

A Small Step for a Library, a Giant Leap for the Librarian: Benefits of Using a Book Locator in a School Library

Gordana Banjanin

II. Gimnazija Maribor,
Maribor, Slovenia
knjiznica@druga.si

Abstract: *This study presents the utilization of assistive technology for more effective school library services in the form of a library book locator to help students be more independent users of libraries. The survey presents the first few school librarians' experience in adopting the new tool. Through the findings of this survey, we would like to familiarize more school librarians with the book locator benefits for their students to independently search for material in the school library. Students are generally reluctant to learn library cataloging system rules, with the book locator they roam the library with ease. Our main research questions were: 1) Has the implementation of the locator influenced the visit rate in your school library? 2) Are there any noticeable benefits of the locator pointed out by the librarians?*

Keywords: *book locator, digital technology, school librarians, library orientation*

Introduction

Students are daily in constant contact with the digital media and adopting new ways of looking at information and for information depending on their needs and requirements. The times and environments of low social, geographical and other stability encourages more unconventional action and form (Bezemer and Kress, 2016). Not only the quantity of images in learning materials has increased, but their previously illustrative role has now become equally descriptive as words. Instead of linear eye movements, typical for traditional media, modern media implies multifaceted information presentation and a shift in different modes of

representation (2016). The school library, as the most typical learning environment, has always provided sources of different types to all its users, students and the staff. It has also been well responsive to changes and giving opportunities to its users to learn about the world in a safe and controlled environment. The school librarians promote effective ways of learning, ways of reading, ways of collaboration. In doing so, the access and use of different sources as well as of various technology in the school library plays an important part in its mission to grow lifelong, independent, thoughtful learners and readers (AASL, 2022).

Through the findings of this survey, school librarians are familiarized with book locator benefits for their students to independently search for material in the library. UDC (or any other) may be a system familiar to librarians, but generally users in school libraries (students and the staff alike) are reluctant to learn it, they complain it is time-consuming, or even give up looking for the right shelf leaving the library. With the book locator they do it with ease.

This study presents the utilisation of assistive technology for a more effective school library services in the form of a library book locator provided by Slovenian national cooperative bibliographic online catalogue and service COBISS+ (developed and run by Izum, an institution with its services catering for all types of libraries, from school to the national libraries in the country and abroad, in the region of former Yugoslavia and Balkans).

Statement of the Research Problem

How to put modern information technology to good use and adopt it in a school library to help students be more independent users of materials besides learning standard information literacy topics? How to also serve the less frequent visitors, or some with cognitive disabilities? And to cap it all, how to use the time in the library more creatively by including students in the process? The book locator can prove a welcome tool in school libraries, even more in the larger ones. First of all, librarians want to help students become more independent in searching for material, especially so in their early visits to their school libraries and in other libraries which they do not visit often. Secondly, the locator can reduce the amount of unnecessary librarians' walks to the bookshelves thus leaving them more time for professional consulting and other services. Namely, learning the universal library signposts of UDC in this time of many alternatives makes no reasonable enough argument

that could not be confronted with as a good counter argument for not learning them. As some practical examples show (Mestna knjižnica Kranj, 2023), some libraries have taken a liberty of leaving the standard classification and rather turning to a more intuitive collection arrangement (LaGarde, 2013) and genrification (Collazo, 2022). Two main research questions were:

RQ1) Has the implementation of the book locator influenced the visit / loan rate in those libraries?

RQ2) Are there any other noticeable benefits of the locator expressed by the librarians?

Literature Review

The outlook of school libraries shows not two of them have the same arrangement of books and other materials. Even being a librarian does not help completely to find one's way around in an unfamiliar library with several sublocations and subsections. Different floor plans, the age, language, social groups of users, and other arrangements all can lead to confusion for a newcomer. Looking at the world library map, one comes across different systems such as Dewey and UDC, LCC, Colon classification etc. (Britannica, 2018). The fine structure and precise order of the universal approach admired by a professional librarian may not be equally understood by a casual user only interested in quickly obtaining a book for their required reading or a collection of solved mathematical problems to study for a test.

