

School Libraries and Information Literacy Education in Lithuania: State-of-Art and Survey Findings

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Abstract: *A self-responding questionnaire (26 items in 3 sections: 1. General information on the school and its library; 2. Information literacy education; 3. The school library role in the school life) was administered in Autumn 2021 to 651 school libraries in Lithuania to investigate how they are organized and positioned, and their role in information literacy education. The main findings show strengths (e.g., opening hours, the school librarian as an information and cultural professional) and weaknesses (e.g., missing PD in Information Literacy). The research provides useful foundations for further investigations and interventions to improve the school library role and profession, as discussed with the President of LMBDA.*

Introduction

International scientific and professional meetings provide both speakers and attendees with the opportunity “to share new data perspectives and to stimulate healthy discussion” (Dua [et al.], 2021). The combination of formal and informal discourses in such meetings facilitates new insights, interactions, collaboration, and may contribute to the development of new ideas, projects, and sectors in the host country, too. This is what happened in August 2012, when school library experts and practitioners from Lithuania and all over the world convened in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital city, to attend the international meeting “Next Generation School Library” (Scarborough, 2012). The focus was put on the relationship between the increasing wealth of information and technologies, the range of foundational competencies for lifelong learning, and the role of the school library in equipping learners with such competencies.

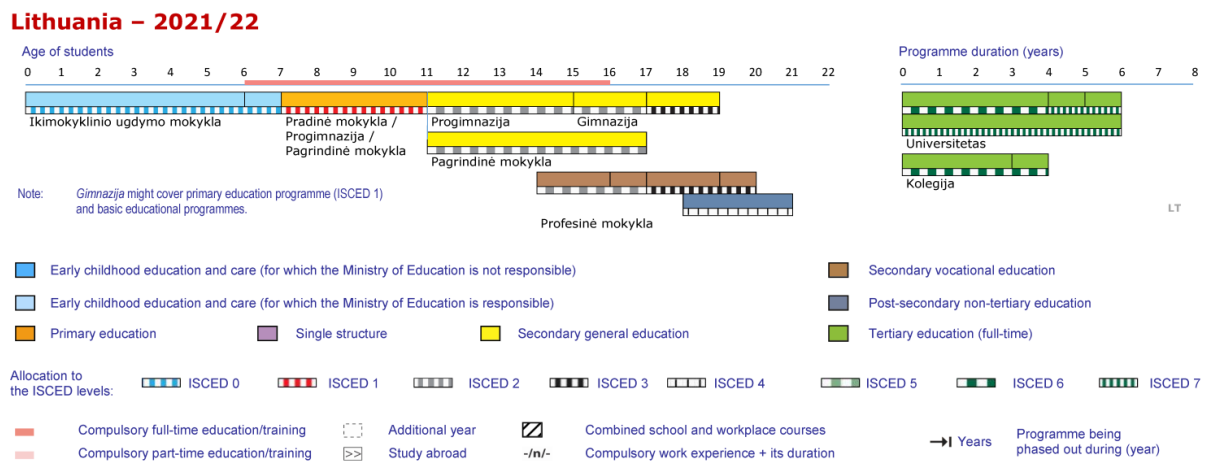
The conference¹ constituted the initial foundation for LMBDA, the Lithuanian School Library Association, that was formally established the following year.

About ten years after that conference, what is the current situation of school libraries in Lithuania and how are they responding to the ongoing change? What role do they play in equipping their users with the needed competencies?

Lithuanian Education System

Lithuania, one of the Baltic Countries, is in Central Eastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, between Latvia and Russia, west of Belarus, and has an estimated population of 2,683,546 (CIA, 2022). It became an independent country in 1990, after 50 years under the USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1922-1991). Education is compulsory until the age of 16 (grades: 1-10): pre-primary (starting at the age of 6 years); primary (grades: 1-4); lower secondary schools (grades: 5-10); gymnasiums (grades: 9-12). Education can be provided by “pre-gymnasium” (grades: 1-8) or “school multifunctional centres” (grades: 1-12) or other formal and non-formal education, cultural and social services. years of age (for more details, see Figure No. 1 and EACEA, 2022).

Figure No. 1: the Lithuanian Education System (source: EACEA, 2022).



Despite the high rate of literacy (99,8% male and female) and although “education is a priority for the state and is publicly funded at all levels”, the education system is affected by some “key challenges”, as a persisting high rate of low performing students (mainly from lower socio-economic contexts); the very little achievement of Lithuanian

¹ The Programme in English is available at URL: https://www.vu.lt/site_files/InfS/Naujienos/PROGRAM_New%20Generation%20School%20Library.pdf

15-year-olds in the PISA 2018 results (compared with those of PISA 2015); the ongoing population decline (some -40% students in the last 18 years); increasing aging and scarce attraction for the profession both for school teachers and school principals. The Law No. V-683 (Sept. 14, 2017) introduced a modernization of the teachers' education and training model, that is "intended to encourage teachers to obtain additional qualifications in a subject or a pedagogical specialization". (EACEA, 2022). Furthermore, stimulus plans for teachers' professional development and qualification, as 'I Choose to Teach!' (*Renkuosi mokyti!*), have been implemented in recent years. Other measures have been also taken by Lithuania since 2012 to reduce the percentage of early school leavers (Unesco, 2012)² and more recently to address the social exclusion of children (Unicef, 2022). Raising the sense of belonging at school could have a positive impact on student's well-being, literacy, and achievement in Lithuania, where:

only 55.7% of 15-year-olds surveyed in the OECD's 2018 programme for international student assessment (PISA) feel that they belong at school compared, with an average of 65.2% at EU level. PISA 2018 shows that sense of belonging is associated with a 20-point increase in reading performance in Lithuania (compared to an average of 11 points), after accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools. (EU, 2021, 190-200: 192)

Legal Framework for School Libraries

The library is mandatory in each school, according to the Law No. I-920 (June 6, 1995), whose third section states:

The school library (other than that of higher education) is an integral part of the school and is very useful to the school community for carrying out various activities; it must adapt to the characteristics and needs of school users, to provide answers as valid as possible. (Translation by the Authors).

