

# SCHOOL LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT VS POLICY PROVISION: DIVERGENCE OR CONVERGENCE?

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## ABSTRACT

A policy and legal framework for school libraries is a guiding framework for the provision, development and management of school libraries. Similarly, it is a lever that standardises school library development, management and practice. Although the existence of a policy does not guarantee the development of efficient and functional school libraries, its inherent value cannot be overemphasised. It is widely documented that in South Africa, only 7.2 per cent of public schools have functional school libraries, which are crucial to enrich the quality of teaching and learning and support learners and teachers. The aim of this study was, firstly, to analyse the legal and policy provision for school libraries in South Africa; and secondly, to examine the state of school libraries in Limpopo province, South Africa. The study further sought to establish whether there is divergence or convergence between policy provision and the status of school libraries in Limpopo. The study adopted a quantitative research paradigm and triangulated utilising questionnaires and document analysis as instruments to collect data. The study established that there is a regime of policies related to school libraries, most of which are still in draft form. Furthermore, the study confirmed that provision of policy does not necessarily translate into an efficient school library system. The distinct divergence means that there is no correlation between policy provision and practice. The study recommends that the existing school library policies should be streamlined, adopted and implemented to scale up the development of efficient and functional school libraries in Limpopo.

## KEYWORDS

school libraries, school library policy, school library development, Limpopo province

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Because of South Africa's chequered past, school library development in the country is still asymmetrical 20 years into the democratic dispensation. For instance, it is widely documented that only 7.2 per cent of public schools in the country have functional school libraries (Equal Education 2011; NEIMS 2011; Rademeyer 2007). The skewed development of school libraries is the undesirable consequence of the apartheid legacy that marginalised certain racial groupings through inferior education, inadequate funding, infrastructure development and resources provision (Asmal 2000; Hart 2002; Hart & Zinn 2007; Machet & Tiemensma 2009; Mahwasane, Meyer & Fourie 2008; Mangena 2003; Mojapelo & Fourie 2008; Naidoo 1997; SA. DAC 2009; Thomson 2011). However, in this new political era the dynamics of separation have shifted from race to locality as evidenced by the literature that asserts that most of the schools with functional school libraries are largely in urban or semi-urban areas, whilst in rural areas, school library development is minimal and virtually non-existent (Hart & Zinn 2007; Machet & Tiemensma 2009; Mahwasane et al 2008; Mojapelo & Fourie 2008; Naidoo 1997; SA. DAC 2009; Thomson 2011).

In view of the foregoing background, the overriding principle for the development of school libraries in South Africa is to redress past inequalities (Hart 2002; Hart & Zinn 2007; Machet & Tiemensma 2009). It is critical that they should transform to centres of information and knowledge that are either relevant to or capable of supporting learners and teachers in meeting their curricular and non-curricular needs. In this light, according to the *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services*, the South African Department of Basic Education (SA. DBE 2012) envisions schools having well-resourced and functioning school library and information services that will: instil a culture of reading and writing; promote respect for intellectual property; and support the acquisition of information literacy skills to access, process and use information resources in various formats, including digital formats. To achieve its goal the DBE should, in partnership with other stakeholders, provide strategic leadership in school library development.

The aim of the current study was two-fold. Firstly, it analysed the legal and policy provision for school libraries in South Africa; and secondly, it examined the status of school libraries in Limpopo province, South Africa. In particular, the study intended to establish whether there is divergence or convergence between policy provision and the status of school libraries in Limpopo. It was important for the study to look at school library policy provision in relation to actual practice in order to determine whether there

is a gap between the two. To realise this aim, the following research questions were developed:

- What is the nature and extent of the policy framework that informs school libraries?
- How does the provision of policies affect the governance, funding and functionality of school libraries?
- To what extent are school library policy prescripts reflected in the provision of school libraries in the province?

