

Luisa Marquardt¹ - Raj Kumar Bhardwaj

*Ranganathan's Legacy and Implications
of The Five Laws of Library Science on
School Librarianship: An Exploratory Study*

Introduction

The role of school libraries as a dynamic and inclusive learning environment, that facilitates the access to information and resources of different type, learning opportunities and social interactions, has been recently challenged in many countries by both the change in information seeking behaviour and the pandemic (and consequent long closures, reduction of services, or limited opening hour).

As reported by Liu (2020), the replication (with some adaptations, for instance, regarding social interactions) in 2019 of a large-scale study that was formerly carried out in 1997 by Julie Morrison, Peter Pirolli, and Stuart Card at Xerox PARC (Morrison – Pirolli – Card 2001),² demonstrates how the technological evolution, the availability

¹ Corresponding author.

² The three authors aimed at understanding the most impactful activities on Web users' behaviour. Three taxonomic classification schemes were drawn based on Web users'

of mobile devices, the interest and motivation affect the way the Internet is currently used. Findings show that the Internet has become «a primary, influential source of information» to gather «knowledge and understanding a topic» as a self-education, although this seems to happen in more passive way than in the past (Liu 2020). Acquiring and developing creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, soft-skills is nowadays more important than ever. Educating to reading, media, information and digital literacy is therefore much needed to equip the 21st century learner (and citizen) with vital skills and competences. Ranganathan had already highlighted some factors - as the information and curriculum overload, the limit of brain capacity and memorization by students, the technical development and ongoing change - that justify the implementation of a functioning school library: in fact,

Educating for a changing world means imparting to the students the basic and current facts, ideas, and information, and habituating them the methods of finding out from books and periodicals other facts, ideas, and information, as and when, getting developed and needed. (Ranganathan 1973: p. 51)

Some countries have set up a school library strategy or stimulus plan (e.g., Portugal,³ Norway,⁴ Italy⁵). In the phase of relaunching or revamping the school library programs, taking in account important theories, research findings and insights can help to better focus on re-

responses that showed three variables – Purpose, Method and Content –, that concur to goal-driven behaviour (on those survey findings, see also Nielsen 2001).

³ Portugal. Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares (RBE), <<https://rbe.mec.pt/np4/home.html>>. See: *Quadro Estratégico 2021-2027*, Lisboa, Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares – Ministério da Educação, 2021, <<https://rbe.mec.pt/np4/qe.html>>.

⁴ Norway. Ministry of Culture, *National strategy for libraries 2020-2023 - A space for democracy and self-cultivation*, Oslo, Ministry of Culture, 2019, <<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/18da5840678046c1ba74fe565f72be3d/rom-for-demokrati-og-dannelse-nasjonal-biblioteksstrategi-2020-2023-engelsk.pdf>>.

⁵ Italia. Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito (MIM), *SiBiS (Sistema Integrato Biblioteche Scolastiche)*, <<https://www.bibliotecheinnovative.it/>>.

thinking the school library program, according to the change in teaching and learning styles.

The outstanding contribution to Library Science by Ranganathan encompasses all type of libraries, including school libraries. Fundamental concepts, such as the centrality of users and learners, their own information and knowledge needs, the customized and personalized reference service, the library as an educational environment, apply to school libraries, too. Ranganathan reflected on his own experience in designing and delivering librarianship courses addressed to prospective school librarians and found that «This new interest, in developing the library of a school as the hub of educational processes practised in the school, naturally gave me immense satisfaction» (Ranganathan 1973: p. 21).

Background and Literature Review

The discourse on school library's role is closely related to learning, both in a broader meaning (e.g., lifelong learning, active citizenship), and more closely at level of school instruction (e.g., implementation of the school curriculum, enhancement of the student's learning outcomes). A functioning school library enhances the overall quality of the educational offer and the learning outcomes, equips learners with the knowledge and competences needed in the 21st century (IFLA 2015). There are many aspects of Ranganathan's works that apply to the process of knowledge building, organization and representation. For instance, although related to aspects and stages of the classification process, the three planes of information can serve as a useful model or scheme. According to Ranganathan's thought, information is created in three «planes» (steps or locations): from a basic - intentional or unintentional - idea that pops up in someone's mind (the idea plane) to its formulation, description or expression through language, and proper and accurate selection of terminology (the verbal plane)

onto its writing down (the notational plane) (Ranganathan - Gopinath 1967). The clear identification of the users' information needs is central in such a process.

Learners' centrality, inquiry-based learning, the acquisition of critical thinking, problem-solving, multiple literacies have nowadays become increasingly important: the school library can provide an inclusive and effective learning setting. Similar concepts can be found in *New Education and School Library* (Ranganathan 1973). The rich volume embodies Ranganathan's intense experience of designing and delivering courses in librarianship addressed to schools, carried in different forms at the University of Madras from 1933 to 1937 (Ranganathan 1973, p. 22). In that book, Ranganathan points that the school library is central in the learning and teaching process; its program and several components (e.g., human, professional and physical resources) promote reading, sustain reading motivation and habits, educate to information, inspire and enable users, and help them develop critical thinking, awareness and social responsibility.

In a time of disruptive change, many school systems are under review, must evolve and adapt to design the next future societies and meet their challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic, current conflicts in many areas, climate change, economic and financial crises, and other factors affect societies and provoke several phenomena (for instance, increasing migration in some regions). Education, school instruction, and culture play a crucial role for a sustainable future. The implementation of appropriate strategies and plans is urgently needed to ensure the continuum in learning and mitigate the impact of those factors. New education acts that were recently passed in some countries include reference to libraries. For instance, the Indian *National Education Policy 2020* states that

Adequate and safe infrastructure, including working toilets, clean drinking water, clean and attractive spaces, electricity, computing devices, internet,

libraries,⁶ and sports and recreational resources will be provided to all schools to ensure that teachers and students, including children of all genders and children with disabilities, receive a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment and are comfortable and inspired to teach and learn in their schools (India 2020).

School libraries can still find a theoretical cornerstone of librarianship in Ranganathan's works, whose current relevancy is demonstrated (Carr 2014; Fernandes – Pinto – Farias 2021), and also by the attempts of updating the *five laws* to nowadays societies, technologies and users' needs, carried by authors, for instance, such as Gorman (1995) or Connaway and Faniel (2014).

One of the respondents to the questionnaire pointed out: «Ranganathan's thought is unifying for all types of libraries: why does the questionnaire have school libraries in the title?» (R27). Ranganathan's principles and works are often part of the academic curriculum, teaching practices (including the courses delivered by the authors of this paper), contributions such as essays and research papers related to many fields and aspects of Library Science. See, for example, the series of contributions to *S R Ranganathan Memorial Volume[s]* published in «Informatics Studies» (IS 2019-2020), or the papers presented at the IFLA WLIC thirty years ago (IFLA 1992). See also online teaching resources regarding the *five laws* (Sayanarayana 2017). Nevertheless, no relevant academic and/or professional literature in English that explicitly relates to Ranganathan's legacy in school librarianship is currently available.⁷ Some papers lack references to Ranganathan⁸ or may loosely refer to Ranganathan's thought, unless this is clearly stated and/or properly quoted:

⁶ The bold character is ours.

