Development of
INFORMATION LITERACY
through School Libraries
in South-East Asian Countries

(IFAP Project 461RAS5027)

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Background

The advent of the information society sees government spending large sums of money on the development of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. At the same time, there is a parallel need to develop a conceptual base for the effective and widespread use of this ICT. Information literacy (IL) provides this base. Information literacy is used today to describe a set of skills and competencies, processes and actions, and attitudes that lead one to be a "wise information consumer," as well as a self-motivated "lifelong learner." Information literacy is a key competence for success in today's world.

Libraries are key actors in providing information for personal, economic and cultural advancement. Of the various types of libraries, those found in schools usually provide the first exposure to this world of information. School libraries exist in most schools (even though some may be at a rudimentary level), and as enrollment rates increase, they are well placed to provide access to information literacy for a new generation of citizens.

In 2003, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) co-organized a Regional Workshop on School Library Services in South-East Asia. At the end of the workshop, the participants recommended that, inter alia, information literacy be integrated into the curriculum and teaching-learning practices of appropriate subject areas, and that the organizers strive to have school libraries recognized as important players in the promotion of reading and literacy. Later, a group of participants from the workshop approached UNESCO with a proposal for South-East Asian countries to jointly embark upon improving information literacy education in schools.

The Project

The project, "Development of Information Literacy through School Libraries in South-East Asian Countries," focused on examining the current state of information literacy education, and recommending action plans to increase school libraries' involvment in the development of an information literate citizenry. The project proposal was submitted to UNESCO and approved for financial assistance under the Special Account of the UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) in 2004. Project activities were implemented by a Project Team, with the focal point based at the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in Bangkok. Project activities comprised three phases:

Phase 1: Planning (July-December 2004)

During this phase, the Project Team defined the scope of the project and planned activities to be undertaken within the framework of the project. Country participants or institutions were identified and invited to take part in a

planning workshop. A methodology for IL assessment was chosen, and instruments were designed and dispatched to the participating countries.

Phase 2: Country Surveys (January-July 2005)

Country participants in Phase 1 were actively involved in the national survey during this phase. The project budget provided for some limited financial assistance to make the survey possible in all seven participating countries. Country reports on the survey were submitted to the Project Team within this phase.

Phase 3: Post-survey Workshop (August-December 2005)

The project activities culminated in a post-survey workshop to share and discuss survey findings. The workshop produced a set of recommendations to guide future collaboration and/or national efforts to promote and implement IL programmes.

Objectives of Project

The Project aims:

1. To provide representatives from South-East Asian countries with a better understanding of information literacy and promote discussion of issues/exchange of ideas for collaborative efforts to promote information literacy

2. To assess the current state of information literacy education in South-East Asian countries

3. To develop a series of recommendations and action plans to enhance information literacy in South-East Asia

The Project sought to achieve:

1. A better understanding about information literacy in South-East Asia among participating information professionals

2. An up-to-date report on the status of information literacy in South-East Asia

3. An increased awareness of the importance of information literacy and the role of school libraries in promoting information literacy among students and teachers

4. Recommendations and action plans, directed towards relevant national agencies, on the enhancement of information literacy

5. Better networking among stakeholders for the promotion of information literacy in South-East Asia

Project Activities

The IFAP Bureau provided its approval of the project in May 2004, and the five members of the Project Team began their

work. Much of the initial work among the team - whose members resided in three countries - was communicated electronically. For the three team members who lived in Thailand, face-to-face meetings and workshops did take place in Bangkok.

A planning workshop was held in October 2004. Participants comprised two representative educators/researchers from each of the seven South-East Asian countries covered by the project: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Myanmar did not respond to the invitation from the Project Team. A few participants from Hong Kong and Singapore joined the workshop at thier own expense. The participants defined IL for use in the Project, particularly in the ensuing survey, discussed survey methodology to be carried out by the participants or their institutions, and drafted sample standardized questionnaires.