## **2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a quantitative approach to determine the correlation between policy provision and school library development in Limpopo (Keyton 2011). Data sources for the study included teachers, principals and officials from the Limpopo DBE. Stratified and simple random sampling methods were used to select the schools and purposive sampling was used for the officials. Within each school, convenient and snowball sampling methods were used to select the respondents. Out of 25 schools that were targeted, only 23 (92%) responded. The study triangulated data collection tools, utilising questionnaires, interviews and document analysis (Creswell 2009). Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from the principals and teacher-librarians, whereas interviews were conducted to collect data from the education officials.

## **3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings and discussions are presented according to the dominant themes.

### **3.1 LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

A legal and policy framework for school libraries is a guiding framework for the provision, development, management and sustainability of school libraries. Similarly, it is a lever that standardises school library development, management and practice. Although the existence of a library policy does not guarantee the development of efficient and functional school libraries, its inherent value cannot be over emphasised. A delineation of school library policy provision is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: School library legal and policy framework**

Legal or policy framework	Depiction
<i>Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996)</i>	The right of access to information, which is enshrined in the Constitution and in its Bill of Rights, links to the freedom of expression and freedom of access to information being responsibilities of libraries.
<i>ANC Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994)</i>	This is the African National Congress (ANC) framework for transforming an education system that was tarnished by apartheid ideologies. The framework underscores that resource-based learning, a culture of reading and information skills underpin quality education. To this end, it stresses that every education institution has an obligation to provide its learners with an equitable access to an appropriate library and information services. In particular schools, rural areas, informal settlements and townships will be prioritised as areas of library and information development and redress.
<i>National Education Policy (Act No. 27 of 1996)</i>	The Act pronounces that the Minister of Education is responsible for the development of the school library policy as a means of improving the quality and standard of education in the country.
<i>National Policy Framework for School Library Standards: A Discussion Document (1997)</i>	This discussion document states categorically that provincial departments of education are responsible for the development of school library policy as well as the implementation of school library models and standards.
<i>National Norms and Standards for School Funding (1998)</i>	Norms and standards are governing procedures for resource allocations to schools. The use of norms and standards depends upon the discretion of schools. The latter have to prioritise the provisioning of learning materials, equipment, maintenance and school libraries. These are some of the necessities that fall within the norms and standards allocation.
<i>Department of Education South African School Library Policy (2001)</i>	This draft policy document empowers provinces to develop provincial school library policy.
<i>Policy for Library Services in South African Schools (2002)</i>	This policy is the revised version of the Department of Education South African School Library Policy (2001) based on the inputs and comments from stakeholders. The policy gives provinces powers to draft school library policy.
<i>Draft National School Library Policy Framework (2003)</i>	This draft proposes two school library models, namely, one school, one library and one cluster, one library.

<i>Draft National School Library Policy (2005)</i>	This draft was produced by the heads of school library services in all nine provinces of South Africa. One of its highlights is that it proposes the centralised school library model.
<i>Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter (2009)</i>	The Charter informs library and information practice in the country. With regard to school libraries, it states that good school library and information services are essential to the transformation of the South African education system, which aims to provide quality schools for all South African learners.
<i>National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services (2012)</i>	This document affirms the vision of the Department of Basic Education of having well-resourced and functioning school library and information services which will contribute towards ensuring that all learners and teachers are information literate and independent lifelong library users and readers.