The idea of helping to find a book and other materials in the library is not at all new, it is a librarian's second nature. Libraries are one of those places where new trends come easily to adjust. Therefore, with the digital technology handy applications on smartphones make browsing the nearest library catalogues a playful activity for those who prefer digital approach (Rochester Public Library, 2022)

It is assumed that a great majority of libraries nowadays offer at least some of their everyday services also online, so anyone can easily get some impression about a certain library just by visiting its internet site.

In Slovenia, every school has a school library and all students visit it at least once. There is also a regular curriculum with topics for teaching for all primary school classes from 1 to 9 (Sušec, 2005), and similarly in the secondary or high school classes from 1 to 4

(Steinbuch, 2010). Students thus attend at least 50 lessons by the age of 19 about libraries, searching, using and documenting sources, and get other information and reading skills. As information literacy classes are not being graded for marks, students are only interested in learning when they see an immediate purpose or they are intrigued in some way. Memorising UDC or library arrangement based on the methods of various visually supported explanations of standard library concepts may not always be appealing to teenagers.

When exploring the internet for various practices, there were only rare examples of libraries found which have adopted a tool such as “Locate this book” (Manchester Library, 2022) where they prepared a video to inform and help their patrons.

Figure 1. *The floor plan of a library and a catalogue search example with the locator sign (Manchester Library, 2022)*

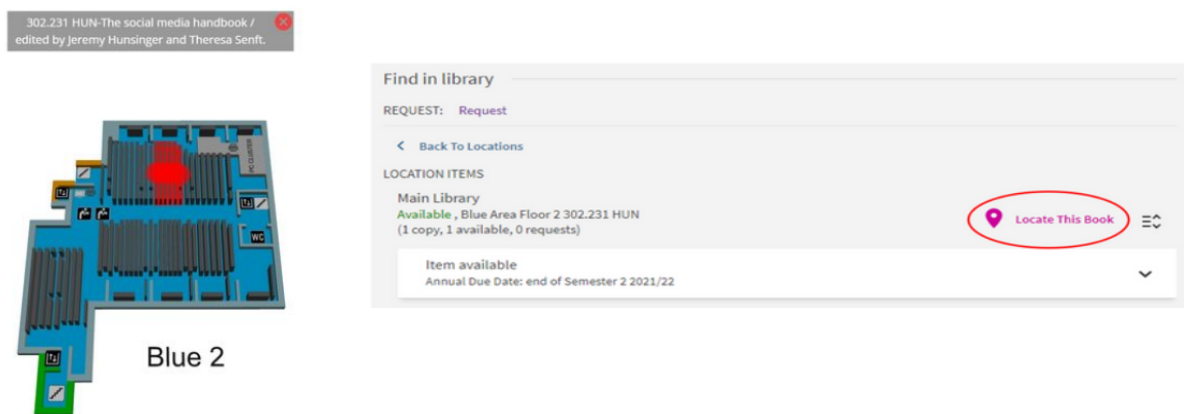


Figure 2. *One-minute video instruction (How to find, July 20th, 2022)*



Yet, this kind of a digital tool to help users find the exact location of requested materials on library shelves is not at all new. In Slovenia, an article has been published already 20 years ago (Budimir, 2001) when the national online bibliographic service provider (IZUM) first introduced and described the technology behind it. Since that time, only a few libraries in Slovenia were known to use a locator at their local platforms (the Central Technical Library, CTK, at the University of Ljubljana, and two public libraries), but they did not use it for long due to various reasons (additional costs etc.).

Description of the Case

In the school year 2009/2010, the head librarian at II. gimnazija Maribor (DGM) (i. e. state general upper-secondary school) approached the professor of informatics with the idea of a book locator, and one of the students taking the computer classes was interested in doing the project. Together they solved various problems with UDC tags, internal tags, etc. and after several months work their own school library book locator was prepared.

The operation scheme was as follows: the floor plan of the library, the local UDC database, the shelves plan with allocated UDC numbers, all connected to the national cooperation online bibliographic system and services (COBISS). When a user looking for a book, clicked on the link to locate the material, the locator prompted the shelves coloring the corresponding cabinet on the floor plan and displayed the image to the user. The locator was also able to record those searched UDCs which were not in the database, but the entries of these units of library material could be detected and appropriately corrected through the catalogued ID.