The need for optimizing existing library structures to save costs on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to provide quality services to schools, because of the student population decline, the "Lithuania 2030" strategy³ has been implemented since 2015 and models of

²

https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/lithuania_national_reform_programme-en.pdf

³ *Lietuvos pažangos strategija „Lietuva 2030“*, patvirtintos Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo 2012 m. gegužės 15 d. nutarimu Nr. XI-2015. Disponibile al seguente URL: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.425517#:~:text=Lietuvos%20pa%C5%BEangos%20strategija%20%E2%80%9ELietuva%202030%E2%80%9C%20%28toliau%20%E2%80%93%20Strategija%29,sprendimus%20ir%20rengiant%20valstyb%C4%97s%20planus%20ar%20programas.%201.3>>.

co-operation have been developed for the integration of library services between public libraries and the school ones.

One of the aims that the Lithuanian library network aims at pursuing is to increase the diversity of sources, accessibility, and quality of the services, to improve the teaching-learning process, and the quality of the education and training offered. The integration between public and school library services began in 1990, when the Ministry of Culture, joining the counterpart of Education, was transformed into the Ministry of Culture and Education. In Lithuania, there are three specific organizational models.

1. The school library as a structural and integral unit of a school.
2. A municipal library with a specific school library section inside its space or building. The school library functions are operated by the municipal public library, prior an agreement between the two institutions; a single library provides services both to the school and to the local community; therefore, there is no school library located inside the school.
3. Joint library services: public libraries and school libraries collaborate, according to the principles of shared leadership, following an agreement between the two institutions that offer the required services both to the school community and the local one. In this case, therefore, there are both the school library and the municipal library, which cooperate in synergy.

Lithuanian Library Associations

Library associations play a relevant role in many fields: professional development of their members, internationalization, advocacy for the profession, development of standards and tools, etc. Being an active member of a library association helps to overcome isolation and get support. In Lithuania there are several library associations according to the library types: for instance, the LSVBA is intended for public libraries, while the LKBA for academic libraries.

After the independence of Lithuania, establishing a school library (or school librarians') association in Lithuania has been "a long and winding road". Many stimuli were provided by the American Professional Partnership for Lithuanian Education (A.P.P.L.E.) in summer schools, when U.S. school library practices were introduced to Lithuanian school librarians, thanks to the commitment of many volunteers as Regina Petruaksas⁴, since

⁴ Lecturer from Pennsylvania.

1992, and later on, since 1996, Dr. Blanche Woolls⁵. Conversations and cooperation among Lithuanian school librarians started to improve and led, years later, to successful meetings and to an international “window”, too, when one of the summer school participants, Snaiguole Raguckiene, represented her colleagues at the annual conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) in Dublin, Ireland (Scarborough, 2012, p. 3-4).

An attempt to establish a school librarians’ association was made in the mid-Nineties, but it was not successful (Mozuraite, 1999, p. 24; Kryzanauskiene, 2008: [p. 6]). A further attempt was made ten years later establishing “the Department of School in the Lithuanian Librarians’ Association (LLA)”, as reported by Kryzanauskiene (2008: [p. 6]); although the LLA website, carefully explored by the authors of this contribution, does not show any specific information on school librarians/libraries, except for the book donation campaign “December of Books”⁶ and the link to the LMBDA - Lietuvos mokyklų bibliotekų darbuotojų asociacija, i.e. the Association of Lithuanian School Library Staff.

LMBDA is a voluntary, public, and autonomous professional organization, which includes both librarians and other professionals who work in school libraries. It was established to promote professional collaboration between school librarians, following the outcomes of the above-mentioned international conference "Next Generation School Library", held The LMBDA was officially registered in Autumn of 2013.⁷ The association currently brings together about 200 school librarians from 33 municipalities. The LMBDA aims at pursuing several goals: coordinating activities (e.g., professional development meetings); advocating for the improvement of the school librarian’s job position and his/her professionalism; representing the needs of students; promoting change and innovation in school libraries and participating in the shaping of Lithuanian education and culture policies. In May 2017, the association became a member of the IASL (International Association of School Librarianship).

⁵ Professor Emerita at San Jose State University's School of Library and Information Science and Consulting Editor of ABC-CLIO/Libraries Unlimited.

⁶ Since 2011, 360,000 books have been donated to school libraries or nursery schools (visit: <https://www.lbd.lt/knygu-kaledu-akcijos-rezultatai-2/>). See also: Marijampolė (2012).

⁷ The first president of the Association was Rima Noreikienė, later replaced by Dalia Balčytytė, head of the Information Resources Center of the Lithuanian Library for the blind; the current president is Žaneta Pratusėvičienė.

