identify the current characteristics of school libraries, the main obstacles they face and to identify potential research opportunities linked to school libraries.

The methodology proposed by Hart (2018) was followed for the compilation of the review material, namely creating an optimal group of academic databases that is in turn made up of a generalist subgroup (Scopus, WoS, Dialnet Plus) and a specific subgroup of the research field (ERIC). The same analysis methodology was used in all four databases:

1. Preparation of a list of terms related to school libraries, taken from the multidisciplinary thesaurus of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the ERIC education thesaurus, as the use of these controlled and structured lists of terms makes the search for documents in specific areas easier. The following are some of the most relevant terms used in our search: School Libraries, Digital school libraries, School librarians / Teacher librarians and Reading habit.

2. The resulting list of documents was limited to the areas of Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities, since they include, *inter alia,* the subcategories Education, Library and Information Sciences and Public Administration.

3. Sorting of documents according to the relevance criterion (Naidorf, 2011).

4. Selection of the 30 most relevant documents from each database and discarding of any repeated documents.

5. Evaluation of the remaining list based on the prescriptions of Dixon-Woods *et al.* (2006) to rule out documents that were below certain quality thresholds. No exclusion criteria were applied (Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016) in order to avoid any possible bias or subjectivity.

6. A document batch of 70 books was obtained, which is the basis for this study's evidence.

In order to analyse the content of the selected documents, the methodological principles of qualitative research related to the critical examination of scientific texts were applied. being of descriptive nature and with the purpose of discovering "the basic components of a specific phenomenon by extracting them from a specific content" (López-Noguero, 2002, p. 168). Therefore, we established 6 thematic categories to organise and present the results.

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Results

School libraries as a space for learning and knowledge development both in physical and digital environments

On the basis of the results obtained, it was inferred that school libraries play a relevant role when they lie in the core of educational establishments, when they are the place of reference for the entire school community and are constantly self-evaluating (Albelda-Esteban, 2019; Cáceres, 2012; Ferrer & Moscoso, 2011; Jiménez, 2010; Lechtenberg & Phillips, 2018; Rumberger, 2018; Santos, 2017; Serrano, 2014; Stubeck, 2015; Varela, 2013; Velo, 2017). School libraries should be a flexible learning environment in which to create interdisciplinary connections and to implement projects related to reading habit promotion, information competence, metacognitive learning, and individual and group research processes (Cartier, 2014; Lambert, 2017; Schultz-Jones & Ledbetter, 2013). They should also facilitate the development of knowledge that is relevant to the entire educational community, such as "literacy competence, holistic learning, tutoring, social media, learning community, career development, computer thinking, resolution of problems, coding, student voice, social-emotional learning, and learning in itself" (Lewis, 2019, p. 56).

The rapid growth of technology also enhances exponentially the dimension of school libraries as information providers (Raja & Mansor, 2014). In this digital environment, school libraries must recognise the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and they must have a website, a webpage and any technology that may emerge (Allen, 2017; Amalia & Menanti, 2017; Cartier, 2014; Domínguez, García, Martinó & Méndez, 2016; Jiménez, 2010; Nasiruddin, 2017; Parrott, 2015, 2016; Santos, 2017; Spear, 2018; 'Supraha-Perišić & Črnjar, 2016). It is essential that school libraries are both analogue and digital environ-

ments, since students must develop skills that allow them to know how to search for and use reliable and verified information through any medium (Bedin, Teixeira & Machado, 2015; Kvenild, Shepherd, Smith & Thielk, 2017).

School libraries as spaces for the promotion of the reading habit and interest in reading different types of texts

One of the main missions of school libraries is the promotion of the reading habit and of the interest in reading and writing (Albelda-Esteban, 2019; Amalia & Menanti, 2017; Cáceres, 2012; Calvo, 2019; Coronas, 2010). Motivation and enjoyment of reading is achieved through the "exchange of ideas, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, experiences, conflicts and needs" (Labrada, Rojas & Rodríguez, 2011, p. 1). Thus, Jiménez (2010) refers to "reading promotion" as

> a series of activities, strategies and techniques aimed at promoting, enhancing and stimulating the approach of students to books, improving their reading habits, ensuring their growth as readers, moving from knowing how to read to willing to read and promoting the recreational aspect of reading (p. 1).