⁷ Search was made in several databases (CABI, ERIC, EBSCOhost, ALIS etc.).

⁸ For instance, the *Guidelines for Library Grant and Promoting Reading in Schools: Building an inclusive and joyful reading culture for children under Samagra Shiksha*, released by the Government of India 2019-2020, provide practical information on establishing or developing a school library and promoting reading and literacy (India 2019-2020).

for instance, they may recall how the school library role was highlighted as the beating hearth of school by Ranganathan who «stated that the school libraries should act as laboratories for students and the librarians should function as guides to help students in learning» (Mahajan 2010: p. 1).

Scope and Methodology

The main scopes of the study were as follows: conducting an exploratory research in order to gain knowledge if and to what extent Ranganathan's legacy is still alive, in particular, in the school library world (school librarianship, school library training, school library practices etc.); forming the foundations for further qualitative investigations and actions (e.g., the constitution of a focus group towards the design and implementation of professional development training), a further phase where a mixed method research design will be employed.

The discussion originated on the 18th of February 2022, during one of the online business meetings of the IFLA Division E, when its Secretary recalled the 50th anniversary of Ranganathan's death as a good occasion to honour, through studies, meetings, workshops or other type of activities, in one or more branches of LIS, the memory of such an impressive 'giant' of Library Science. The idea of an online survey on Ranganathan's legacy in current library practice was well received; the authors, who belong to two different IFLA Sections (School Libraries⁹ and Indigenous Matters),¹⁰ then met online and discussed several issues, agreed about focusing on school librarianship, made a decision about the method (online survey) and started designing the tool (questionnaire).

⁹ <<https://www.ifla.org/units/school-libraries/>>.

¹⁰ <<https://www.ifla.org/units/indigenous-matters/>>.

The questionnaire: structure and administration

The questionnaire was designed and tested using Google form. It is structured in five sections, as listed below, comprising a total of 32 items, plus some fields for optional comments:

1. Presentation.
2. Survey Participant's Profile, Role and Context (12 items).
3. Knowledge of Ranganathan's Works (knowledge or, at least, familiarity with Ranganathan's life, thought and works, and their effects on the daily practice - 6 items).
4. *The Five Laws of Library Science* (their knowledge and implementation - 14 items).
5. Further Information and Comments.

In the questionnaire presentation it was declared that data would be processed statistically and confidentially (anonymously), in respect of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and solely used for the purpose of the survey itself and not shared with anybody else. Responses were coded in order to avoid any personal identification. It was also declared that the main findings would be presented in the International Meeting on S.R. Ranganathan, Cremona (Italy), chaired by Prof. Carlo Bianchini (Pavia University), on May 23, 2022.

The invitation to fill in the questionnaire circulated through international library associations' list-servs (mainly IFLA and IASL) and also spread locally, through national library associations, school library association and school library groups. Responses were collected in 2022, between March 25 and April 25. Responses were coded and their content analysed and categorized.

Limitations

Before presenting and commenting the survey findings, it is worthy to take in account some limitations of the survey, such as langua-

ge, time, type of tool. English was chosen as the official language, a choice that prevented many people, who were not confident in that language or were afraid of mistakes, to fill in the questionnaire. The time frame for responding was limited to a month only, while the invitation took longer to reach potential respondents. Many countries cannot access Google forms. Nevertheless, most of the responses, although limited in number (28 respondents), were detailed and information rich.

All respondents were accepted, although a few of them stated they had a limited knowledge of Ranganathan (or no knowledge at all) and could not provide any response to some of the items; however, they answered to other questions, providing reflections and expressing information and training needs to be considered.

Data presentation

A summary of collected data is presented in this paragraph starting from the *Section 2* of the questionnaire, since the first one regards the presentation of the questionnaire and information about data protection.

Section 2 – Demographic: This section (12 items) collected data regarding survey participant's profile, role and context; gender, age and continent/country; qualifications and roles; role (if any) covered in the school library. Responses came from the following continents:¹¹ Asia (13, mostly from India: 10), Europe (10), America (4, three from Northern and one from Central America), and Oceania (1).

¹¹ Continents can be grouped or counted in many ways and generate different models (see, for instance, Worldometer, <<https://www.worldometers.info/geography/continents/>>).

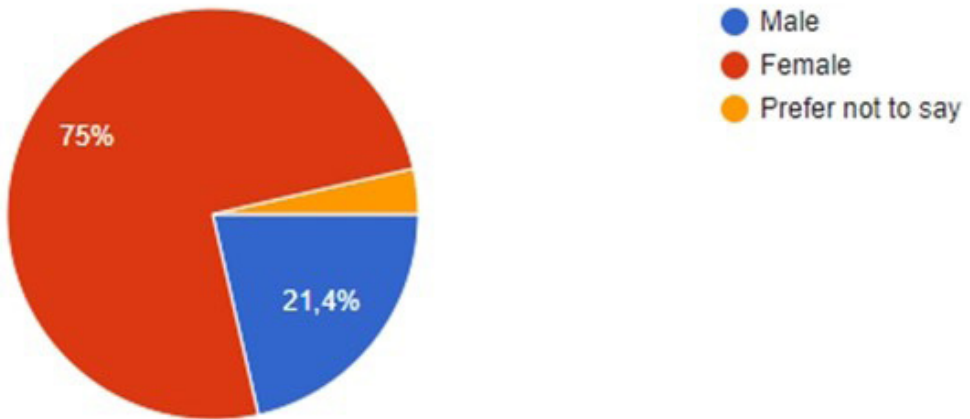


Fig. 1 Respondents' Gender

Respondents were mainly female (75%) (Fig. 1) and mature persons in their forties (28.6%) and fifties (32.1%) (Fig. 2).