Research Purpose and Questions

Updated information and literature about school libraries in Lithuania is rather limited, fragmented and mostly available in Lithuanian; furthermore, the authors realized that a comprehensive and updated picture (in Lithuanian or other languages) of the current situation was missing. Based on the lack of a clear and updated picture of the situation of Lithuanian school libraries and their educational role, particularly, in the field of information literacy, an explorative study is needed to understand the current situation and to form the foundations for further investigations and actions.

The study is therefore based on the following main research questions (RQ):

1. How are school libraries positioned in Lithuania and responding to change?
2. Do Lithuanian school librarians deliver Information Literacy education and, if so, which way?

Conceptual Framework

This contribution mainly refers to the educational and transformational role of the school library, the school librarian as a leader, a teaching partner, an expert in information literacy education, especially as described in the *IFLA School Libraries Guidelines* (2015).

Review of Literature

An overview on school libraries in Lithuania is useful to understand their development in the last decades. The situation of Lithuanian school libraries before and after the country regained its independence (in 1990), is described as a “Golden Age” (in Soviet times) and a “Stone Age” (Mozuraite, 1999, p. 17-18). In Soviet times, school libraries, according to the Regulations of 1972, “had to help the teachers to educate pupils in a communist way”, promote Russian language and literature, atheism and communism (Mozuraite, 1999, p. 18). School libraries, in charge of the Ministry of Education, “were quite active places, almost equivalent to public libraries in their stocks and importance, (...) considered cultural institutions like public libraries but connected with the process of education” (*ivi*, p. 19). Their position changed after 1991, particularly in 1994, when “the Ministry of Culture and Education was divided back into two ministries” and “librarians became cultural workers in the educational system” (*ibidem*). The school library was not included in the new Education Act and curricula, nor in the “Lithuanian Library Law”, the library act approved in 1995. Furthermore, “the New Regulations were already old and conservative in 1998” (*ibidem*). At the beginning of the so-called

“Stone Age”, many challenges emerged: school librarians’ salaries dropped; collections became hard to develop and update because of the change of the ratio - from number of books per pupil to amount of money per pupil -, and book donations (mainly old and useless) from abroad did not help; some opportunities also emerged: school libraries started to cooperate with public libraries (*ivi*, p. 22). The establishment of an Association of School Librarians in 1995 did not help to revamp the school library sector and the school librarian’s prestige (*ivi*, p. 24).

Ambiguity, contradictions, weaknesses emerged from the “first research ever carried out”, a study on Lithuanian school libraries that dates to fifteen years ago when, in the academic year 2006-2007, a questionnaire (edited by Rita Tadarauskiene and presented by Irena Kryzanauskiene) was administered to all the schools, by the Lithuanian Librarians’ Association (School department) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science (Kryzanauskiene, 2008: [p. 8]). The analysis of 1713 questionnaires pointed out several issues, among which: the lack of methodologic support and literature; limited budget; librarians’ low salary, increasing aging, and poor digital skills; the challenging introduction of the computerized library management system (Kryzanauskiene, 2008: [p. 25]).

Library space needs to be “rethought” in innovative ways (La Marca, 2007) according to the change in information seeking behaviour and the need for building a learning community through a stimulating and inclusive library “learning commons” (CLA, 2014; IFLA, 2015; CSL, 2016). The school librarian’s role needs to be “rethought” as well, taking in account the unique role that school librarians can play for their leadership (Everhart, Mardis, & Johnston, 2011; Hughes-Hassell & Hanson-Baldauf, 2008; Kuhlthau, 2010), as educational leaders, partners and innovators (Valenza, 2017), and also as “technology integration leaders” (Johnston, 2012), whose engagement and expertise help developing the digital dimension of their school library (e.g., curating its webpage, digital content, resources and communication). The school librarians’ instructional role is clearly defined in the *IFLA School Library Guidelines* (2015, p. 27): formal and informal instructional activities are addressed to individual students, small groups, and classes, and include the several sets of literacies (reading and writing, media and information literacy/fluency, critical thinking etc.). The school library program contributes to the overall quality of the school and its impact on students’ learning outcomes and creativity. As stated by Unesco,

Quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. It also develops the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges through education for sustainable

development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED). (Unesco, 2016, p. 8)

This research project aims at understanding if and how Lithuanian school libraries are responding to change (technological, educational, societal etc.) and are positioned, and if and how they are involved in delivering Information Literacy education.

Methodology & Research Design

Questionnaires used in former research on school libraries, including the one administered in Lithuania in 2006-2007 (Kryzanauskiene, 2008) were examined. A questionnaire in Lithuanian language was then designed to collect both quantitative data (through multiple choice questions) and qualitative ones, for instance, thoughts, concepts, experiences (through open-ended questions).

The first version of the self-responding online questionnaire was pre-tested and therefore adjusted according to the feedback (e.g., rephrasing of an item). The final version of the questionnaire was organized in three Sections, as described later.

Prior to the development and administration of the questionnaire, statistical data on libraries were extrapolated from the National Library of Lithuania (2020),⁸ and particularly those referring to education and school libraries were analysed: a total of 947 libraries relating to the educational sector were identified, including 880 school libraries.

School libraries	Collections (total items)	Users	Book loans	Visits	Qualified Librarians	SLs with internet access
880	8,432,418	276,240	2,444,838	3,073,720	1122	826

Furthermore, a list of general education schools, based on information available in the “Švietimo portalas” (i.e., Education Portal), was then generated, for a total of 50 pages.

⁸ Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka (2020). *Bendroji 2020 metų Bibliotekų Ataskaita* [i.e., General report on libraries in 2020], <https://www.lnb.lt/media/public/bibliotekininkui/statistika/Ataskaita2020.pdf>.