According to Domínguez *et al*. (2016), the five strategies most widely used to promote the reading habit are reading weeks, storytelling, book fairs, technologies and reading marathons. As for the most widely used resources, these are short stories, puppets, reader's corners and comics. Serrano's research (2014) presents a series of activities for students aged from 0 to 3 implemented in school libraries aimed at "understanding their perception of the book object" (p. 95), and that allow students to acquire certain levels of reading comprehension even before they can actually read.

The promotion of the reading habit and interest in reading is "the responsibility of any society that wishes to grow, develop and learn everyday" (Domínguez *et al.,* 2016, p. 245) and there are several agents and/or factors that influence such reading habit and interest. The role of

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the family (Cáceres, 2012; Castro, Aguilera & Úbeda, 2018; Jiménez, 2010; Serrano, 2014) is "an important indicator of the reading attitude and behaviour towards reading" (Kleijnen, Huysmans, Ligtvoet & Elbers, 2017, p. 13). In addition to the family, Valdés (2013) identifies two different factors linked with the reading habit and the pleasure in reading: reading comprehension and a compulsory reading plan. However, this author concludes that neither of these two guarantees a pleasure in reading. Moreover, according to Smith (2017), "students' perception that we are 'forcing children to read' can sometimes remove any positive outcomes that reading incentives should have" (p. 24). Age and gender are also factors that influence the reading habit (Bogel, 2011).

School libraries as working spaces to achieve the inclusion of the educational community through joint work projects

School libraries also stand out for their inclusiveness. The works of Cáceres (2012), Calvo (2019), Furtado & Oliveira (2012), Parrott (2016) and Pastana & Nóbile (2018) refer to experiences in which actions of inclusion and interculturality have been implemented in or from the school library. These actions are specifically designed for the benefit of minority and/or stigmatised groups, which highlight their experiences and subjectivities. Sometimes, the mere fact that the collection includes books about these groups contributes, on the one hand, to a more comprehensive and inclusive classroom environment (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013) and, on the other hand, it also helps the school library to "offer both windows and mirrors to the world" (Lechtenberg & Phillips, 2018, p. 59). The latter authors provide a rubric for self-assessment of the equitable capacity of the school library and set out a series of actions to be taken in order to increase this capacity. There are also major works related to inclusive education, such as Nasiruddin's (2017), which aimed at "attracting extremely poor children to school and improv-

ing their education in a sustainable manner through training and learning thanks to the innovative approach of a school library" (p. 26). This project has thus succeeded, among other things, in increasing the number of enrolments in educational contexts from 40% to 90%.

Another important function of school libraries is the design and implementation of new projects that enrich the lives of students (Jaime, 2012), which requires collaboration between the person in charge of the school library and the teaching staff (Cooper & Bray, 2011; Jimenez, 2010; Kimmel, 2012; Lambert, 2017; Lechtenberg & Phillips, 2018; Rawson, Anderson & Hughes-Hassell, 2015; Santos, 2017; Stubeck, 2015). Although teachers believe that students' learning would be more effective if both agents strive to work together, such collaboration rarely occurs (Montiel-Overall & Jones, 2011). This may be due to the fact that school libraries are normally used according to the traditional model, that is, teachers only use school libraries to teach a specific lesson in the context of their own teaching planning (Cartier, 2014; Gbadamosi, 2011; Parrott, 2016; Sturge, 2019).

The management of school libraries' bibliographical collections, notably digital collections

The bibliographical collection is a major element of the school library. According to Chang (2016), its correct management is also the main duty of the librarian. In the words of Selfa, Balça & Costa (2017) "the success of the School Library [...] mainly depends on two aspects: a) the school librarian who works in it and b) the quality and current relevance of the bibliographical collections selected by him/her this educational space" (p. 29); furthermore, its collection must be up-to-date and have the potential to awaken the pleasure in reading from an early age; the organisation of the collection must be readily comprehensible to the

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students and it should also have a wide range of books (Lo *et al.,* 2018).