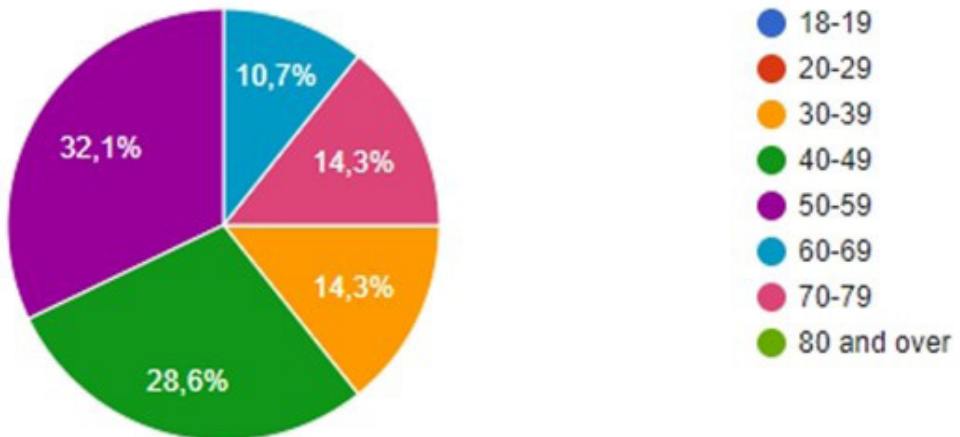


Fig. 2 Respondents' Age

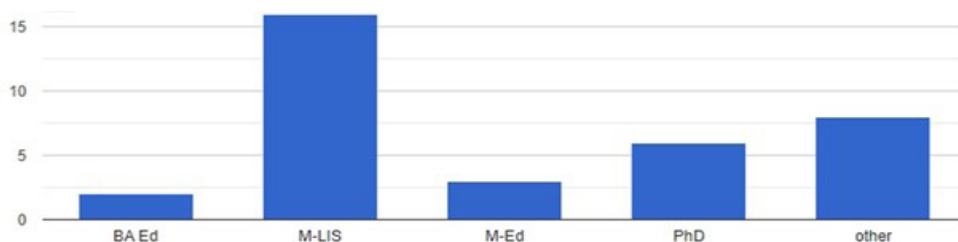


Fig. 3 Qualifications

About qualifications, the majority of respondents held a master's degree in LIS - Library and Information Science (16 out of 28), while only one declared to hold qualifications in both fields (M-LIS and M-Education) (Fig. 3).



Fig. 4 Job Position

About the job position, the majority of respondents were school librarians or teacher librarians (42.9%) (Fig. 4).

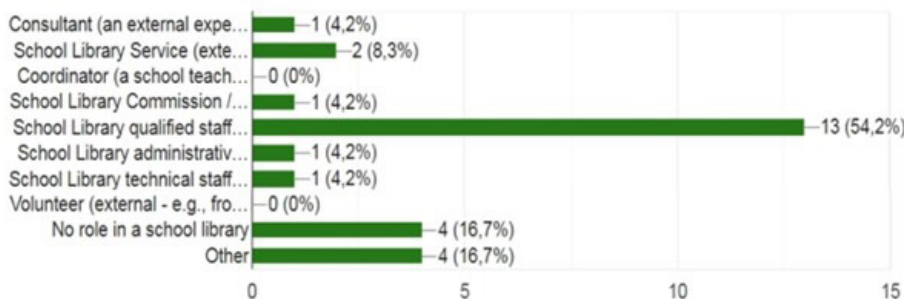


Fig. 5 Role (if any) covered in the school library

The majority of respondents (54.2%) plays a role as School Library qualified staff, while 16,7% play no role in a school library, and the same rates play roles other than the listed ones (e.g., consultant, volunteer etc.) (Fig. 5).

Section 3 – Knowledge of Ranganathan's works: This section (6 items) collected data regarding the level of knowledge of Ranganathan's works, or, at least, the familiarity with Ranganathan's life, thought and works, and their effects on the daily practice.

Q¹²: *How familiar are you with Ranganathan's life, thought and works?* (28/28 R¹³)

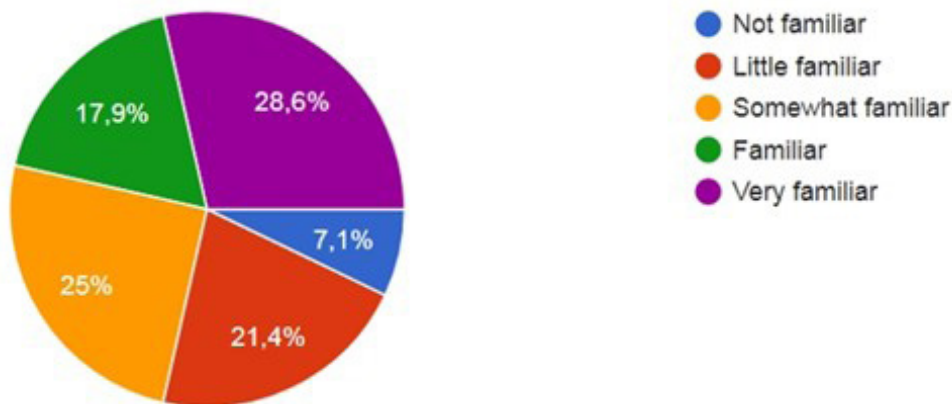


Fig. 6 Familiarity with Ranganathan's life, thought and works

¹² Q is for Question.

¹³ The Respondents (R) to the questionnaire were 28 in total; the number of responses varies from item to item: it might be '28/28', i.e., all of the Respondents provided a response, or, for instance, '24/28', which is therefore to be read as follows: 24 responses out of the total of 28 respondents. While R_i/R_t (e.g., 23/28 R) is for the whole number of Respondents to the item out of 28, R_i (for example, R3) is for 'Response No. X'.

A half of 28 respondents declared their familiarity with Ranganathan's life, thought and works (50%: 17.9% familiar and 28.6 very familiar), while 46.4% are less familiar (25% somewhat and 21,4% little familiar), or not familiar at all (7.1%) (Fig. 6).

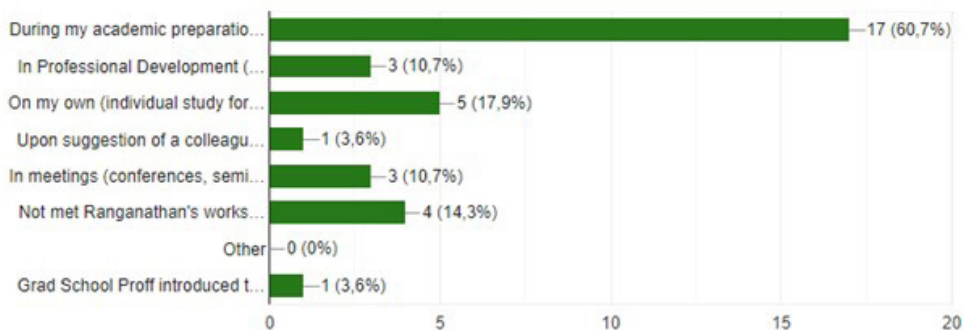


Fig. 7 Where Ranganathan's works were met

More than a half of respondents stated they met Ranganathan's works during their academic preparation (60.7%), while some respondents had not met them yet. Meeting Ranganathan's works during higher instruction on one hand can lead to investigate new fields (Svenonius 1992), on the other hand it does not automatically imply a high familiarity with them, as emerged from this study. In fact, some of the respondents who declared to be very familiar, said they met Ranganathan's works during individual study, professional development courses or meetings, that may provide valuable stimuli to deepen the knowledge of those works (Fig. 7). Among the works, the best known is *The Five Laws of Library Science* (18 out 28), followed by *Colon Classification* (9 out 28).

On the qualitative side of the survey, 25 respondents (out of 28, since three – R4, R13 and R20 – did not provide any response) provided a valuable feed-back on Ranganathan's contributions relevant to the library field (in general).