Schools were divided by state and county; data of each school were categorized in a 6-column worksheet (see example in figure no. 1), as follows:

- 1) progressive numbering
- 2) name of the school
- 3) school website URL
- 4) library contacts and insertion position
- 5) name of employee(s)
- 6) information on whether to send the questionnaire, in case of lack of library contacts, the sending contacts are marked.

Figure No. 2: sample of the worksheet.

1	Mokyklos pavadinimas SCUOLA	Adresas INDIRIZZO WEB	Bibliotekos kontaktai CONTATTO BIBLIOTECA Bibliotekos nuoroda	Daruotojai IMPIEGATI	Anketa LO STATO DEL QUESTIONARIO
2	Dabikinės Vladimiro Zubovo mokykla	http://zubovomokykla.lt/	Nerasta	Nerasta	Ne
3	Akmenės gimnazija	https://akmenesgimnazija.lt	romualda.augustiniene@gmail.com	Vyr. bibliotekininkė Romualda Augustiniene Mokytoja Judita Puzonienė	Taip
4	Kruopių pagrindinė mokykla	https://kruopiai.akmene.lm.l t	Nenurodyta Pagalba mokiniui	Nenurodyta	Taip
5	Papilės Simono Daukanto gimnazija	www.papilesgimnazija.l	Nenurodyta informacija	Eglė Zaveckienė	Taip papiles.mokykla@akmene.lt
6	Ventos gimnazija	https://venta.akmene.lm.lt/	Nenurodyta paslaugos	nenurodyta	Taip rastine@ventosgimnazija.lt nerastas
7	Ramučių gimnazija	https://ramuciugimnazija.lt/	Nenurodyta paslaugos	Bibliotekos vedėja Regina Altukavičienė	Taip rastine@ramuciugimnazija.lt
8	Sauletekio progimnazija	http://sauletekis.akmene.lt/ www.sauletekioprogimnazija .lt	Nenurodyta paslaugos	vyresnioji bibliotekininkė Laima Barzeliene.	Taip

All the school websites were visited and analysed: no information or link to the school library webpage was found in 230 cases, while useful and interesting information was retrieved in many others. For instance, the school library may be listed as a “structure/facility” or, more often, as “services”. Furthermore, detailed information is often provided: e.g., Media and Information Literacy Education results to be compulsory in the “Media and Society” curriculum at the “Salomeja Nėris” School in Vilnius starting from the fifth grade in the Lithuanian School System (corresponding to the first year of the junior high school; average 11 years-old pupils).

Taking in account the school librarians' role in developing the digital dimension of their school library, 651 school library websites or webpage, linked to the school website, were listed, and then selected as the recipients of the invitation to collaborate to the survey. An invitation was sent straight to the school librarian (321 cases) or to the school administrative office (330 cases, although the invitation did not necessarily reach the school librarian). The questionnaire was administered online, through a Google form, in Autumn 2021 (AY 2021-2022), from the 5th of October to the 20th of December; 110 responses were collected and 101 were selected as valid.

General Education Schools	Sent questionnaires	Straight to the School Library	Other contacts (Administration)	School Libraries missing from the school website	Valid responses over total received
881	651	321	330	230	101/110

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire is structured in three sections, as follows:

1. The first Section aims at acquiring general data on the school and its library (13 items): school type and population, the school library and its services, budget, staff, opening hours.
2. The second Section focuses on information literacy (6 items, four of which are not compulsory and aim at investigating the availability - or not - of training course, the organization that oversees them, who the attendees are, what methodology is used).
3. The third Section focuses on the school library, the role it plays in the school life, how activities are organized, and suggestions for improvement (7 items), for a total of 26 questions (17 multiple choice; 9 open-ended).

Main Findings

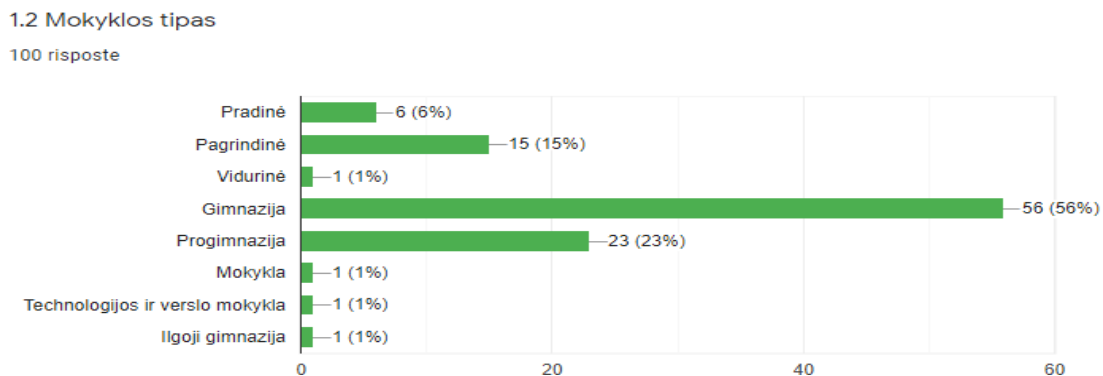
This paper addresses both two overarching questions – RQ#1: How are school libraries positioned in Lithuania and responding to change? RQ#2) Do Lithuanian school librarians deliver Information Literacy education and, if so, which way? - and presents the main findings from an explorative survey. Findings are organized and presented according to the structure of the questionnaire. The picture that emerges from the data processing shows the importance of school librarians as information and cultural professionals and their key role for a functioning library. At the same time, it shows some weaknesses, like the lack of professional development in Information Literacy and

consequently limited educational offer (some 30% of the respondents) by the school library in this field. Possible solutions to improve the school library role were also drawn, and discussed with the current President of LMBDA, who was interviewed, too.

