



WIKITEKA - the report on school libraries in Poland

"Undercut wings"
Situation, challenges and potential
librarians and libraries
and school libraries

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WIKITEKA is a project within the [Wiki-school program](#) run by Wikimedia Polska addressed to school libraries. Recognizing needs of school librarians, Educational Team of Wikimedia Polska has reached out to teachers-librarians and asked how they run their often small, underfunded spaces with time limits and very often frustration.

The whole report in Polish you can find [on Wikimedia Commons](#) or on [Wikiszkola website](#).

You are invited to read main conclusions and a summary below.

Main conclusions

School libraries serve multiple functions. They are involved not only in promoting reading or lending books. They serve as information centers. They are place for individual and collaborative work for students. They support teachers in preparing for classes and and conducting teaching activities. They carry out cultural activities of various nature. They organize meetings, festivals and holiday celebrations. They also serve as counseling centers for children and teenagers. These are places where leisure time is spent before and after school. They often serve other roles, too, like providing daycare. Librarians voluntarily substitute for absent teachers during their working hours, without receiving compensation. Despite the numerous tasks and roles that libraries fulfill, they are marginalized within school structures and the education system, and are underappreciated by society.

- Underestimating the role fulfilled by libraries, librarians, and library professionals is one of the reasons for disregarding both their needs and potential.
- The greatest strength and advantage of school libraries resides in their staff. It is their creativity and dedication that primarily determine the current potential of these institutions.

- School libraries operate within the structures of schools, and their activities are focused within that context. The school administration and the parents' council are their main partners within the school.
- Besides schools, most school libraries cooperate with public libraries, mainly in their immediate vicinity.
- School libraries do not have dedicated funds in school budgets, which makes it difficult for them to plan their activities. 35% of librarians believe that the resources at their disposal have decreased in the past 5 years. They often lack sufficient funds not only for their operations but also for purchasing new books which are necessary to attract attention and overcome the reading crisis among children and youth.
- The situation of libraries varies greatly in terms of the spaces and premises they have. 40% of librarians point out the insufficient amount of space they have, which significantly affects the possibilities related to their activities.
- 86% of the surveyed librarians declare that their institutions have computers for library works. Three-quarters of the facilities have access to wireless internet, and 64% have access to broadband internet.
- Slightly over half of the surveyed school libraries have digitized their library resources. Some libraries are currently in the process, while others plan to start the digitization process in the near future.
- 57% of the surveyed school libraries have their own website, and 48% have a presence on social media platforms.
- School libraries do not have extensive resources for utilizing information and communication technologies (ICT) in their work. The main equipment they have at their disposal includes computers, printers, speakers, and scanners. However, these resources are not sufficient for school libraries to function as multimedia information centers.
- School libraries are not adapted for working with people with disabilities. Only 11% of libraries declare having appropriately adapted workstations. Only 3% of school libraries have devices such as digital talking-book players (e.g., for those hard of hearing or with visual impairments) that can be helpful for people with disabilities.
- A small number of libraries have access to paid digital resources. The highest percentage - 13% can offer access to paid electronic journals.
- Librarians assess their digital competences highly. Over 90% declare they can handle basic tasks such as file transfers and setting up email accounts. Over 80% are able to prepare presentations and make use of open educational resources. 75% know how to prepare library activities that require students to use ICT. Approximately 60% can handle more advanced tasks such as creating and conducting surveys or independently/by themselves creating graphics.

- 96% of librarians consider their knowledge of copyright law and regulations regarding intellectual property protection online to be at least average. Approximately 70% believe that their knowledge and skills in safely using technological devices are high.
- All librarians utilize/are able to create various digital technologies in their work. Almost everyone uses text editors and presentation software, while over 80% use software for cataloging library collections. More than half use project management tools, and approximately three-quarters utilize social media and communication applications.
- Librarians are familiar with student engagement in ICT such as project-based learning, escape rooms, flipped classrooms, and gamification. However, they use them relatively infrequently.
- The most commonly used tools by school librarians for creating materials are WordWall, Genially, and Padlet.
- The most important digital competency that librarians would like to develop is independent creation of digital materials, as indicated by 58% of the respondents.
- Librarians have a coherent/consistent vision of how the school library of the future should function. It is a place that combines tradition with modernity and the digital world. It serves multiple functions for the entire community: promoting reading, engaging in cultural activities, providing knowledge and information, attracting and engaging children and youth, inspiring them, and conducting digital education.
- However, achieving this vision requires addressing systemic problems, including highlighting the role of the library within the school structure, ensuring sufficient staffing and financial resources, and providing adequate space.