Two find all works are important, since «He is not called 'Father of Library Science' for no reason» (R8) and «His all works are the guiding factors» (R11). Ten focused more on works (*The Five Laws, Colon Classification*), while four on one or more laws (e.g., R6), underlying their importance «Most importantly, the first law 'Books are for use' and the last one 'Library is a growing organism'» (R17), or suggesting to be «repurposed to be meaningful in a digital age» (R12); in some cases, comments were added: «Books are for use, and every reader his book. Information is meant to be found; libraries can help make the connection between users and needed information» (R5). The centrality of patrons (readers or users) particularly resonates to some of the respondents (R7; R24; R27; R28). On the side of library management and organization, Ranganathan's principles offer «another strand to different ways of managing collections» (R3); it is also «very useful by following rules of library Science in daily prospects» (R14); «The Library System is described in connection with the internal and external elements of Library Practice» (R16). «Libraries cater knowledge in different contexts. His [i.e., Ranganathan's] books deal with collecting knowledge, processing recorded knowledge, organizing knowledge, making it accessible/retrievable in time, and the ways to customize and disseminate it to the concerned» (R10).

Surprisingly, *New Education and School Library: Experience of half a century* is not mentioned by anybody.

When asked what aspect of Ranganathan's contributions is particularly relevant to their daily library practice, the *five laws* (all or a specific one of them) particularly resonate with a half of the 24 respondents (twelve, since four – R4, R13, R20 and R26 – did not provide any response), while 3 mentioned *classification*, and four related to reference and user's guidance. The *five laws* are considered 'the guiding lights' (R22), that 'help for betterment of service' (R18), in the daily practice (R24), 'lowering barriers for users' (R5). Ranganathan is perceived as «a pioneer and unconventional and contributed to the librarian role having a degree of freedom» (R3), «[h]is classification

and cataloguing methods surely help me in finding sources for research, in presenting my finding or thoughts in a planned logical way and make it authentic by perfect citations. His teachings can surely make one perfect in research, writing and presentation» (R10).

Free comments

Comments were provided by 9 respondents: appreciation of Ranganathan's works, mainly *The Five Laws*, that «remain as absolutely core professional values» (R12), and gratitude to him were expressed. One underlined how «his personality and crooked path to success are as interesting as his library works» (R3). Concerns were also expressed because «Unfortunately, most of Ranganathan's works and ideas are not visible to modern librarians. There are cases of deformation of interpretations of his postulates in favour of the 'modernization' of libraries» (R16), furthermore, although «he [Ranganathan] is the base of Indian libraries» (R23), it is a shame that in India «we have wasted his legacy, his was fundamental in giving prominence to library as he helped in enacting library act for the state and paved way to similar other acts» (R22). His «credit for indicating that the library is user centred is important» (R27), and the focus should be put on the reader: «A book that nobody reads is useless. Losing a book (because someone doesn't give it back) is better than losing a reader» (R28). Finally, «the [Ranganathan's] contributions related to library policy, legislations are to be taken seriously for the improvement of libraries» (R15).

Section 4: The Five Laws of Library Science: This section (14 items) deals with the knowledge and implementation of *The Five Laws of Library Science*, aims at exploring to what extent respondents are generally familiar with the five laws (Fig. 8) and how relevant these laws are (Fig. 9).

Q: *How familiar are you with The Five Laws of Library Science (1931)?* (28/28 R)

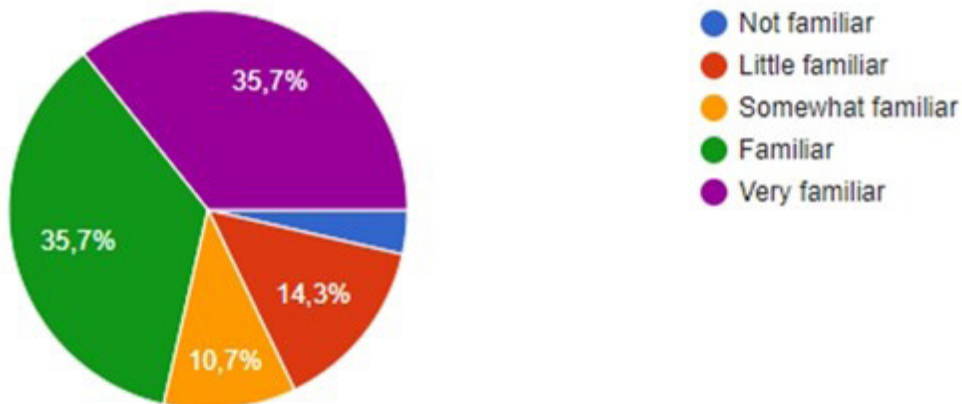


Fig. 8 Familiarity with the *Five Laws*

The minority of respondents (14.3%) is little familiar with the *five laws*, and one is not familiar at all.

Q: *How do you rate the “Five Laws” relevance to your work (both at theoretical and practical levels)?* (27/28 R)

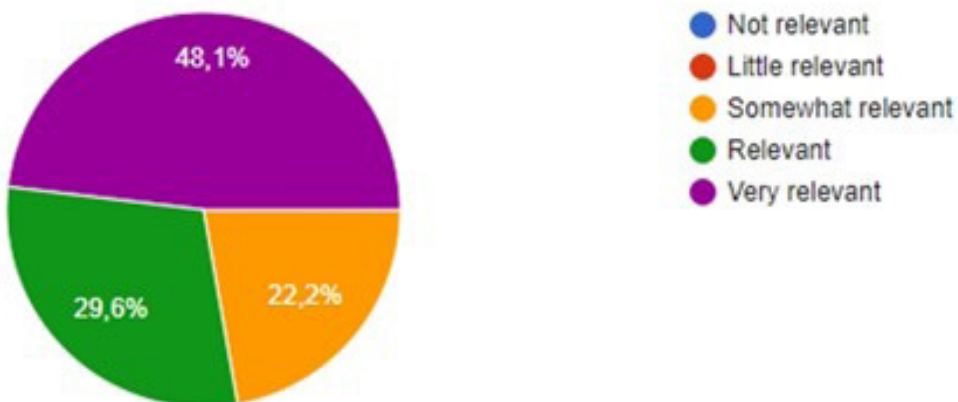


Fig. 9 Relevance of *The Five Laws*

All of the respondents (27, since one did not provide any response) stated that the *five laws* are somewhat relevant (22.2%), relevant (29.6%), and very relevant (48.1%).

Law No. 1: Books are for use (24/28 R)

Respondents were invited to comment briefly and describe how law No.1 applies to their work and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). Four did not provide any response. The responses provided by 24 respondents are summarized as follows.

All of the respondents agreed on the importance of the first law. Collections are important and the library is not relevant without them (R9), nevertheless «readers have a priority» (R2), and a school librarian has «to take care of reader. I think it's better a lost or damaged book than a lost reader» (R28), since «books [are] for students not just to sit on shelf» (R1), in «boxes» (R6) or are there for «display» (R17), «shelving» (R19), «decoration» (R3), and are meant to be «useful for students» (R11), made available in different «formats» (R5) and accessible (R4, R10), presented (R6), made visible in «open shelves or in glass shelves» (R21), promoted to proper displaying and encouraging students (R22), as suggested here, too:

«Think about presentation (i.e. front-facing and displays); promote books; make it easy to borrow and engage; integrate books and skills into classes; provide good information on library catalogue» (R7). The central location of the school library counts, too (R21).