Section 1: General information on the school and its library

The institutions that participated in the survey were mainly public schools: gymnasiums (56%), pre-gymnasiums (23%) and only 6% of the primary schools (Table No. 1).

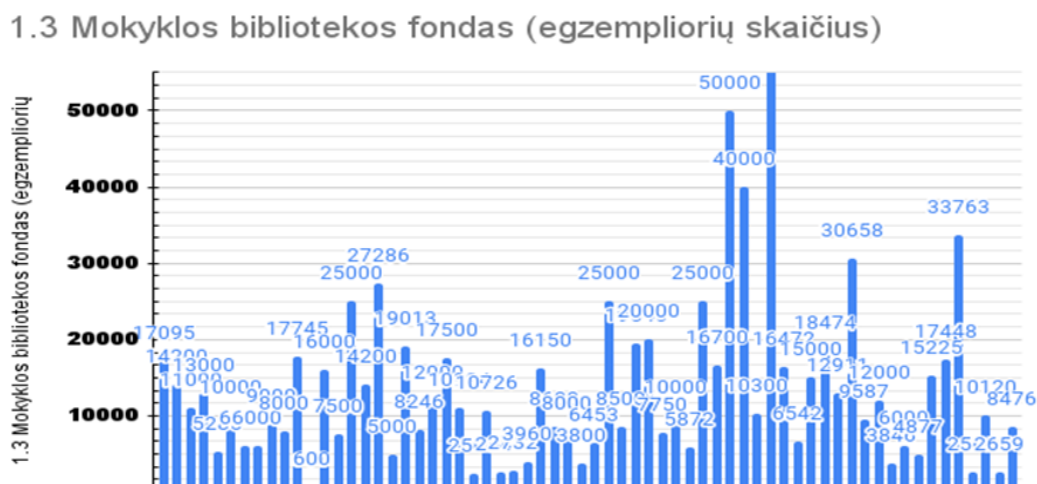
Table No. 1: type of participating schools.



Collections

An average number of volumes per student is about 20 (digital resources are not included). 70% of libraries have more than 10,000 volumes: the stock varies according to the dimension of the school and number of pupils. Each school autonomously purchases books and other documents helpful to its own users; collections are generally updated twice a year (in Springtime and at the end of the year), while for purchasing new materials as needed the school librarian consults with the school entities.

Furthermore, from the website analysis, it was found that collections include both information documents related to the curriculum, and material for recreational purposes. In addition, many libraries have a section dedicated to resources for teaching staff and a section dedicated to digital documentation.

Table No. 3: Collections (amount of books).

Library space

The size ranges from a minimum of 60 square meters to more than 200 square meters. The number of seats varies according to the size of the library and the number of pupils who can be hosted. Furthermore, the responses report that, in addition to the library, many schools also have reading rooms.

Fundings

The range of fundings varies very much (from 0 up to 45,000 euros) and a general complaint emerged by the responses: funds allocated to libraries are considered insufficient and not constant. As a result, collections are often obsolete; many books donated by associations or organizations are not always adequate for users. Therefore, libraries often cooperate by sharing funds or organizing events for fund-raising and book donations to the library. Budget details of each library are available in the National Library of Lithuania “Martynas Mažvydas” (2021).

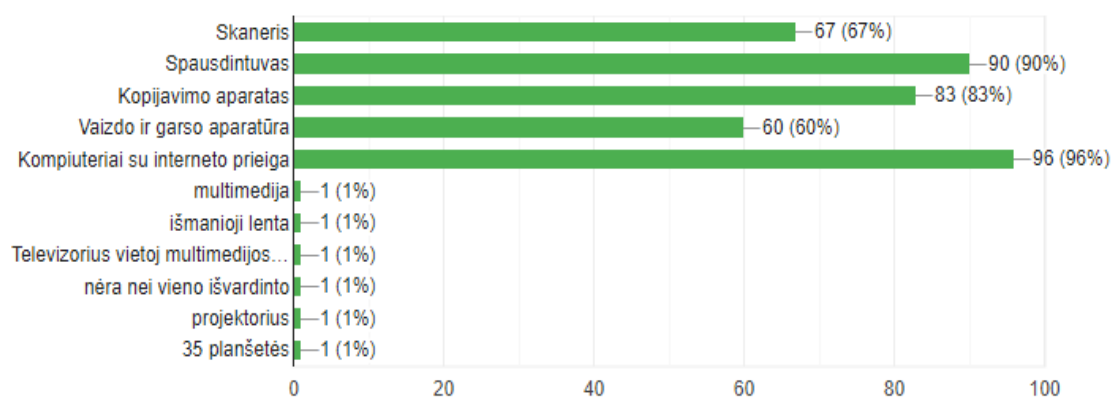
ICT and Internet Access

826 (out of 880 libraries) have computers for Internet access (94% circa).⁹ Percentages ranging from 60% up to 90% show that other technological tools (scanners, printers, photocopiers, video and audio equipment) are available (Table No. 3 – ICT equipment).

⁹ While it was 74,7% in AY 2006-2007 (Kryzanasuskienė, 2008, [p. 5]).