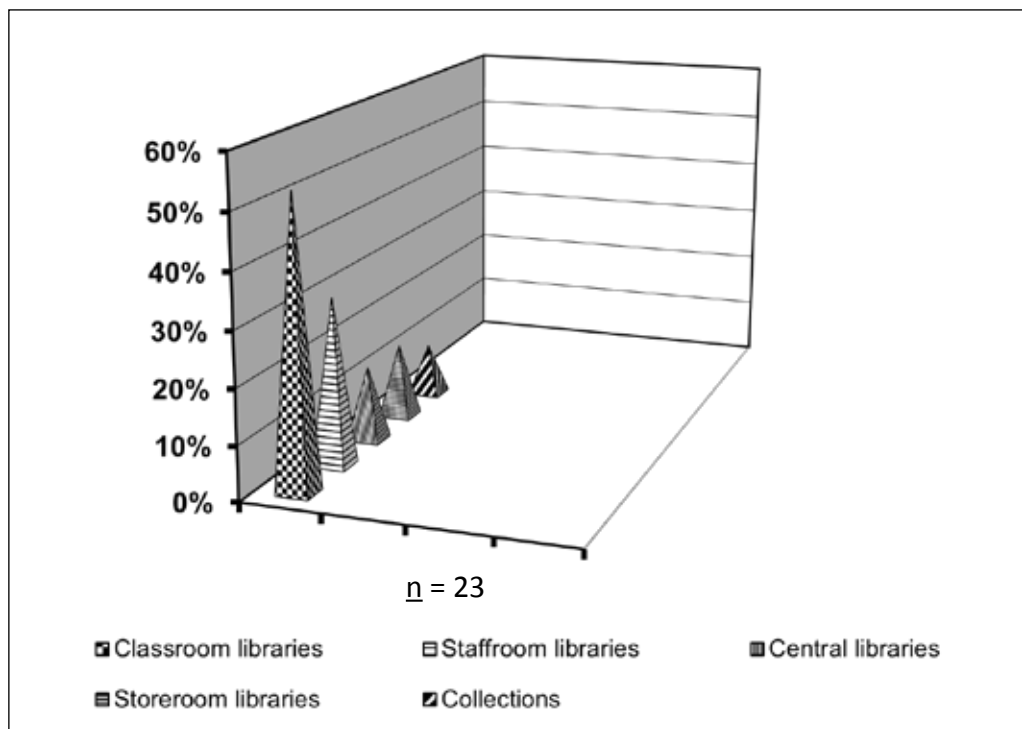
Table 1 presents a chronological outline of the school library legal and policy framework from 1994 to 2012. The table depicts two contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, it presents a series of documents with a common thread, namely, the need to have improved school library development and practice in the country. On the other hand, it portrays lack of advancement, coordination and commitment in the development of legal and policy framework for school libraries. Thus, it points to the development of innumerable discussion documents, policy drafts and guidelines that have not been finalised, let alone been adopted and implemented.

### **3.2 CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN LIMPOPO**

Limpopo is one of the nine provinces in South Africa. It is named after the Limpopo River which forms a border with Zimbabwe to the north and Botswana to the west. According to the 2009/10 Draft Plan of the Limpopo Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), only 10 per cent of the population has access to libraries.

#### **3.2.1 School library amenities**

The study established that due to lack of central school libraries in the majority of the schools, the use of other school library models has been eminent.



**Figure 1: School library facilities**

The findings clearly established that there are basically two categories of schools, namely, those with libraries and those without. Of the 23 schools that were surveyed, four (17%) respondents claimed to have a library facility that is also used for multiple functions such as staffroom, storeroom and classroom. Only three (13%) respondents claimed to have central school libraries used solely for their intended purpose. Central school libraries are dedicated libraries where resources are centrally managed by teacher-librarians. This type of setting gives learners and teachers opportunities to access library resources for classroom or home use. On the other hand, those libraries with multiple functionalities have books kept in cupboards or boxes. By its very nature, this kind of arrangement limits library access and usage. Summarily, this means that only seven (30%) out of 23 schools have school library spaces, although some of these are used for multiple purposes. It also came out that central libraries have reasonably better collections than their counterparts that are not well-resourced to support the curricular and non-curricular needs of their users. The results also showed that all the schools with central libraries are in affluent urban areas. This is confirmation of an assertion highlighted earlier that there is a perpetual development of inequalities in the development and provision of school libraries in South Africa. This is despite the provisions made in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1994); the ANC Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994); the National Education Policy

(Act No. 27 of 1996); the Library and Information Services Transformation Charter (2009); as well as the draft policies and discussion documents.

