

Web Sites of Primary School Libraries – Case of the Šibenik City

Mihaela Banek Zorica

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Zagreb
mbanek@ffzg.hr

Nikolina Grubišić-Čabo

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Zagreb
nikolinagcabo@gmail.com

Abstract: *The school library is an informational, cultural, and educational center of the school. According to the School library guidelines they are "...learning environments that provide space (physical and digital), access to resources, and access to activities and services to encourage and support student, teacher, and community learning" (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2015). With the advance of the Internet, the library is presented to the world and enables continuous contact with other centers and other libraries, so they are functioning in both physical and digital space. And the history of the school library website is a very long one as school librarians were the professionals that accepted new technology in the early days. As Dukić (2012) writes "the first web pages of school libraries appeared in developed countries as early as 1994. From 1995 to 1996, the number of school library websites increased rapidly. However, the main feature of these websites was static, because the communication was mostly in one direction - from the website to the user". With the advance of Web 2.0 librarians became able to create their own library websites without excessive computer skills. Awareness of the need to create websites exists and is strengthened by trends from the outside, but we must keep in mind the need to modernize them because outdated and uninformative pages can only harm the library. Namely, they are the identity card with which the library enters the most remote homes, other libraries, research centers, etc.." (Lazarich, 2003). Today, when most children and young people grow up with digital technology and the Internet, creating their own library website is an appropriate way to bring the library, and thus reading, closer to young people. Well-designed websites can be a good tool for searching for information related to learning, but also a virtual learning community in which school librarians can collaborate with staff and students. Valenza (2007) goes even further in analyzing the quality of the websites by creating a taxonomy of the school library websites. But what happens when the school and their library's physical space are closed due to the lockdown. Shifting their physical space in the virtual one assumes well-developed communication strategies. The question that arises is should the virtual space be the same as before the pandemics or should it adapt to the new context. The goal of our research is to investigate the current development of the school library websites in one of the Croatian cities and investigate if they respond to the current challenges of the transformed educational environment.*

Introduction

The beginnings and creation of the libraries are connected with the beginnings of literacy. Since their forming, libraries have always played an important role in the education, but also in expansion and improvement of the cultural and educational aspects of various communities. They can be described as place that collects and processes all kind of knowledge and encourage users to work independently with the help of modern technology and various materials such as book materials or non book materials. In this sense, they stand for educational, informational and cultural centre of the school. IFLA School Library Guidelines defines that school library should have a written marketing and promotion policy specifying objectives and strategies. One way to do it is creating a school library website that can provide important informations not only to the students and staff, but also to the other users. School libraries have not only physical, but also digital space, which, by every means today many school libraries in Croatia do not persuade. The tasks of the school library have changed throughout history, but they still have a big part in the school system, since they provide not only education, but also personal growth of children and young people.

The most important role in the work of school libraries is played by the school librarian. They encourage critical thinking and creativity and in their work they must demonstrate excellent communication skills, computer competence and pedagogical approach. In the 21st century, school librarians must follow the trends in profession, educate students and others about the school library etc. One way of doing that is the establishment of the school library websites and its promotion on social networks. Adequate access to the information and communication technology must be provided to all students.

New technologies are changing the way we live and technological tools have become part of our everyday life. Internet connection provides direct access to vast information, and with mobile devices we can communicate anytime, anywhere. Web 2.0 tools help us interact, connect and collaborate in the modern world. School libraries encourage students to use technology in all subjects and thus get the opportunity for research and communication which can be realized throughout the website of the library. Today, more than ever, the term online learning or distance learning indicates the importance of using technology in education, but also it points out to the necessity for libraries, as information centers, to encourage information literacy and the use of digital educational content. The establishment of communication through the library website represents a new way of connecting with its users.

In Croatia, it can be often seen that the majority of school library sites depend on the school IT specialists, and that the amount of web pages that are created independently of the school website is small, but they still exist. This research will show which one of them has the better quality.

Unfortunately, in Croatia, laws and regulations do not keep up with the news in education. In the USA, school libraries normally have an equally strong service over the web as well as in physical space. This research was based on ten primary school library websites in the area of the city of Šibenik. The city is situated in Croatia, on the Dalmatian coast and it is one of the oldest Croatian towns. It has a population of nearly 34 k people and in its area it counts 10 primary schools.

Theoretical background

A lot has been written about school library websites. The basis of this paper is the guidelines that Joyce Kasman Valenza set in her research she lead in 2007. Valenza conducted a content analysis on a certain sample of websites that she believed represented high quality and effective school library websites. The main goal of her research was to model descriptive taxonomies for an optimal and productive school library website. In addition to Valenza, three authors / Faletar, Golub and Sudarevic also wrote about this topic in their Guidelines for creating school library websites. The authors state that when creating a website, one should primarily define its purpose and create content on the page accordingly. Access to library websites should certainly be available to everyone, and in their forming we must keep in mind also disabled persons.

Methodology

Using Valenza's taxonomy, the content analysis of the school libraries' websites in one Croatian region was done at the beginning of 2021. A sample of 10 primary school library websites in the city of Šibenik was used. The research was based on the following presumptions: Primary school libraries have their own websites but they are not well designed, and Library web pages created separately from the school page are of the highest quality.