Albelda-Esteban (2019) states that the school library's collection should cover all education and curriculum levels, cover any special needs and have varied genres in analogue and digital media. The idea of including digital resources in BE collections is also supported by 'Supraha-Perišić & Črnjar (2016) and by Parrott (2016), as their studies show that "60% of students prefer to read from a screen" (Supraha-Perišić & Črnjar, 2016, p. 355) and that e-books reinforce reading education for the new millennium learners or the so-called "digital generation" (Parrott, 2016). However, in the study conducted by Gbadamosi (2011), 66.66% of people in charge of a school library recognise that their bibliographic collections, mostly on paper, are deficient, inadequate or obsolete. This is mainly due to budgetary constraints (Parrott, 2015; Takeda, 2019).

The role of the school librarian as manager and facilitator of access to the bibliographical collection

As mentioned above, the person in charge of the care, organisation and operation of the school library is -by definition- the school librarian. The school librarian paradigm would be the American one (Judge & McMenemy, 2014), with the dual qualification of teacher and librarian and the support of the administration, solid professional associations and robust standards. They are above all a flexible person, due to their triple role as teacher/educator, librarian and cultural manager (Jaime, 2012), since they must be alert to new literary modalities and ways of reading (Abeyà *et al.,* 2017), they must anticipate the needs of users (Lo *et al.,* 2018), and be able to face the changing interests of students (Allen, 2017; Shion, 2013; Velo, 2017). Furthermore, they must know the contents of each of the areas of the school curriculum (Montiel-Overall &Jones, 2011), since they play a particularly important role in what is called making connections, that is, "connecting the curriculum with

resources, other curricula or past experiences" (Kimmel, 2012, p. 8). Buchter (2013) is committed to creating a new classification system within the school library so that students can be searchers and users of information independently, and the librarian can decide on how to arrange the collection so that users can move around independently.

Many authors believe the school librarian is responsible for achieving a greater impact on the student's information literacy and/or competence, as well as using information and technology in an ethical and responsible manner (Bedin *et al.,* 2015; Onyebuchi & Ngwuchukwu, 2013; Song, 2016; Suarez, 2016; Subramaniam *et al.,* 2015; Velo, 2017). Another characteristic of the school librarian is their initial and continuing professional training (Cooper & Bray, 2011; Song, 2011; Spear, 2018).

In many cases, school libraries are not managed by librarians, but by teachers who oversee it in addition to their work as teachers. Matsumoto (2017) studies the extent to which the level of use of school libraries and the quality of their services vary depending on whether they are managed by a school librarian or a teacher-librarian. He concludes that having a school librarian in charge is more effective. The teacher librarian does not feel sufficiently trained to manage the school library effectively, especially regarding the use of ICTs and how to develop the informational competence of the readers (Gbadamosi, 2011; Jaime, 2012; Song, 2011). There are many countries where teacher librarians do not have any professional library qualification (Judge & McMenemy, 2014). Varela (2013) proposes to implement specialised training so that teachers in initial training know how to give "a response to the needs detected in the educational field on the school library as a learning setting" (p. 112). Thus, teacher librarians would be able to propel school libraries in the absence of professional school librarians. Rawson *et al.* (2015) suggest developing collaborative actions between *trainee* school librarians

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and *trainee* teachers. Ribeiro, Mendes & Leal (2017) also analyse the role of school libraries in initial teacher training and the results show that having a school library during such training benefits both the learning process and future professional practice.