With regard to access and usage of the library, the respondents unanimously indicated that schools do not have a library period scheduled in the time-table. This means that libraries are used arbitrarily in the afternoon or whenever the librarians are available. The fact that there is no dedicated library period and that some collections are housed in multi-utility spaces might impact negatively on the accessibility and usability of library collections as well as on their arrangement, preservation and security.

A question was asked to determine whether schools have a school library policy or guidelines. Out of 45 respondents, only seven (16%) indicated that they have school library guidelines. The respondents were asked to indicate the anticipated value of a school library policy. The majority of the respondents, including those with no libraries, indicated that a school library policy is a guiding framework for the provision, development and management of a school library. It is encouraging to note that even though there is lack of a conclusive policy framework at national level, at lower levels there is an understanding of the inherent value of a school library policy.

### **3.2.2 Human resources**

Sufficient manpower is essential for any organisation to accomplish its intended outcomes and objectives.

#### **3.2.2.1 School Library Unit – Head Office**

The findings of the study established that the School Library Unit at Head Office comprises a Senior Manager and two Chief Education Specialists. The three officials have to manage and support 3 915 schools in the province (Limpopo, DBE 2014). The education officials are expected to conduct workshops for teacher-librarians in all schools including primary schools. They should also monitor and visit schools relating to library issues. They should ensure that copies of the *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* (SA, DBE 2012) reach schools and also ensure that relevant stakeholders are workshopped in order to implement the guidelines successfully. This is a tedious job for only three education officials. The study established that five departments, including education, are under national administration and all posts are frozen. The education officials indicated that four vacant Deputy Chief Education Specialist posts cannot be filled. This signifies some of the daunting challenges faced by provincial departments of education in the country to roll out school library and information services effectively for all schools. The absence of enough School Library Advisors has a further negative impact on the improvement of school library practice and culture in the province.

### **3.2.2.2 *Teacher-librarians***

Only six (13%) respondents indicated that their schools have full-time, qualified teacher-librarians. Out of these six, teacher-librarians in three schools have other teaching responsibilities, that is, they are not dedicated to the school library because they teach other subjects. This was attributed to the shortage of teachers in the province which makes it impractical to have a dedicated teacher-librarian especially for those schools with underdeveloped libraries. Similarly, the findings established that there is an acute shortage of qualified teacher-librarians in the entire province. Literally, it means that there are no foot soldiers to spearhead the effective establishment and development of an active and sustainable school library system in all five districts of the province, namely, Capricorn, Vhembe, Greater Sekhukhune, Mopani and Waterberg.

It also emerged that there is a lack of continuous professional development for teacher-librarians. When asked about capacity development opportunities to upgrade the skills of practising and/or aspiring teacher-librarians, the majority (78%) of the respondents responded negatively. Only a few (22%) respondents acknowledged that there are few workshops conducted by the DBE on school libraries. However, most of them were unable to attend because of their teaching responsibilities. This highlights a dual problem where, on the one hand, teacher-librarians cannot attend workshops because of competing priorities, and on the other, the lack of adequate staffing at Head Office resulting in few workshops being offered. The situation compromises the establishment of an active and sustainable school library system in the province. Hart (2013) affirms that school library support services in the provincial education departments lack the capacity to conduct workshops, and to monitor and visit schools to give advisory services.

### **3.2.2.3 *School library committees***

Out of 45 respondents, most of them (34; 76%) indicated that their schools function without school library committees. Only a few (11; 24%) respondents confirmed that they have school library committees. Those respondents with school library committees were asked to indicate the general functions of these committees. The functions were collated and listed as follows: drawing up guidelines and rules; evaluating library resources; determining opening and closing hours; ordering, accessioning, classifying, cataloguing and shelving the newly acquired library materials; managing funds, monitoring usage patterns; marketing and publicising library services and resources; taking decisions regarding library improvements; and celebrating and promoting literacy days.