The aim of the research was to compare the similarities and differences of these websites according to the content taxonomy and its four categories:

- 1) Information Access and Delivery (contains features related to the collection and retrieval of user information)
- 2) Learning and Teaching (refers to sources related to information literacy in the knowledge society, including contents for teachers, students and parents)

3) Books and Reading (in this category accent is on developing and promoting the habit of reading)

4) Program Administration (provides users with basic information about the library)

Each of the four main categories of the content taxonomy was divided into additional properties that define each of them. The conducted research provided an insight into the quality of the library websites and at the end of the paper recommendations for the improvement were presented. The authors wanted to investigate if the school library websites respond to the current challenges of the transformed educational environment.

Results and discussion

According to the first dichotomy of content analysis, an overview of the appearance of features by schools was made. Library websites are mostly part of the school website but it is not the case in three samples. Out of a total of 60 features to analyze, the only one that has a 100% representation is the General information about the library. Three features occur 50% while only twenty features occur 10 to 40%. The authors discovered a disturbing fact that 36 out of 60 features do not appear on any websites. The research identifies that none of the library websites has a representation higher than 50% and that libraries on the school websites in Croatia are not sufficiently represented. This was the first presumption that was confirmed. The second presumption was that the library websites of greater quality are actually separated from the school website as they leave school librarians with more freedom in developing and updating content. This presumption was confirmed as library websites created separately from the school website are of the highest quality.

Out of the list of the features, the authors selected the most used ones: General Information about the library, Links to information and school homepage, News from the library, Activities related to learning / cooperation between teachers and librarians.

What is surprising is the fact that no library has a list of new materials, summer lists for learning, lists of books that have won awards, lists created by students, and surveys. Since these features can be a way to encourage learning, the question arises as to why librarians have not dedicated themselves to them, especially since we know that the role of the library in promoting reading is great. Therefore, we can identify that there is a huge discrepancy between the theory and reality. Still, the virtual space is only a representation of the school library seen by the general public and it does not prove or question the quality of the library.

Impact of the research

What research has identified is that there are elements occurring on the websites that are not part of the Valenza's taxonomy. Examples of these elements are: search engine button, documents on library history, links to virtual events in other partner institutions (such as public libraries, museums, theaters, etc.), resources for storytelling and e-picture books, a corner for the youngest with links to play and drawing content, links to animated movies and videos, links to games and more entertainment, and protocol and help during the epidemiological measures due to the COVID-19. This confirms the fact that the taxonomy needs to be updated but also new research on virtual school library space needs to be done. It is important to educate librarians about the usefulness of websites and to encourage them to make the website of the school library as high quality as possible.

Conclusion

Today, school libraries represent a place within the school institution where its users can feel comfortable because they are focused on the well-being of students by teaching them about the use of new technologies for searching and finding content, motivating them to express their creativity with images and videos, and working together with others to students. In addition to students, the school library can be useful to the entire school community, because with its developmental and pedagogical activities and other services, it can directly influence the personal development of its users. With the increasing flow and availability of information, there has been a change in libraries. From the classic school library, whose function was to borrow books, information and multimedia centers emerged, but their task remained the same.

This research was conducted with the intention of pointing out the need to organize library websites, but also to suggest the potential possibility of expanding features in order to increase the quality of library websites. The proposal of new research problems is the result of noticing insufficiently treated topics in the research conducted by Joyce Kasman Valenza. Library websites should have a clean and modern design and be easy to use. In order to be competitive, libraries could create parallel pages in different languages on their websites and write instructions for using the school library in a special section.

The Program Administration category could be expanded with information about the library's collaborations with other cultural institutions in the community, such as cultural centers, galleries, theaters, cinemas, concert halls, and museums. In the Books and reading category, links to the best applications for reading books on mobile phones (eg Amazon Kindle, etc.) could be provided, as well as indicating the existence of bibliotherapy, which in a broader

sense refers to targeted and guided reading. Also, it would not be bad to introduce the possibility of leaving user comments in a special menu, through which you can really see what users think about the library page. With the advice and suggestions of users, there is a possibility of insight into what should still (perhaps) be improved or possibly added. Furthermore, marketing the library through social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) is a great way to bring the library even closer to users. On the website, there could therefore be links to the library's social networks. This feature may be addressed to parents or students under parental supervision, as some social networks have a minimum age for their use. Regarding the teacher website links feature, there is no doubt that the school library cannot have too much influence on whether teachers have their own websites, however the librarian can certainly consult with them and refer them to tools for creating web pages (if teachers want to have their own web page).

At the end of the paper, from all the above it can be concluded that the web pages of primary school libraries should definitely be made of better quality. The research also showed that in some samples librarians felt the need to create a website themselves, which resulted in such samples being of the highest quality. It is very important to make school librarians aware of the need to create high-quality websites, as they will be able to offer their users information at any time of the day.

In conclusion, on the library's website the emphasis should be on reading programs and workshops, as well as activities related to learning or other services that would encourage students to read, because, as Pushkin says: *..Reading is the best learning.*"

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Biographies

Mihaela Banek Zorica is a professor at the Department of the Information and communication sciences and Head of the Chair of the Media and communication at the Department. She is teaching at the undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate level on topics including: e-learning, information and media literacy, school libraries, and knowledge organization. Currently she is national coordinator of ERASMUS+ KA2 project DIGITOOLS – Innovative Tools for Enhancing E-Learning Solutions in Universities.

Nikolina Grubišić-Čabo works as a librarian at the Public Library of Velika Gorica. She has a Bachelor's degree in Italian and further education in Slovenian and Macedonian language and literature.