Accurate selection of books and resources that meet users' interests and needs (R15, R17, R24) and a functional organization, for instance, dividing «books into subject-related or young adult fictions, to make sure they accommodate to the needs of the students» (R20), are also key to effective usage, since «Books are for use – As a librarian in my opinion Books should be procured according to requirements, Subject level, Interest & for giving information and knowledge according

to users (Students, teachers or others)» (R14), and gain «Best satisfaction level in service» (R18).

Issues related to terminology were also raised, because «what he [Ranganathan] intended was the knowledge content of the documents» (R10). Therefore, replacing the word 'books' with «resources»(R3), «document» (R10), «materials» (R4), «information (...) and it remains true» (R12).

Law No. 1: "Books are for use" - Examples (24/28 R)

Respondents were invited to submit examples from their practice. Comments and examples provided by 24 respondents (out of 28) are summarized and discussed as follows. They point out some factors that promote the use of the collection, such as

- the role that is played by the library - «a place where students come for knowledge. In school lib the foundation of future generation is laid» (R11), by useful information that «supports teaching and learning – and pleasure – at all levels» (R12), and by the implementation of the 1st law itself as a «help for better service» (R18);

- building up a variety (R3) of relevant and selected collections (R22) – for instance, for the school leaving certificate exam (R20) – or related to the needs (R14) and level of literacy and comprehension (R16) of users;

- keeping collections updated through accurate book selection (R27) and weeding (R5, R6);

- promoting new acquisitions, for instance, through displaying «book jackets on notice board» (R21), informing patrons (R22), and facilitating access (R1), usage (R23) and circulation (R2; R17; R19, R28).

Another important factor is the librarian's role, as underlined in many comments and examples: employing a «fulltime librarian at

EVERY¹⁴ school» (R1), whose competences and interpersonal skills while interacting with teachers (R20) and managing information and communication (R7) are key, for instance, in «creating excellent collections for wide reading and literature circles; building information skills units around curriculum areas and resourcing them very well. Establishing an inclusive and available atmosphere and providing clarity of communication» (R7).

The school librarian is the school information specialist who acts promptly: «If I get a document or knowledge resource immediately I expose it to concerned population among my users. For example, if I get a good article/paper on Ukrainian war which provides latest assessment of the same in its historical perspective and, if I am in a school, immediately I will inform history/politics teachers and concerned students using posters or mail or other methods» (R10). He/she reaches out its patrons «for example, the books of [famous Indian writer] RK Narayan when I procured there was no demand. I made sure that I speak to all the age groups that will enjoy and the book[s] are in demand» (R15).

Law No. 2: Every reader his or her book (24/28 R)

Respondents were invited to comment briefly and describe if and how law No. 2 applies to their work and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). Four did not provide any response. The responses provided by 24 respondents are summarized and discussed as follows.

Law No. 2 helps in «collection development» (R18). Diversity could be the keyword of most responses: «diversity of books» (R1, R20) or, better, «resources» (R3), or «information» (R12), not necessarily «traditional material» (R4); diversity of needs (R15, R16, R17, R19, R21) and interests (R9, R15, R21).

¹⁴ Capital letters by the respondent to the item.

Similar concepts – such as respecting users, their freedom of choice, their right to have the book they want; supporting users; meeting their interests and needs (whether personal or learning) – emerged from many responses (R2, R5, R7, R10, R11, R12, R14, R23, R24, R26, R27, R28).

Some tips were also provided: «Research and purchase books from around the world on many relevant curriculum topics; purchase fiction at a wide range of reading levels; purchase for special interests, cultural, social, gender, religions, etc.» (R7).

The librarian's role and professionalism as an information and communication specialist were recalled, since «the customising of information to meet individual user need is a core professional skill» (R12).

Law No. 2: Every reader his or her book - Examples (24/28 R)

Respondents were invited to provide examples regarding law No. 2 applied in their daily practice and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 24 respondents (since four did not provide any) are summarized and discussed as follows.

Librarians and teacher librarians play a critical and important role in «matching the reader to the book» (R7), attracting (R2, R11, R20, R28) and encouraging students to read (R7), be free to make their own choice (R9), share their readings and recommend books (R1).

Readers' well-being counts: the librarian ensures «that readers feel fine in the library» (R2), and can read «in the library a favourite book at break times in the corner almost as a comfort blanket» (R3).

Librarians play a critical role reading education and literacy: they may have to overcome prejudices of parents who do not want their children to read «certain types of materials (usually relating to graphic novels) - that's still reading» (R4), in fact «[o]ne poor reader became an avid and capable reader after reading every book in the graphic novel collection» (R7), or find books with interesting content and also

«with attractive book cover and pictorial representation of the text» (R11) to connect reluctant readers (R4, R6) or low literacy readers (R7) to reading (R4, R6). Connecting books to the actual users' needs and the local context is also important (R17, R20), as testified here:

The system should be able to fulfil the specialized requirement of every user. So we have to assess the users and their areas of work and keep knowledge sources ready to provide to them when they require. In addition, I say my library is near the church of St Francis of Assisi. So it is only normal that people will come asking for information related to the saint. So I will keep all materials available on the Saint as a special collection. Theological works, historical works, biographies and even fiction like the work *God's pauper* Nikos Kazantzakis. So everyone who come seeking for knowledge will get something specific to them. (R10).

Users' training is provided and self-direction is stimulated so that patrons can «discover these books for themselves» (R5). Customized reference service is also important: this may mean, for instance, finding an on-line manual for «setting up a new printer» or «using search strategies» for finding «the right info» on the «history of the Swedish Navy for a new book» (R12).

Some examples underline the importance of setting up a good library collection (R18, R21, R23, R24, R28), using «wish-lists» (R20) or requests (R21), and implementing services - including reference (R15, R22) -, that are cooperatively designed with users (R27), and interacting with them, as suggested here: «individual conversation about choosing a book, participation in intra-school meetings when planning educational and extracurricular activities, interaction with subscribers on social networks to understand their information needs» (R16).

It is also advised to «Treat people equally without judgement» (R19): for instance, students should not be discouraged in their readings. Students often like to confront themselves with more complex texts - although it is suggested «to middle school level (class VI-VIII),

but student of class IV read complete series of Harry Potter» (R14) -, and not satisfying them may mean losing a reader: «Anna was a 9 years-old reader who wanted to read a book slightly up her age, one of my colleague thought that is was too complicated for her so they refused to borrowed her. She tried to manage to take it in another library and we unfortunately lost her» (R26).

Law No. 3: Every book its reader (22/28 R)

Respondents were invited to comment briefly and describe if and how law No. 3 applies to their work and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 22 respondents (since six did not provide any response) are here summarized and discussed. Important factors are:

- Ensuring a wide and diverse collection (R1, R3, R4, R5, R7, R19) and its usefulness (R9, R10, R14, R15);
- Monitoring constantly the collection and users' interests, needs and literacy level (R3, R16, R20, R24), type of school (R11);
- Reaching out and engaging actual and potential patrons (R2, R7, R23), ensuring them proper reference service (R12),
- Implementing the catalogue (R21), arranging «book exhibition» (R21) and often changing display «so that every book get a chance to be on display and catches the attention of the reader» (R17);
- «The experience and the sensibility of a librarian can do the right matching» (R28) and get users «satisfied with librarian work» (R18).