## **3.2.3 Funding**

The study intended to establish the funding opportunities for school libraries. The majority (76%) of the respondents alluded that school libraries do not have annual budgets to buy library resources. Apparently, before 2008, most schools used to allocate 10 per cent



of the norms and standards budget for library materials, but this was stopped due to budget constraints. As an alternative funding option, the schools with central libraries charge learners extra fees to generate a pool for buying library materials. The same libraries indicated that they also host fundraising events to augment the library budget. It also emerged that a few respondents (9; 20%) received donations from members of the community, local and foreign companies, public libraries, Rotary Clubs and book publishers. Given the lack of commitment towards the finalisation of the national policy framework, it may not be surprising that there is no dedicated budget for funding for school libraries. The arbitrary funding model is unsystematic and unmaintainable and is likely to impact negatively on the development of school libraries and their ability to meet targets or obligations.

### **3.2.4 Collection development**

Very few (4; 9%) respondents indicated that they received core materials from the DBE to kick start their library collections. Most schools have old textbooks as library materials because there is no library budget allocated to procure new resources. The limited buying power of school libraries impacts negatively on the growth of the collection which in return impacts on the ability of the library to achieve its mandate. The decision to buy school library materials is at the discretion of the teacher-librarian and principal. With the lack of dedicated funding, it will be impossible to acquire library collections that are balanced in terms of form, language and content. Out of the 23 respondents, only one (4%) indicated that his or her school buys Internet bundles to allow teachers and learners to use cell phones to download relevant resources from the Internet.

With regard to the evaluation of library materials, 11 (24%) respondents confirmed that they evaluate the materials regularly. Those who did not evaluate their school's library resources put forward the following reasons: lack of a qualified librarian; lack of time; staff shortage; lack of appropriate skills and knowledge; lack of motivation; and the tedious nature of the evaluation process. When it comes to weeding of library materials, only the centralised school libraries indicated that they weed their resources annually. Two of them indicated that some weeded materials were stored in a storeroom for later use, whilst the other one said weeded library materials were given to the learners for home use.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although South Africa is 20 years into its democratic dispensation, the study confirms that school library development is still skewed, and plagued with discrepancies and inequalities. Although there are pockets of good practice, there are distinct limitations that reflect a lack of standardisation which perpetuates divisions amongst

the affluent urban and underdeveloped rural areas. This could be attributed to many factors including the lack of strategic leadership on school libraries evidenced by the assemblage of policies and discussion documents that are still in draft form. The lack of conclusiveness or decisiveness on the legal and policy framework for school libraries casts ambivalence over school library development in its entirety. Similarly, it creates an indeterminate state that not only perpetuates inequalities in access to libraries, but also reinforces social inequalities; compromises the quality of education; and denies learners opportunities that could be derived from accessing the wealth of information prevalent in the information society (Bloch & Ndebele 2010). This state of affairs defeats the fundamental vision of the DBE of advancing the transformation and redress agenda by developing well resourced and functioning school libraries. Similarly, it relegates school libraries to a non-priority zone (Hart 2002) wherein the threshold for planning and resource provision is compromised. Without a policy, there are no standards set for school libraries which in turn means that the baseline is fluid and is difficult to implement, to quantify or to measure.

The study concludes that to achieve convergence between policy provision and school library development the DBE, together with relevant LIS stakeholders, needs to develop, finalise, adopt, sanction and implement the *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* (SA. DBE 2012) as the official document for informing school libraries. This document is comprehensive and therefore covers most of the critical issues related to school libraries. It could, therefore, be sanctioned as a blueprint for re-engineering, planning, standardising, coordinating and managing school library development, ethos and practice in the country. This will not only highlight commitment to school library development, but will also strategically elevate school libraries to the apex of the education sphere in the country. It is hoped that the current study and similar studies will underpin school library development efforts in Limpopo in particular and in the country in general.

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