The group decided that a national survey team should be established in each of the seven countries, and that the workshop participants would be included in the survey team and play an active role throughout the process. In actuality, however, this did not occur in some countries because the workshop participants were either transferred to a new post or went abroad for further study. This phase of the project began in the countries with translation of the questionnaires into national languages (if necessary), pre-testing the questionnaires, refining them, selecting samples, gathering

and analysing data, and preparing survey reports. This phase lasted up to eight months in some countries. Considering the constraints – time, financial, and human resource - the efforts of the survey teams were commendable.

In September 2005, a four-day post-survey workshop was organized in Bangkok, Thailand. Most of the participants from the initial planning workshop returned and provided the much needed continuity. In other cases, the persons most involved in the survey and the preparation of the report took part in the workshop. Apart from sharing the results of the survey, the participants undertook a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) exercise and prepared a draft of a national action plans to promote IL development in schools.

At the time the second workshop was being planned, the IFLA Regional Office for Asia and Oceania in Bangkok considered organizing a follow-up meeting to its regional workshop held in 2003. It was then decided that since both activities had the same purpose, vis-a-vis the improvement of information literacy among school students, the two activities could merge to provide the participants with an opportunity to extend their horizons.

Definition of Information Literacy

The participants in the first workshop agreed to adopt the following definition of information literacy for the Project:

Information literacy is the ability to recognize when information is needed, to identify the needed information, to identify the sources, to locate and access information efficiently and effectively, to evaluate information critically, to organize and integrate information into existing knowledge, to use information ethically and legally, to communicate information , and carry out all of the above activities effectively

Survey Tools

Standard questionnaires and sampling guidelines (both in accompanying CD) were used for all seven countries to assess the status of information literacy education. The respondents were school administrators, teachers, and librarians (or teachers in charge of school libraries). Questionnaire items were grouped under eight areas:

1. Awareness and training for IL
2. School's vision of IL
3. Education and training of teachers and librarians for IL
4. Implementation of IL
5. Leadership for IL
6. Assessment and evaluation of IL
7. School library
8. IL support systems

Size of Sample

From the reported data, the sample ranged from 1.6% – 3% of the potential school population, with a relatively consistent coverage of administrators, teachers and teacher-librarians in most countries.

Country Reports

The country reports are included in the enclosed CD-ROM. Additional information and data may be obtained directly from the authors.

Analysis of the country reports is included in the CD-ROM, while the findings and recommendations are summarized hereunder.

Findings

The term **information literacy** is a term that is difficult to translate into certain national languages. Therefore, there were varied interpretations of terms and application of ideas. The findings from the surveys in the seven countries may be summarized as follows:

Awareness and Training for IL

There is room for improvement where awareness and understanding of information literacy is concerned; primary teachers have the greatest awareness of IL. IL is accorded varying degrees of importance, although it is generally agreed that IL is important.

School's Vision of IL

Between 16% and 58% of the respondents indicated that their school had a policy statement on IL, though none actually provided a written copy.

Education and Training of Teachers and Librarians for IL

Respondents' exposure and training in IL is generally low regardless of a school's location (urban or rural). Those who learned about IL did so from training courses, in-service training, seminars, and user education programmes.

Implementation of IL

The responses showed disparity across the region. Where it is taught, IL is integrated into courses and/or taught as an orientation in the library. School libraries and teacher librarians seem to play a small role in teaching IL. In two out of seven countries, IL is taught by teachers-in-library and in five countries, it is a part of extra-curricular activities. Lack of qualified teachers, librarians, computers and insufficient library collections are cited as the main factors preventing the teaching of IL.

Leadership for IL

In two countries, there was a lack of leadership for IL. It is felt that teaching IL is a teacher's regular responsibility. Most specialist IL teachers are involved in preparing school policy related to IL.

Assessment and Evaluation of IL

Assessment and evaluation of IL activities is not given due importance in most cases, although it is considered the teachers' responsibility. Only one country said that IL assessment was a part of students' learning assessment.

School Libraries

A library or a resource centre in some form does not exist in all schools; in one country, 40% of schools do not have libraries/ resource centres. Where there is a school library or a resource centre, its budget tends to be very small. Some schools have computers, but they are mostly outside the library; others have computer labs in the school libraries. Connectivity to the Internet is not widespread and student access is limited. Other hardware found in some school libraries/resource centres includes slide projector, film projectors, VCRs, VCDs/DVDs, audio players/recorders, televisions, overhead projectors, and LCDs. Some equipment is provided by the

Government, while other items are donated to the schools. The schools procure some equipment with their own resources. Unfortunately, in many cases, only a fraction of school budget goes towards the development of the school library/resource centre.