One suggests the creative usage of information - «Stimulating users to create content: why not an active approach?» (R27) -, an aspect that recalls the school librarian's leading role in media, information and digital literacy education.

Law No. 3: Every book its reader - Examples (23/28 R)

Respondents were invited to provide examples regarding law No.

3 applied in their daily practice and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 23 respondents (since five did not provide any) are summarized and discussed as follows.

Strategies and factors that facilitate the encounter of every book with its own reader can be:

- appropriate book selection and wise acquisition (R11, R24), cataloguing (R16) and arranging «on the correct place» (R23) «new & interesting books» (R1) to satisfy each reader (R9, R11, R12, R14, R15);
- presentations and thematic exhibition (R1, R2, R10, R16, R17, R21), that might not always be successful: «I tried to challenge the students with more “difficult” books, such as displaying Harari’s books around, but so far only teachers have come to borrow them» (R20).

Librarians might be challenged on the one hand by the need for acquiring «books and resources without judgement» (R19), since any form of censorship should be avoided, but on the other hand, there may be «patrons who want queer materials removed from the library because it doesn’t fit with their personal values» (R4), or academic staff who may question titles of low level (in their opinion), as testified here:

I bought some easy read versions of the classics and it was questioned by the head-teacher why we had them because it was an academic school – I explained that not only could English as a second language kids then access them but it was also good for exam students who needed to read a range of books by a classical author to revise from. I think the same applies to audio books, digital books etc. (R3).

The book collection might be also considered of scarce immediate interest or usefulness, but:

We have a juvenile book collection in our academic library. Most of our users will not be interested in a juvenile collection, but the students in our teacher education program will be! Through book discussions with students in wide reading or literature circles and also an annual survey we were able

to gauge student reading interests quite well and use this data to inform our collection development. (R7).

The (school/teacher) librarians have an educational role to play in - «training readers to work independently with it [the catalogue]» (R16);

- offering opportunities for content creation, such as «exercises and games to guide users to create a book» (R27);

- matching resources and readers (R3, R28).

Furthermore, it is possible to infer from the examples that (school/teacher) librarians' competences and leadership make a difference in implementing the law No. 3, reaching out and engaging patrons through properly built collections, services and creative activities.

Law No. 4: Save the time of your reader (23/28 R)

Respondents were invited to comment briefly and describe if and how law No. 4 applies to their work and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 23 respondents (since five did not provide any response) are here summarized and discussed.

An important factor is efficiency in providing students with support and guidance (R2, R14, R15, R23); with relevant materials «well in time» (R1, R9, R11, R19, R24); with an organized, clear and «readers friendly» library (R2, R4, R5, R16); well catalogued, classified, curated and preserved resources (R3, R10, R17, R21).

A respondent suggests, for instance, to «provide a good library system and well-catalogued items; ensure good signage, library maps and instruction on how to use the library and locations of interest; provide trolleys of books in very high demand for a current research topic» (R7).

Some comments and suggestions highlight the importance of the librarians' educational role in teaching search strategies and research

skills (R12, R20, R28) and «not to waste time with misinformation or bad information» (R27); technology helps (R18).

The librarians' effort to match the reader and his/her book should be always respectful not to «make your reader uncomfortable and lost him/her» (R27); furthermore, «sometimes a reader should “lose” his or her time in a library, getting lost between books, authors of every time and place. Saving time is not always the right thing to do» (R28).

Law No. 4: Save the time of your reader - Examples (23/28 R)

Respondents were invited to provide examples regarding the implementation of law No. 4 related to their daily practice and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 23 respondents (since five did not provide any) are summarized and discussed as follows.

Due to lack of space is not possible to report examples, good practices and tips in detail here. Common factors that emerged are the following:

- facilitating user's orientation through proper signage and shelving (R2, R4, R5, R7, R11, R14);
- efficient management system and access to OPAC, databases etc. (R3, R10, R16, R17, R18), and knowledge of search strategies (R10, R12), although in some schools their usage might be minimal (R9);
- functional management (R18) and organization (R19, R21, R22, R24, R28), for instance, keeping «the books in clear order, so that pupils can find what they need easily and if needed, I can help them get the books quickly» (R20);
- consulting «students help plan programs, suggest books & resources» (R1).

The level of librarian's professionalism makes a difference while assisting patrons (R15, R19), teaching media, information and digital literacy (R27), and strengthening the collaboration with subject teacher to improve students' learning:

I used to visit classrooms before research projects started so I could use the language of the subject teacher in my keywords and also curate resources for the project work including PDFs of exemplar work from previous years as a model for the students to work towards (R3).

Law No. 5: A library is a growing organism (23/28 R)

Respondents were invited to comment briefly and describe if and how law No. 5 applies to their work and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 23 respondents (since five did not provide any response) are here summarized and discussed. Important factors that implement law No. 5 are:

- ensuring ongoing growth and change of the library (R1, R4, R15, R16, R17, R19, R20, R24), flexibility (R5, R21), to evolve (R3) and be current (R7, R11), according to the user's needs (R12, R14, R22, R27);
- cooperation at local, national and international level (R2, R10, R21);
- updating and expanding collections (R6);
- connecting with the school curriculum (R3);

Some concerns are expressed about the scarcity of space (R3, R9, R28), also due to the effect of the pandemic.

Law No. 5: A library is a growing organism - Example (23/28 R)

Respondents were invited to provide examples regarding the implementation of law No. 5 related to their daily practice and context (e.g., as a LIS teacher, or school librarian etc.). The responses provided by 23 respondents (since five did not provide any) are summarized and discussed as follows.

The 5th law is a guiding principle (R9) that keeps «myself curious and enthusiastic in learning and meeting any challenges in works» (R19), hard to be fully implemented «due to fund problem» in one case (R18), but another states that school libraries are nowadays «get-

ting more recognition and the budgets are also enhancing» (R10).

The 5th law also means «always look for new resources, research, grants, ideas, & student input» (R1), implementing «projects, campaigns, new services and programmes, etc.» (R2) and keeping the collection updated and relevant through «weeding» to «have room for new materials» (R4, R28), and new acquisitions (R8, R15, R16, R17, R22, R23, R24), in different formats (R14, R27), providing updated information on relevant topics «(for examples, the news of ongoing wars in Ukraine for interested students, or the picture dictionary of German and Ukrainian)» (R20).

The law stimulates change and flexible adaptation of space (R3, R13, R21), «‘library as third place’ rather than ‘warehouse for books’» (R5), and as learning environment for teaching information and digital skills (R7).