Every year during 2011-2019, all new students (i. e. over 200 each year) were organized to visit the school library in the first months, and they were acquainted with the locator. Most of them were eager to use the tool to save their time during short breaks, and performing their independence in the library searching for their projects or leisure readings. In 2021 and 2020, the lockdowns disabled this practice for the newcomers and also two previous generations who were not able to practice the new skill.

In October 2022, a new version of a locator was introduced by IZUM at their international annual conference. The main new feature was 3D design, a 360-degree view, and the ability to virtually walk around the room using the computer direction keys or the

mouse. As there had been a decade long experience with a book locator at DGM already, there was also a strong interest to upgrade technology and enable additional functionalities. It was the first school library to start using the tool after the official presentation, which was just before the winter holidays, therefore it was introduced to students in the beginning of 2023. The teachers were presented the locator as well at a staff meeting and invited to use it. One of the teachers' reactions was: »What are you two (the librarians) going to do now at all?«.

As the majority of annual library information classes are usually done before January, there could not be a proper presentation to the students of all levels. Therefore, they were introduced during their individual visits, and proper class visits with presentations are planned for the new school year. The locator displays a 2D or 3D library plan with the exact location of the searched book.

Figure 3. *An exemplary 2D display (Tacer Slana & Žuran Putora, 2022)*

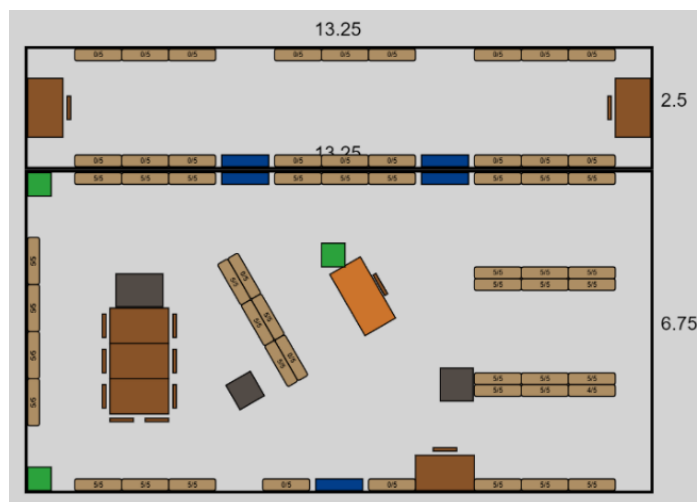


Figure 4. *3D display of the layout of the premises and equipment (Tacer Slana & Žuran Putora, 2022)*

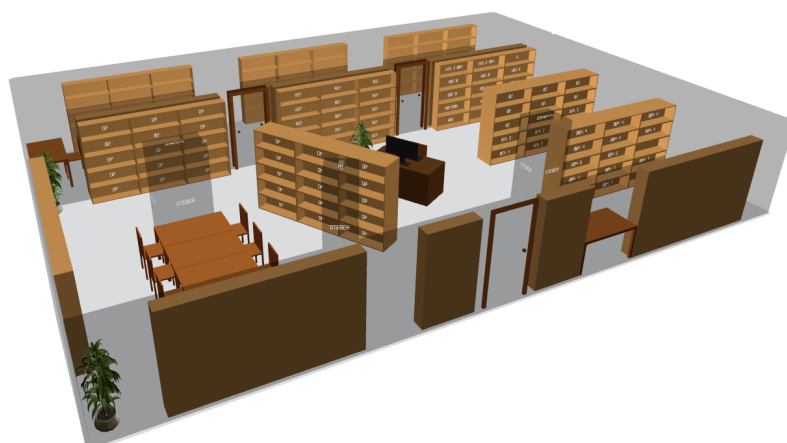
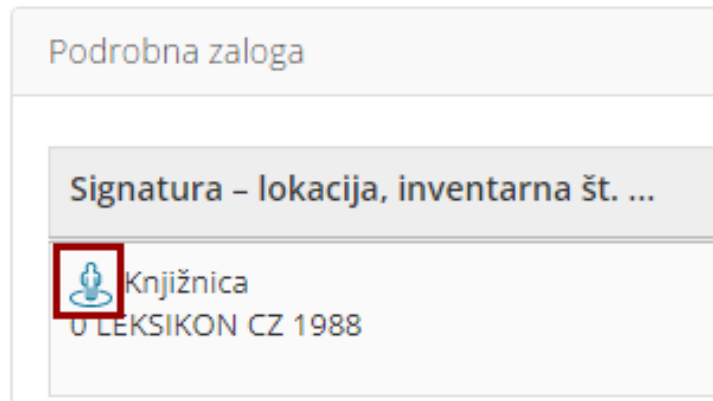
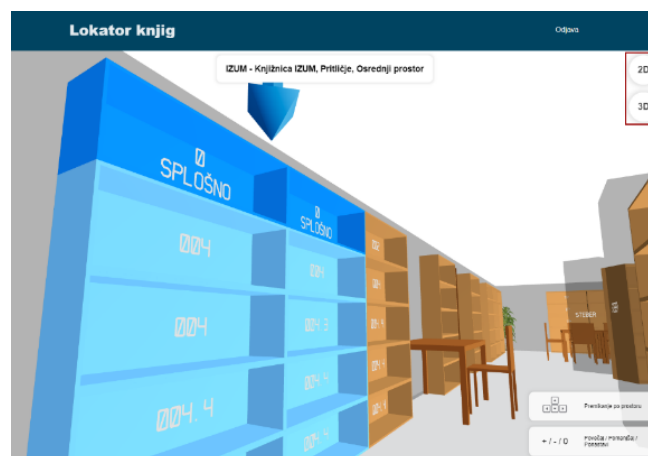