Methodology, purposes and implementation of the research

The purpose of the survey was to carry out a diagnosis of the situation, challenges, potential and needs of librarians and libraries in primary and secondary schools of various types. In particular, it was intended to answer the following research questions:

- What is the situation of libraries and school librarians?
- What are the functions and roles of libraries in different local communities?
- What is the communication and collaboration between the library and librarians and their cooperation with different institutions and the community?
- What are the main issues and challenges for libraries and those working in them?
- What are the digital competences of librarians and librarians?
- What is the potential for libraries to become centres of digital informal education in schools?
- What are the needs of librarians and what kind of support do they need?



The implementation of the study was based on two complementary research methods - qualitative (individual in-depth interview) and quantitative (questionnaire interview with librarians).

Qualitative study

The study was conducted/carried based on interview guidelines consisting of three blocks of questions. The first block focused on the general situation and role of school libraries and librarians. The second block addressed the digital competencies of library staff and the use of ICT in their work. The third block is concerned with the challenges, problems, and needs of libraries and librarians.

The interviews were conducted in the form of talks (direct, online, or telephone conversations) between the researcher and the librarians. The duration of each interview was typically around 1 hour. All conversations were recorded, then listened to and analysed.

The study was carried out from April to June 2022 and included 11 library staff members from various parts of the country, different types of schools, and different-sized institutions.

Summary

Librarians and school libraries are an unnoticed, underappreciated, and untapped potential in Polish schools. Research shows the distance that separates these institutions from a.o. public libraries, which have received extensive support in recent years, including under the Library Development Program.

The activity of school libraries is based primarily on the commitment, creativity and passion of many librarians. They constitute the primary potential of these institutions, undertaking many activities that go beyond the conventional book lending aspect commonly associated with school libraries'. They are involved in reading promotion. They undertake activities aimed at overcoming the crisis of reading among students. In many schools, they assist in information retrieval and provide knowledge. They also serve the role of confidants for the children, providing them with assistance. They are a great support in fulfilling the educational and pedagogical functions of schools. At the same time, in many places they carry out their activities on the basis of very limited financial, location and personnel resources. They also have very basic equipment and software at their disposal. Their situation is not conducive to increasing the activity and action of libraries, including opening up to cooperate with institutions outside the school and the local community. The lack of a dedicated budget for activities also makes it challenging to plan and develop activities in a more long-term perspective.



The research shows that school librarians possess high digital competencies as a result of, among others, the variety of tasks they engage in, including supporting other school staff in utilizing/using technology in teaching. In the context of actions aimed at further digitizing schools, implementing technology in education, and fostering digital non-formal and informal education in local environments, it is valuable to recognize and systematically support this potential. The school library can be one of the key spaces for digital education in schools, with librarians serving as leaders in such education. For this to be possible, school libraries themselves must undergo a process of digital transformation, equipped with high-quality digital resources, suitable hardware, and a space that would enable them to fulfill various tasks. Appreciation, support (both in terms of personnel and financial support), providing opportunities for professional development, access to information and knowledge are also needed by the school library staff. Their work should be recognized by state, schools, local governments and parents. Only in this way will school libraries be able to spread their wings.

(transl. by Marta Bożek & Julia Jabłońska)

Read also:

https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education/News/August_2022/Wikiteka_project_in_Poland_-_summertime

https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education/News/October_2022/Report_on_school_libraries_in_Poland_for_the_Wikiteka_project

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WMPL-Wikiteka_raport_z_badania.pdf

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