The Five Laws (28/28 R)

Q: *What Law of the Five Laws of Library Science does particularly resonate with you? (28/28 R)*

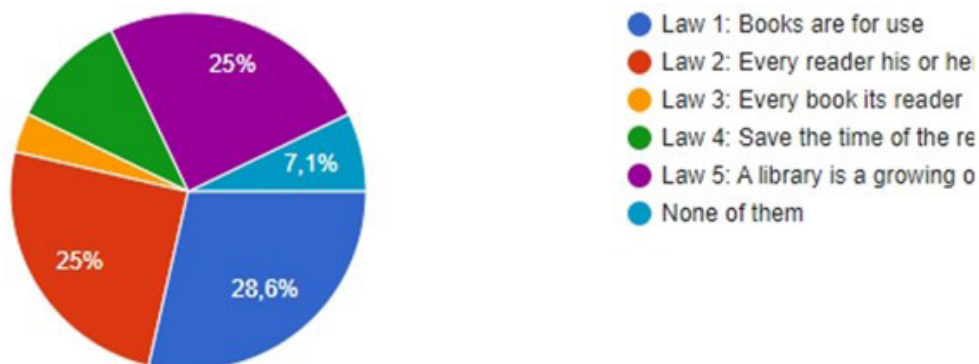


Fig. 10 The most resonating Law

The law that resonates most is the 1st one, according to the following results (Fig. 10):

1. Law 1 *Books are for use* (8 responses): 28,6%.
2. Law 2 *Every reader his or her book* (7 responses), and law 5: *A library is a growing organism* (7 responses, 14 in total): 25% ex aequo.
3. Law 4 *Save the time of the reader* (3 responses): 10,7%.
4. None of them (2 responses): 7,1%
5. Law 3 *Every book its reader* (1 response): 3,7%.

Relevance of the chosen law (21/28 R)

Respondents were invited to explain briefly why the selected “law” particularly resonates with them (or make them think of changing or modifying something in their disposition or practice); 21 (out of 28) motivated their choice as follows:

- *Law No. 1*: Centrality of users/readers and their needs (R9, R10, R11, R17, R21, R24, R27, R28).

- *Law No. 2*: Training patrons (R5) and connecting them with books and other resources (R2, R5, R7), since «Each book was written as an expression of an important idea of the author. We are obliged to organize communication from the author of the idea to the reader who will be able to understand, accept and develop this idea. There are no useless books, there are unheard ideas» (R16).

- *Law No. 3*: [no motivation was provided.]

- *Law No. 4*: Efficiency (R15, R22).

- *Law No. 5*: Ongoing change, interaction, interconnection, collaboration (R1, R3, R12, R19, R20).

Appreciation was also expressed for all the laws, «perfect» (23) and «relevant for every library in the world, in past and in the future» (R2).

Usefulness of promoting Ranganathan's works (28/28 R)

Q: *How do you rate the usefulness of spreading the word of Ranganathan's works and teaching his theories among school library practitioners (both those who are already trained and those in training)? (28/28 R)*

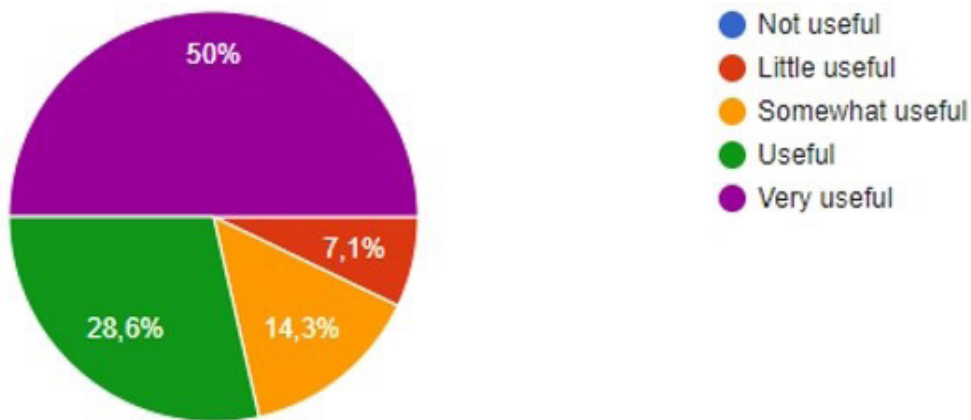


Fig. 11 Usefulness of spreading the word of SRR's works among school practitioners

All respondents expressed find useful spreading the word of Ranganathan's works and theories among school library practitioner: it is considered very useful by 50%, useful by 28.6, somewhat useful by 14.3% and little useful by 7.1% (Fig. 11).

Respondents' Comments (16/28 R)

Respondents were invited to submit their comments, reflections and explanations (if any) related to Ranganathan and his legacy, or to the above mentioned laws. 16 respondents (out of 28) provided their comments, in some cases very detailed, consisting in several lines, that can only be summarized here.

They found «Ranganathan's thought is unifying for all types of libraries works» (R27), and is not limited only to «library but the holistic picture of human empowerment, I think there is a need to bring awareness» (R15), also to be «followed in the true spirit» (R21); his concepts should be kept «at the heart of our efforts and focus» and embodied one's own practice» (R14), being the profession an act of faith (R19); they are helpful «as we look to decolonize our libraries»

(R1); his works should be translated «in local and national language» (R9) and updated (R22).

The *five laws* - base of Indian libraries (R23) - are considered still relevant (R5, R8, R11, R12), because they «carry basic values into library practice. Now there are people without professional education among school librarians. It is important to provide them with the basic principles from his work» (R16), although «their terminology needs to be modified according to current formats and technology» (R10).

One found helpful the questionnaire itself because it «has made me revisit them and reconsider them in a modern context rather than an historical one» (R3); another said that it is «right to remember Ranganathan but together with the many who have had importance for world librarianship» (R27).

Q: *How much are you interested in learning more about Ranganathan and his work (e.g., through webinars, workshops etc.)?* (28/28 R)

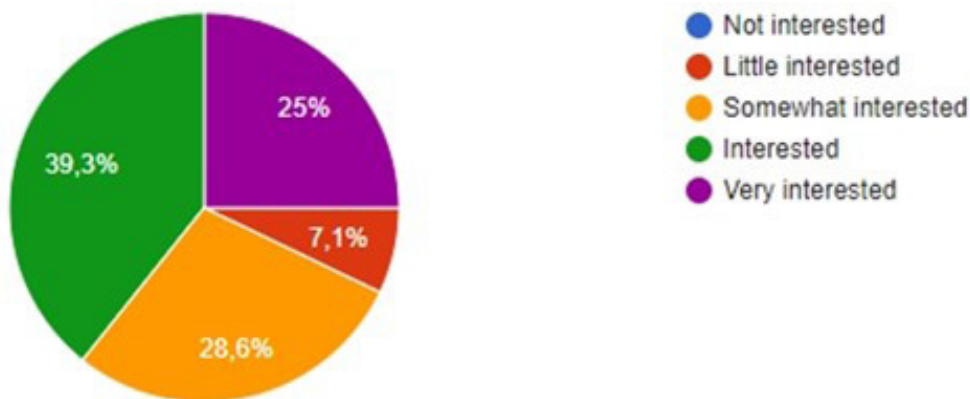


Fig. 12 Interest in learning more about SRR

All respondents expressed their interest in learning more about Ranganathan and his work: 67.9% are interested and very interested, while the remaining 32.1% is somewhat or little interested (Fig. 12).