Figure 5. *The locator icon in catalogue search (Tacer Slana & Žuran Putora, 2022)*



Clicking on the locator icon opens a three-dimensional view of the library or of the section in which the shelf with the material is marked with dark blue and an arrow.

Figure 6. *Showing the position of the material on the shelf (Tacer Slana & Žuran Putora, 2022)*



Methodology

Much thought had been given to the methods to gather relevant data about the locator usage. First part of the research had been centered to discover which libraries in Slovenia had ever had a locator tool before 2022. Second step was to get the information which particular libraries started using the locator in 2022, which was not straightforward due to GDPR and that several libraries only started with the production phase, and had not activated the locator

for use yet. To collect this information, an online structured questionnaire was sent to forty libraries of different types (there are 927 libraries in Slovenia), which were marked as they at least had opened the production platform. After the first call, only two libraries responded, two others sent electronic mail that they were unable to cooperate because they had merely looked into the locator instructions and had not had the time to complete the tool.

After sending additional reminders for taking the online survey (1ka online system), there were twelve libraries from around the country all together of different types and sizes who gave at least some response. The survey results were analyzed and the data presented in graphics and compared for common trends.

Preliminary Findings & Discussion

The findings of the paper are organized and presented according to the structure of the survey. What the data reveal is the importance of regular and constant library instruction for the students' benefit, and for librarians to be acquainted with novelties and have the time to disseminate the tools and skills.

There were 12 librarians responding to our survey.