Table No. 3 – ICT equipment.**1.6 Mokyklos bibliotekoje yra:**

100 rispote

**Opening Hours**

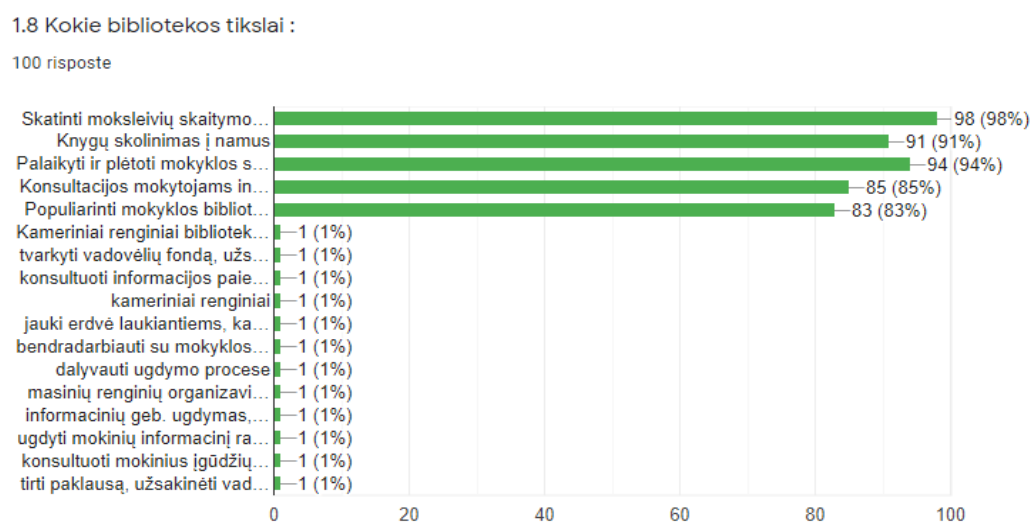
Students can use the library during and beyond school hours (average opening: 07:00-08:00 a.m.; average closing: 04:00-05:00 p.m.), to carry out a project, or attend extracurricular, cultural, socializing and research activities.

Staff

School library professionals are mainly qualified librarians (78%), but there is a substantial percentage of schoolteachers (37%). The number of library staff varies according to the number of pupils: 1 or 2 staff members, in rare cases 3 if the number of school populations is large. 94% are aware of PD courses, while 6% do not know.

Main Goals, Services and Activities

Table No. 4 – Services and Activities.



Libraries pursue many goals, provide services, and organize activities: promoting reading (98%); lending books (91%); implementing the school curriculum (94%); providing reference service to teachers (85%); promoting books (83%). Other services and activities (12%) include: providing consultancy on information search and retrieval; organizing events; educating to information literacy and creativity and cooperating with the school to support pupils' learning process.

Section 2: Information Literacy Education

The second Section covers the importance of information literacy (IL), information skill development, and examples of best practices.

School Libraries delivering IL Courses

Activities of information literacy education are stated by only 31%, while the remaining 69% state no activities in this regard are carried out. Information literacy courses are mainly delivered by the librarian and are sometimes organized in cooperation with teachers and specialists in the field of communication technologies. Those courses are mainly addressed to pupils of different age groups, especially high school students, and include theoretical lectures and practical exercises, debates, quizzes, competitions, workshops, and seminars, as well as inquiry, reading, comparison and discussion activities.

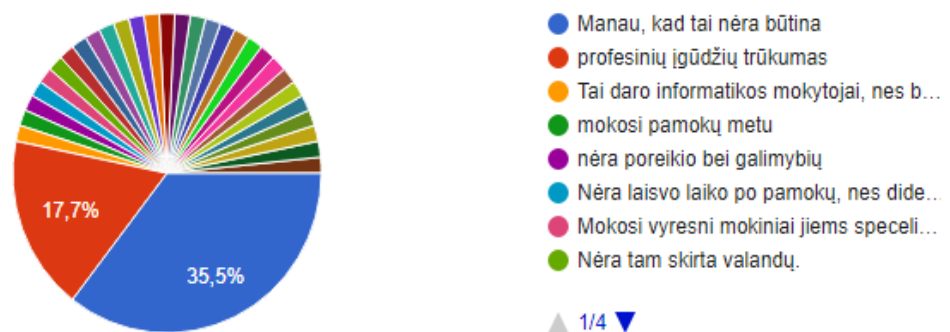
Main Obstacles to Information Literacy Education Delivery

As Table No. 5 shows, 35,5% respondents do not think delivering information literacy education is necessary; 17,7% lack professional competencies, while 53,2% list several reasons (such as inclusion of IL in computer education, exceeding workload, etc.). Information literacy courses are not regularly and widely delivered. Some justify the answer by the fact that information literacy is already taught in computer classes; others state that there are specialists in the school; others that there is a lack of the minimum number of registrations to start the courses, and others point out the lack of specialists and the fact that an information literacy course would require too much of the librarian's time. The fact that information literacy is generally taught by technology teachers (instead of school librarians) highlights the lack of awareness of necessary training to be able to teach this set of competencies effectively. In fact, some librarians state that it is not their responsibility to teach information literacy, and 18% confirm that they do not have the necessary skills.

Table No. 5 – Obstacles to IL Education Delivery.

2.1d Jei nėra informacinio raštingumo mokymo užsiėmimų, nurodykite priežastį .