Problems (and possible solutions) related to the correct use and implementation of school libraries in the school curriculum

The lack of training of teachers working as school librarians is not the only problem of school libraries. Opening hours are also defined as a problem, since school libraries operate on specific hours, they coincide with class schedules and a system of scheduled visits is followed, usually once a week per class group (Cartier, 2014; Gbadamosi, 2011; Judge & McMenemy, 2014; Lambert, 2017; Santos, 2017; Stubeck, 2015). The attractiveness and usability of school libraries' webpages should also be improved (García & Faba, 2015; Jiménez, 2012, 2013), although this is less important in a context described as "grey and not very encouraging, with much to organise and redirect, a titanic endeavour" (Varela, 2013, p. 115) and where there is still much left to be done (Johnston and Green, 2018). School libraries mostly suffer from a lack of legal definition, administrative support, budget, specialised staff and students' interest. Furniture is also inappropriate, bibliographic collections are limited and the technological resources (if any) are inadequate or obsolete (Gbadamosi, 2011; Jaime, 2012; Spear, 2018; Valdés, 2013; Varela, 2013). Abeyà *et al.* (2017) believe the root of the problem is that "teachers, pedagogues and librarians finish their university studies and have not read much, know just a few authors, have read a few books only, and are aware of few ways of reading only" (p. 37). All these drawbacks make it difficult to develop the students' interest in reading and study skills. The figure of the school librarian is also often not legally defined, has no time to design, plan or implement activities, they work alone, have no support or consideration from the teaching staff and the parents, and, despite the fact that the school library is described as an inclusive body, do not feel competent to address matters such as attention to diversity, inclusion, equity and social justice (Dominguez *et al.*, 2016; Judge & McMenemy, 2014; Lechtenberg &Phillips, 2018; Subramaniam *et al.*, 2015).

In response to the obstacles above, several solutions are proposed. Santos (2017) suggests the implementation of "classroom-library work projects" (p. 48). On their part, Domínguez *et al.* (2016) argue that family support is supposed to be the key factor to improve reading habits and student performance. Kim (2012) suggests 12 strategies for the improvement of school libraries, such as the review and amendment of the laws on Primary Education and school libraries, training and employment campaigns for school librarians, selection and distribution of major research on school libraries among schools or implementation of "cases of excellence in education" (p. 219) related to literacy and information literacy. Finally, Ferrer & Moscoso (2011) suggest the following guidelines for improvement:

> greater involvement of teachers in the use of the library as a fundamental resource for their teaching. This is the only way for students to consider it a basic resource for their learning [...] extension of opening hours, personnel policies, lending, collection development, scheduling of activities and integration of computer equipment [...] The recruitment of stable, full-time staff is a priority in order to improve the operation and use of school libraries (p. 95).

These improvement guidelines would undoubtedly render school libraries functional spaces for the entire educational community.

Conclusions

This review establishes an updated state of affairs around school libraries as pedagogical spaces for the promotion of reading and information literacy (Durban, 2010; García, 2010). School libraries are still considered as educational spaces capable of responding to the teach-

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ing-learning needs of students, especially the acquisition of the reading habit. Theyare still characterised by its inclusive nature, with the potential to facilitate flexible learning and connections between disciplines, and to promote research and meta-cognition processes, as well as the development of informational competence. Moreover, their role in promoting the reading habit shall not be overlooked. However, the traditional model of school libraries is still deeply rooted and is mainly defined by the lack of a specialised professional profile, the lack of collaboration between teachers and librarians, and the limited economic means to renovate the furniture and to update the library collection and its technological resources.

Several research opportunities regarding school libraries have also been identified, notably at an international level, such as its integration in the daily work of each educational establishment and the social environment thereof, and the implementation of dynamic activities from school libraries plus subsequent analysis of the results of such implementation. To that end, there are several outstanding studies that emphasise the need for specific training aimed at school librarians, especially with regard to their dual function as library managers and reading promoters.

Finally, the bibliographic review carried out allows us to affirm that school libraries -at an international level- seek for training aimed at the figure of the school librarians following the North American model. This refers to librarians who are capable of formulating work proposals related to the development of the reading, literary and cultural competence in digital and analogical environments beyond the consultation of printed documents. Therefore, this figure is conceived as a reading mediator who promotes participation and cultural consumption in the broad sense of this concept. Although it is certain that this would be the paradigm of the school librarian, reality shows, as perceived

based on the bibliographical review made, that there are many problems that prevent school librarians from assuming the aforementioned functions.

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