Figure 7: *Type of the libraries*

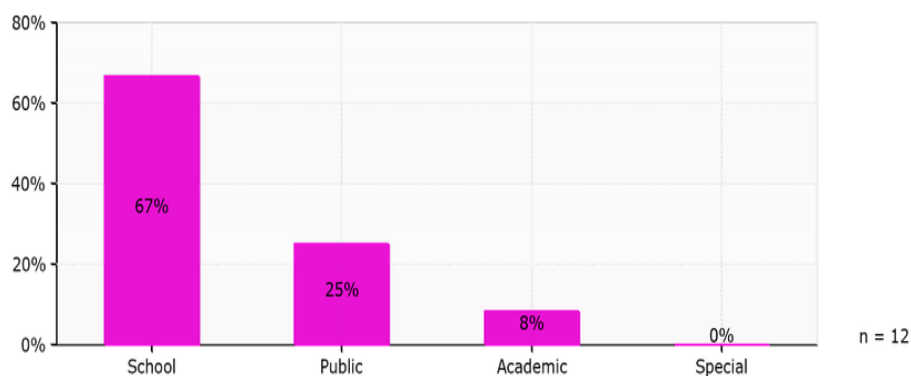


Figure 8. *Size of the libraries*

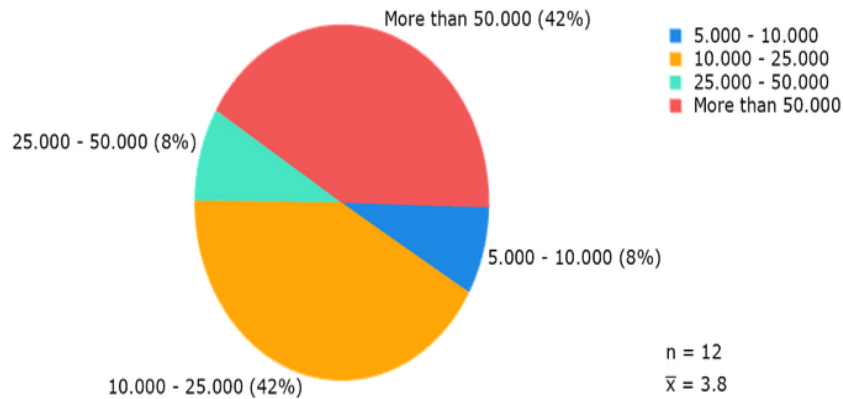
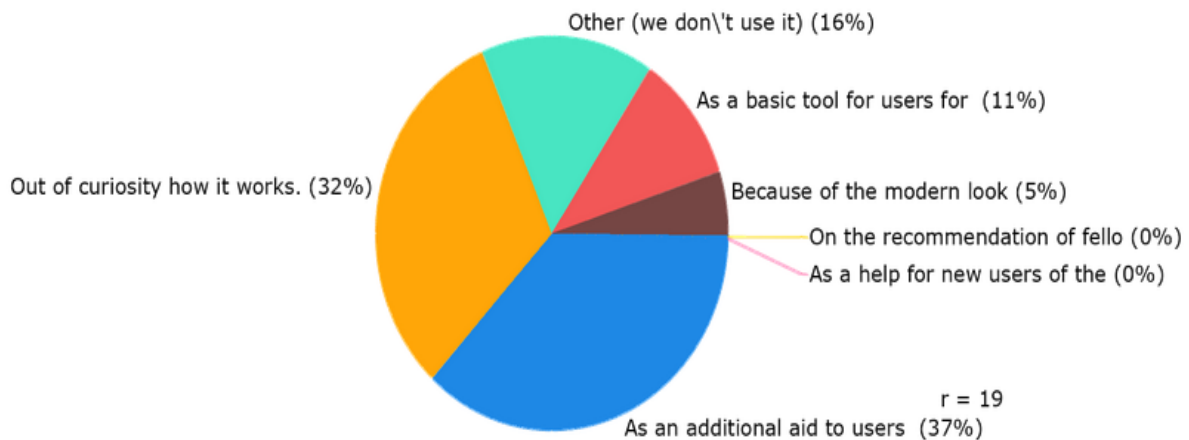


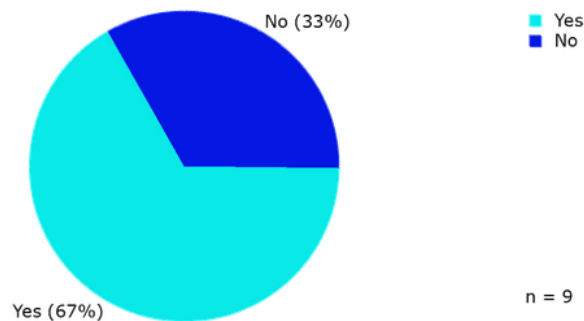
Figure 9. *Shows the purposes for starting the locator*



As the Figure 9 shows, more than a half of the librarians started the locator out of curiosity, and as an additional searching aid. There were no recommendations from fellow librarians yet, and the locator was not intended primarily to be a tool for new users. One of them was also attracted by the modern looks. The respondents were allowed multiple answers.

When answering about the difficulty of using the tool, two thirds (2/3) of the librarians who answered the question (see Figure 10) - only 9 responded to this question, because they have not introduced the locator to the users yet - confirmed that the usage of the locator is easy.

Figure 10. *Do you find the locator intuitive enough for students to use it easily?*



Beside general knowledge of using a computer and being introduced to the national library catalogue, there are no other skills necessary pointed out (see Table 1).