62 risposte

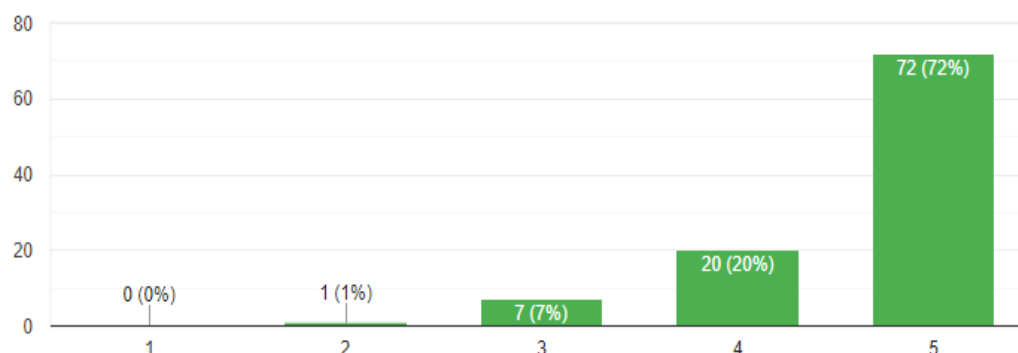


Despite actual obstacles and personal resistances, information literacy education is considered extremely important by 72% and very important 20%, for a total of 92% librarians (Table No. 6), who are aware that there are many teaching methods, but many of them show their need for training courses to develop information literacy education.

Table No. 6 – Importance of IL Education.

2.2. Jūsų nuomone, nurodykite, kokia yra informacinio raštingumo svarba.

100 risposte



IL Models and Resources

Those who deliver information literacy courses do not refer to any of the globally shared models, as the Big6 (Eisenberg & Berkovitz, 1990), Guided Inquiry (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2007), etc. Courses are usually organized by the individual librarian who can make use of the materials available in the education portal (<https://www.emokykla.lt/>), where information literacy guidelines, manuals, and supplementary instructional materials to school subjects for each age group can be found. Another useful reference that is frequently mentioned in the responses is the portal "draugiskas internetas" (i.e., Friendly Internet, <https://www.draugiskasinternetas.lt/>), that provides teachers and parents with educational materials, videos, interactive games and recommendations; the portal offers events and contests that aim to raise awareness of current digital challenges in promoting safer use of the Internet and digital technologies.

Best Practices

Examples of best practices provided by librarians refer to lessons where learners play an active role by constructing their own knowledge, or to events that promote the development of digital skills in a safe way. They refer to activities such as brainstorming, "reading for meaning", "comparison and juxtaposition", "academic controversy", "analysis of multimedia texts", debates and activities designed to develop critical and ethical thinking, experiential workshops, and activities involving the use of e-mail, the electronic register (logbook) and other specific software or platforms. Students are introduced to the library's structure, its holdings and OPAC; they are taught the practice of referencing, too. Other activities involve reading children's fairy tales and then moving on

to the use of encyclopaedias and dictionaries to carry out digital projects. Integrated lessons are also promoted: public librarians come to the school library and deliver lessons on information literacy to teach students how to find information consciously and independently. Proper writing of sources and citations, description of books and online sources are also taught.

Section 3: The School Library's Role

The third Section focuses on the school library, the role it plays in the school life, how activities are organized, and suggestions for improvement (7 items).

Usage of the School Library by Schoolteachers

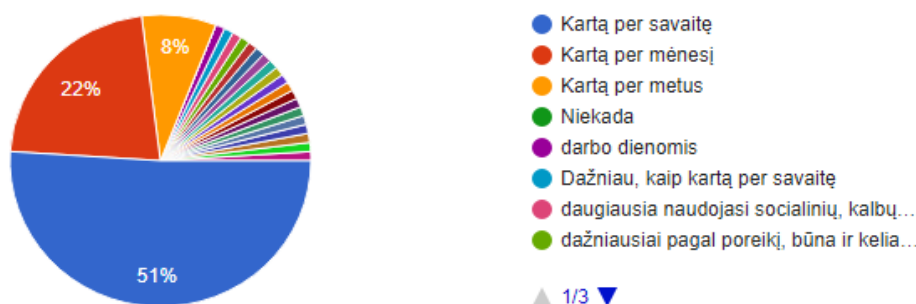
With reference to the library attendance data, libraries are configured as useful learning environments and extremely functional to the learning process: indeed, they are used by school users on a daily (51,5%) or monthly (21,2%) basis to carry out different types of activities (Table No. 7).

Table No. 7 – SL Usage by Schoolteachers.

3 skyrius – Bibliotekos vaidmuo mokyklinėje veikloje

3.1 Kaip dažnai mokytojas kartu su mokiniais naudojasi mokyklos biblioteka ?

100 risposte



The main purpose of teachers in using the library is to deliver lessons in a less traditional way by, for example, having pupils engaged in projects, group work, and creative workshops through multimedia resources. Efforts are made to encourage reading, especially taking advantage of October as the ISLM – International School

Library Month, to introduce young children in the school life and in particular the library. In fact, when asked how popular the library was within the school system, it is emphasized how highly it is taken into consideration and is an integral part. In addition to supplementary lessons, exhibitions or events on lesson topics, meetings on issues such as addiction and abuse, book clubs or discussion groups are also organized. According to some librarians, information education takes place naturally while pupils prepare project work or carry out their assigned tasks during which reference and information education are constantly provided. Thus, the main activities librarians are concerned with are teaching students to use all possible sources of information, enabling them to develop critical thinking skills, and helping both students in individual projects and teachers in planning lessons and inquiry-based activities. When asked how important they considered information literacy courses for both students and teachers, responses were homogeneous: IL courses are considered essential for students, while not strictly necessary for teachers (although professional development for teachers – including in the field of information literacy -, are mentioned at p. 27 in the *IFLA School Library Guidelines* of 2015).