Staffing is a problem in school libraries. Many schools do not even have teachers trained in library science in charge of the libraries, let alone professional teacher-librarians. In many cases, library staff do not work full-time, and other staff spend little time in the school libraries. Teacher librarians, who are assigned the responsibility for school libraries, may also have to teach classes, often on a half-time schedule.

Professional training of library staff paints a grim picture and huge variations. One country reports as high as 96% of school library/resource centre staff receives no professional training. Unfortunately, only a fraction of a school's budget goes to the school library/resource centre.

IL Support Systems

Implementation of IL requires strong support, starting with a national IL policy. Many respondents do not know if there is an IL policy in their countries. Schools teaching IL receive support from state education policy, the Ministry of Education and, where available, the state or local resource centres. The national libraries play the smallest role in providing funding support.

School Library Development

Participants who took part in the 2003 IFLA regional workshop reported on activities that they had undertaken to promote school library development. Many indicated that they had shared the 2004 workshop report with their colleagues in the Ministry of Education, and presented the recommendations to the Ministry of Education and their colleagues. Some of the recommendations were implemented, such as translation of the IFLA School Library Manifesto. On a personal level, some individuals became more involved in the development of school libraries by passing on the knowledge gained from the regional workshop, promoting reading, and getting involved in library-related activities. At the national level, and of particular importance to this workshop, was the growing role of school libraries in promoting information literacy in the participating countries. New developments included school clusters for information services, community access to school library resources, integration of ICT into the school library programme, better access through library automation, and school library personnel taking on leadership roles. At the time of this report, no specific innovative IL project had been reported.

Obstacles to school library development included low literacy rates; shortage of classrooms, library space, trained classroom teachers, and trained teacher-librarians; limited school library collections; small or no budgets for school libraries; lack of awareness among senior MOE officials about the role of

school library programmes in relation to the IL concept; limited facilities/equipment; and few guidelines on how to integrate IL into regular teaching programmes.

SWOT Analysis

In the post-survey workshop, the participants performed a SWOT analysis to identify factors affecting IL education in their respective countries. The findings of the analysis may be summed up as follows:

Strengths

Support and commitment, as demonstrated in inclusion of IL and school library policies as a priority in the national education plans with corresponding action plan and budget allocation, was mentioned as a strength in some countries. Other strengths included teachers/librarians with IL experience, full-time school librarians, dedicated teachers, IL training programmes for teachers, national reading promotion programmes, and library or school resource centre associations/networks.

Weaknesses

The list of weaknesses was the longest. In some countries, there is lack of awareness about IL (what it is and why it is important), resulting in the absence of a national IL vision, mission and strategies. The concept of IL is not well-known

or understood. IL skills are not commonly recognized. School administrators and teachers do not understand the role of IL in the teaching-learning process. Nor are they aware of library programmes, which may explain why there is a lack of teacher-librarian partnerships. On the other hand, teachers and librarians are not ready to promote IL, partly because IL is not a part of their pre- and in-service training. Small national budgets for education result in proportionately small or lacking budgets for school libraries and IL programmes.

In terms of infrastructure, the participants cited a lack of schools, school libraries and other types of libraries. Where libraries do exist, there is a lack of support, lack of qualified/trained librarians, insufficient library collections, limited materials in national languages, and lack of access to the Internet. Cooperation and collaboration between school libraries and other types of libraries is weak/non-existent. More interesting and appealing activities are needed.

Also cited as weaknesses were poor reading habits, the absence of IL in school curriculum and in teacher/student performance assessments, and the overall need to integrate libraries into the teaching-learning process.

Opportunities

The participants saw a number of opportunities for IL promotion and implementation; however, they differed from one country to another. Among those cited were: curriculum

reform that opens an opportunity for IL to be integrated into the new curriculum; government policy that gives priority to the creation of a knowledge society; availability of ICT infrastructure and facilities at the school level and free ISP for schools; parents and communities that take an active role in their children's education; community libraries with Internet access; distance learning programmes; public libraries/community information centres; TV and radio in every home; and global ICT development. External support from international organizations such as UNESCO and NGOs, book publishers' associations, school/university libraries groups, active teachers' associations (support to teachers), educational TV programmes, increasing IT knowledge and skills among children, and enhanced international partnership are all considered as opportunities.