Table1. *About the previous knowledge for using the locator*

Do you think your users need additional knowledge to use the locator? Which one?		
Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Cobiss search	1	9%
No	3	27%
Not if they use it regularly	1	9%
I don't know	1	9%
Some a lot, others nothing. It concerns elementary school students who take 9 years to become digitally literate.	1	9%
Maybe younger students, especially when using a computer.	1	9%
Total	8	73%

When asked about the reactions of the users, librarians could give multiple answers. More than half of them (55 %) replied that the users gave positive comments, and one third (27 %) replied that the users gave negative comments.

noticed the rejoicing reactions of the users. No-one replied that the tool is time-consuming or complicated. Two responses show that there will always be users who are not bothered.

When asked how they introduce the locator to the users, there were 8 responses. Either they do it through indirect visual instruction or through personal instruction in groups or individually.

Figure 11. Shows how users get to know the locator

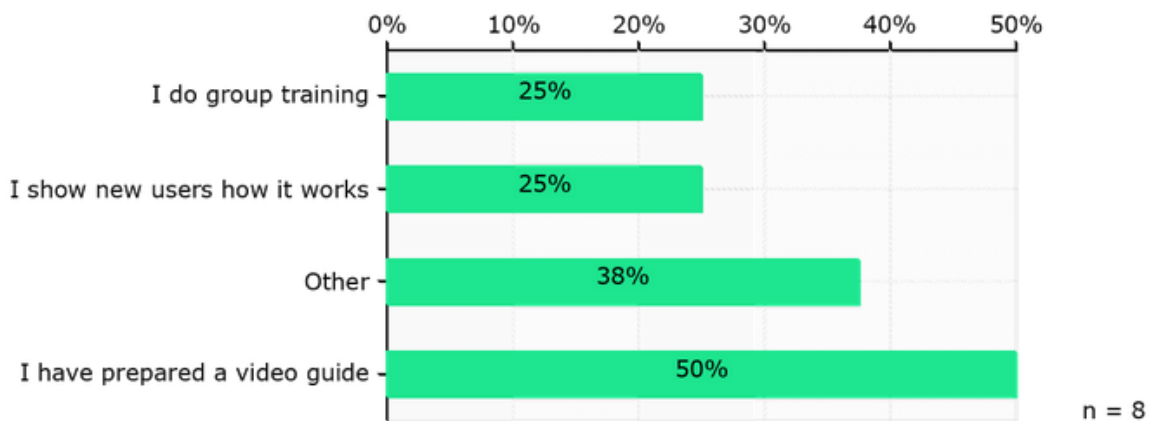


Table 2. Shows how the users find library material without the locator

Before the introduction of the locator, how did your users know the layout of the material and how to find the desired material?		
Answers	Frequency	Percentage
They wandered around the library searching or asking	1	9%
As part of the lessons, during the introductory lesson in the school library, we also familiarize them with the layout of library materials.	1	9%
Lessons of LIS	1	9%
They become familiar with it during regular library information skills classes (LIS) or when they come to look for material.	1	9%

Students know where to look for material, as we learn about it in the library information classes.	1	9%
Every user was helped by the librarians.	1	9%
The curriculum foresees 4 lessons per section (from 1st to 9th grade). through these lessons, students successfully find their way to our school library.	1	9%
Using shelf labels.	1	9%
Total	8	73%

Further they were asked what disadvantages of the locator users mention. From 8 responses, three answered (9 %) that they mention no disadvantages and 3 have no responses from their users yet. One response mentions that a user has a difficulty to find the locator and another one mentions difficulties with 3D orientation in the room.

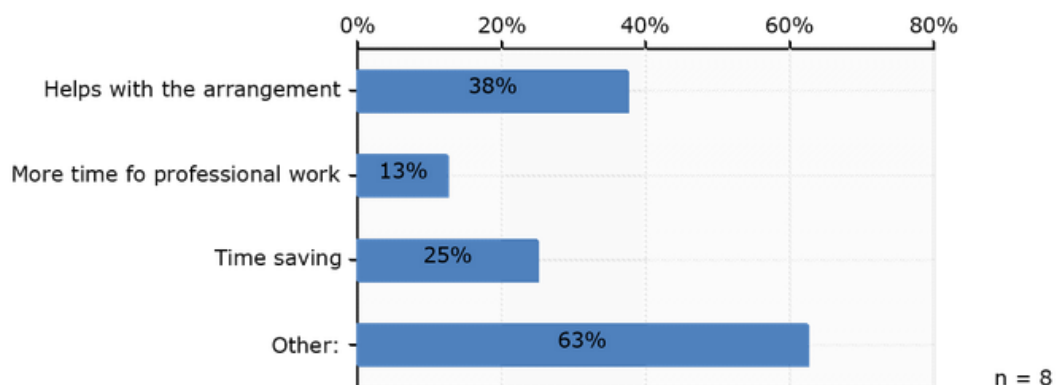
Table 3. Shows locator's disadvantages by librarians