School Library Improvement

Many common concerns and critical issues emerged: above all, the lack of funding, while a stable and regular budget would allow a better collection development and improve library spaces, making them more aesthetically welcoming, modern, and digitally innovative. The need for rethinking space and furnishings, incentivizing the librarian profession by making it more prestigious (also in terms of wage), giving more importance to the librarian's opinion and to the library's role in promoting reading, media literacy and information also emerged.

Discussion and Limitations

This study processed and examined 101 valid responses (out of 110 received) to the quali-quantitative questionnaire on Lithuanian school libraries, their organization, services, and activities, regarding information literacy education.

Discussion

In summary, the strengths of Lithuanian school libraries are their all-day accessibility, both during and after classes, for students and teachers, thus playing a relevant role within the school system and enjoying a certain popularity. They are willing to collaborate internally (with librarians and teachers) and externally (with institutions, other libraries),

while also offering professional development training so that they can always have qualified and up-to-date staff. The sour notes come from the lack of funds to allow them to improve and update the environments, furnishings, and collections, causing consequently professional demotivation and a greater workload for librarians. Responses clearly highlight the close connection between the library and the school: the library emerges as a useful tool for carrying out school, extracurricular, research and even socialization activities, since events and exhibitions are planned. Furthermore, many collaborative initiatives are promoted by school libraries: 80% of school libraries collaborate with other libraries of the same type and with public libraries, too, while about 40% cooperate with museums, universities, and municipalities.

Regarding information literacy education, it is possible to say that majority of respondents consider it extremely important and are in favour of sharing good practices. However, information literacy education in school libraries does not appear to be a systemic and well-organized activity, thus increasing the workload and, in many cases, those directly involved do not even have the professional capacity to teach it.

Responses suggest that a way through which to promote the acquisition of information literacy is to take advantage of the features and benefits offered by the school library, considered one of the best environments for learning, promoting educational success, dialogue, discussion, inquiry, socialization, and educational and intellectual growth.

The library, however, would not go far without the librarian, who plays the key role of a facilitator and mediator who leads students to acquire this competence, teaching them how to access and manage the information flow consciously. The librarian, according to this perspective, must not only be properly trained, but above all must pose his/herself in a welcoming manner, conveying to the children a love for inquiry and a hunger for knowledge.

By researching each individual library and visiting it virtually, it was possible not only to enter into the heart of the school life of the institutions in Lithuania, but also to understand the role played by the school libraries themselves. Therefore, the pictures, words, and descriptions on each website proved to be essential tools for acquiring information about the functions assumed by the libraries.

Limitations

From the Authors' viewpoint, two main limitations can be found: L#1 - the number of valid responses (101, corresponding to 1/6 of the invitations sent), although most of them were very informative and detailed; L#2 - the intentional exclusion of 230 schools

from the survey.

About L#1, a further survey could be carried out in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and/or National, Regional or Local Education Authorities, and the LMBDA: an institutional invitation to participate in the survey might attract more attention.

About L#2, the fact that no information is available in 230 school websites on their libraries on the one hand shows how little importance is given to the school library and its online projection; at the same time, this does not automatically mean that those school libraries are not actively engaged: they might deliver efficient and effective services and activities, that are not visible online.

Implications and Conclusions

The questionnaire administered was particularly useful in investigating, specifically, the activities carried out by the school libraries surveyed, the methods they use, the role of librarians, their strengths and weaknesses, satisfactions, and aspirations.

These research findings show that school libraries in Lithuania are well-known, active, dynamic, and reliable entities, and are well appreciated by pupils both during and after school hours. In fact, Lithuanian school libraries prove to be active components of the school, since they are loved and attended by pupils, who use them to study, engage themselves in leisure activities such as playing chess, sharing thoughts and ideas, creating content and products, and spending time reading books. Thus, it is possible to say that school libraries serve multiple functions: social, cultural, and educational. They represent spaces where conversations are stimulated and fostered, where pupils can carry out projects and tasks in groups, in a non-formal environment that allows for the joining of different points of view.

Lithuanian school librarians think that teaching information literacy is particularly important; nevertheless, it is apparent that it is not a well-structured and long-lasting activity yet. In some cases, professional skills and funding are lacking, in others the workload is too much.

The data collected were shared with the Lithuanian School Libraries Association (LMBDA), which, being primarily involved in cooperation among its members, may draw its conclusions and design possible interventions to improve the situation of school libraries in Lithuania, making sure that all students can benefit from a functioning school library and acquire the 21st century competences. The LMBDA Association, whose purposes are uniting, cooperating, and supporting all members of the association,

especially school librarians, could develop a professional development programme for school librarians' upskilling.

Thus, in Lithuania, although in some cases there is a lack of resources and expertise to initiate information literacy courses, it is possible to state that school libraries are nonetheless configured as integral parts of the school, capable of playing a key role in pupils' learning and educational success.

In conclusion, this survey can be considered a starting point for further systematic survey on an annual basis at the national level, directly involving school librarians and other school library professionals. Current conditions, situation, and trends of their school libraries may be monitored and assessed. A recurrent survey may highlight strengths and critical issues, help finding solutions, stimulate schools to engage themselves in taking care of the library's image, especially through online sites and social networks, for a wider outreach, greater accessibility and visibility, and the updating and modernization of spaces and collections.

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