Q: *If interested in learning more or attending any initiative (webinar, online meeting, this survey findings etc.) regarding Ranganathan, would you like to be informed or contacted (not for commercial purposes)?* (28/28 R)

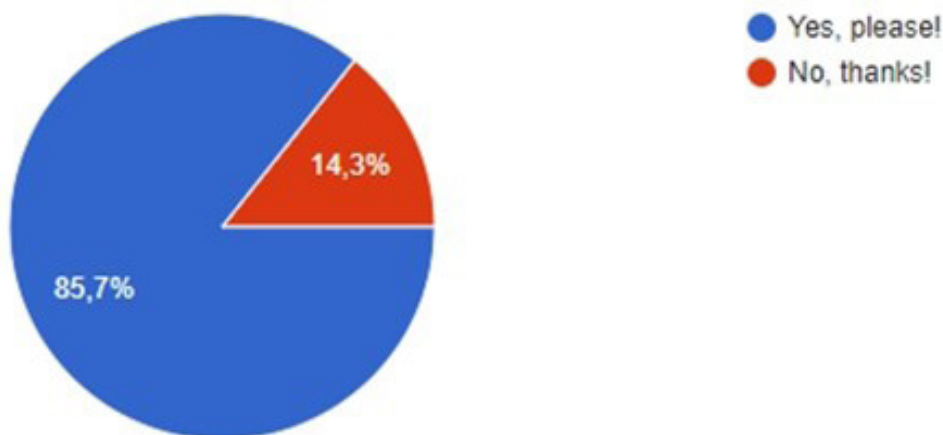


Fig. 13 Interest in further contacts

Most of respondents (85.7%) are available for further contacts (Fig. 13).

Final remarks

Ranganathan's principles, particularly the *five laws* can still serve as a useful and effective "guide to navigate through a period of transformative change" (Carr 2014), as also suggested by one of the authors of this paper (Marquardt 2022, p. 11-12). Taking in account the current situation and status of school libraries where «physical spaces have shrunk and more emphasis is placed on digital access» (R3), due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the change in education acts and school curricula, technologies, reading competences and practices, there is an

urgent need for the school library to evolve: «The library should feel the power and speed of changes and implement the necessary changes in its services, communications, collections» (R16).

Besides the number of impact studies on the correlation between a functioning and effective school library and the students' learning outcomes,¹⁵ discovering (or re-discovering) Ranganathan's thought and vision on the school library's role could be beneficial to the school librarian's education, training, and professional development. More awareness should be generated so that «it is to be hoped, every school even in the lower stages of education will be in possession of a library which deserves to be called in Ranganathan's word "a live workshop."» (Sargent 1973: 18).

Despite some limitations, this first exploratory survey authentically captured participants' reflections, experiences and perceptions. Their responses were often very detailed and, more in general, expressed the appreciation for the usefulness of the questionnaire itself for "re-launching" Ranganathan, recalling attention to his legacy, especially in school librarianship; provided inputs and examples of how The *five laws* apply to the school library context; expressed respondents' needs for education and training to gain better knowledge of Ranganathan's works.

The findings from this survey constitute the basis for further investigation, through a wider research, maybe utilizing a mixed method research design, and a more in-depth qualitative survey (e.g., focus group). Education and training through the delivery of webinars and learning materials could be designed, too. The *laws*, when included in Librarianship and Information Management courses, can bring valuable insights to prospective librarians and help them to develop a greater vision of the profession and its performance in our complex,

¹⁵ See, for instance, the list curated by the Library Research Service (LRS, available at: <<https://www.lrs.org/data-tools/school-libraries/impact-studies/>>), a review (Gretes 2013), or a study related to the Italian context (Marzoli and Papa 2019).

changing and challenging era and societies (Fernandes – Bentes Pinto – Farias 2021, p. 124).

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¹⁶ <<https://www.ifla.org/units/professional-division-e/>>.

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged school libraries, affected their services and activities in many ways and led to changes, such as, for instance, reduced opening hours and services, library spaces transformed into a classroom, closures, but also the development of digital collections and delivery of remote services. In such a complex and ever-changing context, the school librarians' educational role might have been challenged as well. A sound preparation both in education and library science constitutes a steady basis that helps face and overcome disruptions and change. The outstanding works of S.R. Ranganathan are widely recognized for their innovative contribution to library and information science, including school librarianship. In his book *New Education and School Library: Experience of half a century* (1973), Ranganathan points that the school library is central in the learning and teaching process; its program and several components promote reading, educate to information, inspire and enable users to become critical thinkers and responsible citizens. *The Five Laws of Library Science* apply to the field of education and school librarianship, too. This contribution aims at presenting an overview of Ranganathan's legacy in the school library context and, in particular, the relevance of *The Five Laws of Library Science* in the nowadays' school librarianship, based on the findings from a self-responding questionnaire, that was distributed through library associations' list-servs and administered online in March-April 2022. Although limited in number, the respondents (28 in total from different continents, except Africa) provided data, comments, and reflections that constitute the basis for further investigation and actions.

School librarianship; school librarians; Ranganathan; The Five Laws of Library Science; information literacy education.

*La pandemia da Covid-19 ha costituito una sfida per le biblioteche scolastiche, condizionato i loro servizi e attività in molti modi, e portato a cambiamenti quali, per esempio, la riduzione degli orari di apertura e dei servizi, la trasformazione degli spazi della biblioteca in aula scolastica, le chiusure, ma anche lo sviluppo di collezioni digitali e la fornitura di servizi remoti. In un contesto così complesso e in continua evoluzione, anche il ruolo educativo dei bibliotecari scolastici potrebbe essere stato messo in discussione. Una solida preparazione sia pedagogica sia biblioteconomica costituisce le fondamenta necessarie per affrontare e superare gli sconvolgimenti e i cambiamenti. Le opere eccezionali di S.R. Ranganathan sono largamente riconosciute per il loro contributo innovativo alla Documentazione e alla Biblioteconomia, inclusa quella scolastica. Nel suo libro *New Education and School Library: Experience of half a century* (1973), Ranganathan sottolinea che la biblioteca scolastica è centrale nel processo di apprendimento e di insegnamento; il suo programma e le sue diverse componenti promuovono la lettura, educano all'informazione, rendono gli utenti capaci di pensare criticamente e agire responsabilmente. Le Cinque Leggi della Biblioteconomia si applicano anche al campo dell'educazione e a quello della biblioteconomia scolastica. Questo contributo mira a presentare una panoramica dell'eredità di Ranganathan nel contesto delle biblioteche scolastiche e, in particolare, la rilevanza delle Cinque Leggi della Biblioteconomia nell'odierna biblioteconomia scolastica, sulla base dei risultati di un questionario auto-compilato, distribuito attraverso le liste di discussione delle associazioni bibliotecarie e compilato online nel periodo marzo-aprile 2022. I rispondenti, sebbene di numero limitato (28 in tutto da diversi continenti, esclusa l'Africa), hanno fornito dati, commenti e riflessioni che costituiscono la base per ulteriori indagini e azioni.*

Biblioteconomia scolastica; bibliotecari scolastici; Ranganathan; Le cinque leggi della biblioteconomia; competenza informativa.