What shortcomings of the locator do you see as a librarian?		
Answers	Frequency	Percentage
For libraries with several sub-locations in the same physical space, its preparation is very demanding.	1	9%
Insufficient selection of architectural elements (showcase, sofa, armchair...) and selection of colors.	1	9%
The choice/shape/color/size of tables, chairs, seats and additional showcases, containers that would be better visible would be welcome.	1	9%
It is not so easy and quick to establish the locator.	1	9%

I don't miss anything.	1	9%
It helped us and users.	1	9%
I don't have enough time to dedicate more time to this segment. I think I figured I had to redesign the layout in cobiss to be able to locate the proper titles on the shelves.	1	9%
None	1	9%
Total	8	73%

When asked about the advantages of the locator for their daily work, 38 % of them find it helpful with the arrangement of the books, and the same amount see it as saving time for other professional work. 27 % have no experience yet with it, and one suggests that if teachers use it, it becomes popular.

Figure 12. *Do you recognize some advantages of the locator at your daily work?*



As the final question, librarians were asked what is their opinion on whether the locator has a positive visit / loan effect in their library. As several of the libraries have not introduced the tool to their users, they can not give a definite answer. Other responses are equally divided.

Figure 13. Shows librarians' opinion about the effect of the locator



The analysis focuses on the purposes and reactions of the users, the comparison of a library search before and after using the locator, and on the quality impacts of the locator towards students' and librarians' satisfaction.

The data collected from different types of libraries (primary school, high school, university) show that the locator is suitable for any age and it requires no previous knowledge of library cataloging or other rules. It is very intuitive and resembles some of the characteristics of Google maps tool for example.

The larger a library, the more can the locator be of use, also in libraries with several subcollections. A librarian finds it most useful being able to change particular locations and sublocations in the catalogue very quickly and easily according to their needs.

The book locator is a good example of utilisation of assistive technology for more effective school library services. It is an application of a new approach to library orientation experience. The production phase may involve additional changes in the holdings organisation, so the 6 months period after the launching of the tool is too short a period due to a lot of other work during the school year.

As a library tool, it is applicable for different levels and intuitive in use, it does not require library specific knowledge. Although its production in larger libraries may require some additional effort, it also helps at sorting the misplaced items, it saves time and while

giving more independence to the users as well as prepares them for lifelong learning (different libraries, the same tool).

Implications and Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to discover if the implementation of the locator influenced the visit / loan rate in those school libraries? This is obviously too early to claim for most of the libraries after such a short period of the locator usage. It will take some more time for libraries to implement the tool and then to check again. As far as it can be observed in the library where it has been used for the last 12 years, there has been a high number of visits and loans, an average of almost 300 visits per day (out of 800 students) in 2018, and over 300 in 2019. During 2020 and 2021, it has fallen considerably, and is gaining again in 2023 (210).

Regarding any noticeable benefits of the locator usage during the first 6 months expressed either for the students as well as for the librarians themselves, the survey was at least partly able to express satisfaction of both categories of users, the results show first signs of positive responses in both categories. In order to save quality time of a school librarian, being usually one person for the whole school, it is important to provide students opportunities to use the library independently and be able to find appropriate sources by themselves from the very start. As it is clearly stated in the final report of the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (ACRL) “It not only prepares them for lifelong learning; but, by experiencing the excitement of their own successful quests for knowledge, it also creates in young people the motivation for pursuing learning throughout their lives” (2012).

Thus another important advantage that the book locator brings is that students like coming to the library from the very start in a new school and they feel encouraged going to the right shelves because they are assured they are able to do it by themselves.

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Biography

Gordana Banjanin, MSc. of American studies from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, has more than twenty years of experience in libraries. Present position: upper-high school teacher librarian in the national and IBDP programmes, running information literacy and academic integrity courses, organizing reading activities.