Threats

The low awareness among government officials and the public about IL was among the cited threats. Where government is concerned, the participants believed that sufficient budgets for IL programme implementation might not be allocated, and could also be affected by a policy change or other political influence.

In terms of human resources, the IL programme is threatened by the teachers, the librarians' low salary and their lack of training in IL. Implementation of IL programming is human resource intensive, and can, therefore, suffer from a shortage of qualified personnel.

Poverty, low level of development, low literacy rates, multi-ethnicity, high costs of education and books, inadequate infrastructures, and poor reading habits were also perceived as threats to IL programme implementation.

National Action Plans

Taking into consideration the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the participants tried their hands at setting IL "Vision, Mission and Strategies" for their respective countries. Each country group also prepared a mock-up of a national IL action plan, which was later shared with the rest of the participants in a plenary session so that all participants would develop some ideas as to what could be done to promote IL. A matrix analysis of these action plans provided a visual statement about the areas where national and international projects could be shared and utilized.

Recommendations

Based on the proposed actions, the participants put forward a number of recommendations, with equal priority to those listed below. It was agreed that the recommendations be sent to UNESCO, IFLA, and the relevant government authorities in each country.

The participants of the post-survey workshop:

1. Recommend that the following definition of information literacy that was adopted by the UNESCO Workshop on Development of Information Literacy through School Libraries in South-East Asia on 18-20 October 2004 in Bangkok, i.e.

   Information literacy is the ability to recognize when information is needed, to identify the needed information, to identify the sources, to locate and access information efficiently and effectively, to evaluate information critically, to organize and integrate information into existing knowledge, to use information ethically and legally, to communicate information , and carry out all of the above activities effectively

   be adopted as the working definition for the region, and that individual countries may adapt and/or translate the definition for local needs.

2. Urge Library Associations and School Library Associations to provide continuing professional development and education opportunities in relation to their information literacy policy statement, and to report actions to UNESCO, IFLA and IASL.

3. Encourage UNESCO, IFLA and IASL to undertake media campaigns to raise awareness about information literacy in the region, and to advocate the importance of information literacy with respective governments.

4. Urge UNESCO, IFLA and IASL to encourage Ministries of Education to embed information literacy processes into their curriculum and teaching-learning pedagogy.

5. Urge UNESCO, IFLA and IASL to encourage Faculties of Education, Faculties of Library Science, and teacher training colleges to embed information literacy processes into their curriculum and teaching-learning pedagogy.

6. Urge Library Associations and/or School Library Associations in each of the countries to develop an information literacy policy statement, and to promote the concept to education authorities at all levels.

7. Urge Ministries of Education to provide quality school library facilities, collections and staffing at least to minimum standards, as identified in the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines 2002.

8. Urge UNESCO to support pilot projects that model information literacy implementation at all levels and types of education.

9. Endorse a proposal for a workshop on "Policy Writing and Implementation" using information literacy as the working content, to be held as a pre-conference workshop at the IFLA Conference in Seoul, Korea in August 2006 and, if possible, for funding to be sought that would bring participants from South-East Asian countries.

The participants of this workshop also give equal priority to the following actions:

10. That a project be established to develop a curriculum, materials, and process for the training of trainers to conduct workshops in order to implement information literacy across the region.

11. That a research project be proposed to determine where courses that model the integration of information literacy processes in their training programs for education and school library personnel are currently offered.

12. That a hands-on workshop be initiated to explore the different problem-solving models of information literacy in classroom applications and their application through cooperative planning and teaching with school library personnel.

13. That, in order to maintain communication at the regional level, participants are urged to make use of available channels of communication, e.g. IFLA-L, IASL listserv, school librarians' blog in the Philippines.

14. That UNESCO and IFLA reco gnize the significant contributions of the officers of the region in organizing and implementing this outstanding workshop.

Acknowledgements

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