

All Together We Can Read: A Programme Promoting Inclusion in Portuguese School Libraries

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Abstract: *Inclusion is highlighted by several international organisations as a priority to be taken into account in each country's educational policies. Portugal has been following these guidelines and commitments, publishing legislation with a comprehensive approach to the concept of 'inclusion' and monitoring its implementation in educational communities. School libraries, as structures of the Ministry of Education, integrate, in their action plans, reading promotion projects aimed at specific audiences. The main aim is the integration of all students, creating conditions for them to fully enjoy the benefits of reading. In this article, we present the results of the project "All Together We Can Read", implemented in 62 schools over the last five years. Although there are areas for improvement, the evaluation reports point to a strong impact of the project in improving student learning and affirming the school library as a structure for pedagogical innovation and knowledge induction.*

Keywords: *inclusive education, school libraries, reading promotion, innovation, learning improvement*

Introduction

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by Portugal in 1990, the "States Parties recognise the right of the child to education" (UNICEF, 2019, p. 23), ensuring equal opportunities. Over the years, the promotion of access to quality education has been the subject of a broad reflection at the international level, and we can verify the evolution of the concept of 'inclusion' and, consequently, of practices in schools.

According to UNESCO (2019), inclusion is a dynamic process that aims to promote quality education for all and eliminate all forms of exclusion. As such, it entails that the education system changes to adapt to the learner and, in this way, to contribute to overcoming obstacles that may prevent learning. As stated in the *Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education* (UNESCO, 2019), quality inclusive education constitutes SDG 4 of the UN Agenda 2030 and a means to achieve all other sustainable development goals. With this in mind, the governments of each country are called upon to define education policies that promote equal opportunities and access to quality education, regardless of the obstacles that need to be overcome.

In Portugal, the policies defined have sought to respond to the UNESCO challenges, in different but complementary ways. On the one hand, by publishing legislation that induces changes in practices in schools and educational communities; on the other hand, by promoting the development of inclusive practices, which are readjusted according to the emerging contexts.

The commitment made, in our country, to inclusive education was reiterated through the publication of Decree-Law no. 54/2018, of 6 July, which defines as a priority of the XXI Constitutional Government's programme "the bet on inclusive education where every student, regardless of their personal and social situation, finds answers that enable them to acquire a level of education and training that facilitates their full social inclusion". The publication of this legislation confirms the link already assumed by Portugal in the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reaffirmed in the "Lisbon Declaration on Educational Equity", in July 2015, but moves away from the unidimensional approach that considered inclusion as simple participation of students with Special Educational Needs in regular schools. This decree-law proposes a multi-level approach to curriculum access, based on flexible curriculum models, the adoption of learning support measures with different levels of intervention and the monitoring of these measures.

The reality faced by Portugal in recent years (the arrival of many children and young people from other countries for socio-economic reasons and also war) has required new responses from the country. In order to include all students, with special emphasis on migrants and refugees (in the school year 2019/2020, according to Santos et al. (2022), the number of pupils of foreign nationality enrolled in primary and secondary education was 68

018, representing 6.7 per cent of all pupils), and to avoid any form of exclusion, UNICEF recommends Portugal to ensure that national legislation guarantees "full and equal access for all children to inclusive and quality education in the formal education system, including access to catch-up programmes and accelerated learning opportunities, regardless of their asylum or migration status" (UNICEF, 2019, p.3). With the same concern, the National Education Council (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2022) published a set of recommendations to be operationalised through real measures related to an education policy for inclusion, curriculum development that supports inclusion, a broad and diverse educational community for inclusion, thoughtful and appropriate training for inclusion and the promotion of language teaching as indispensable means for inclusion.

School libraries in Portugal are key resources for the development of educational policies and, in this way, for the development of inclusive practices in schools. The School Libraries Network, the program responsible for the installation and governance of these spaces, highlights, in the set of values expressed in its Strategic Framework 2021-2027, the "recognition and appreciation of diversity in its plurality, creating conditions for the development and participation of all." (Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares, 2021, p. 31).

As shown by the different documents produced, its action plans and the projects developed, the School Libraries Network seeks to follow the international guidelines, namely those suggested by IFLA, in the School Library Manifesto:

Equitable access to the learning commons in primary and secondary school library environments, resources, and differentiated instructional opportunities for all learner needs and abilities must be ensured, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or identity, disability, nationality, language, professional, economic, or social status. Specific access must be provided for those who are unable to use mainstream library services and materials. (IFLA, 2021, p.1)

The creation and sustainability of inclusive physical and digital spaces, as well as the development of reading promotion programs, in an intrinsic relationship with writing and communication, are lines of action defined by the School Libraries Network for the time limit of 2027. The success of these actions relies, of course, on the ability to create and maintain partnerships within and outside the Ministry of Education, which allow to

aggregate synergies that contribute to the comprehensive development and life skills of all students.

The creation of inclusive physical and digital spaces involves adapting the furniture, the school library collection, the services, and the equipment it offers to all its users, taking into account the specificities of each school and its context. The promotion of reading is an essential part of the action lines of the School Libraries Network and, therefore, of all school libraries. In fact, several studies show that there is a direct relationship between reading habits and the mastery of reading skills and personal and school success of students, since reading promotes the development of many transversal skills (Krashen, 2004). Therefore, according to the IFLA Guidelines,

Students with reading disabilities require alternate reading materials and, in some cases, may require special reading devices. A school librarian should be able to cooperate with specialized teachers for these students to support their reading needs. A school librarian should also support teachers in their work with classroom reading to meet local and national standards (e.g., helping out with recommendation of books appropriate for reading projects and of books that support the country's language standards). (IFLA, 2015, p.39)

In line with these guidelines and with the concern to develop inclusive reading promotion projects, the School Libraries Network launched the project "All Together We Can Read" more than a decade ago.

All Together We Can Read: Project Presentation

"All Together We Can Read" is a project to promote inclusive reading and writing, developed in school libraries, in coordination with different partners, inside and outside the school.

The pilot project started with a partnership between the School Libraries Network Programme and the Special Education and Socio-Educational Support Services of the Directorate General of Education, in the school year 2011/2012. At the beginning, it was developed in five school clusters in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, having as a

fundamental pillar the pedagogical collaboration between librarians and special education teachers. Initially, the project had the following objectives:

- To provide school libraries with appropriate resources, in different formats accessible to pupils with special educational needs;
- To develop good practices for the promotion of reading, taking into account students' capacities and needs;
- To share inclusive teaching practices, resources and materials.

The successful implementation of the project in 2011/2012 allowed its expansion in subsequent years. This expansion was achieved with the collaboration of the National Reading Plan, an inter-ministerial programme for the promotion of reading, with the support of both the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the PT Foundation. More recently the Altice Portugal Foundation and Pro-Inclusion: National Association of Special Needs Education Teachers have become partners. After 2011/2012, an annual application was launched to all clusters/ secondary schools in the public school network, which may request funding for the acquisition of documentary resources, software and specific equipment and consumables.

Over time, the project broadened its scope of action to include the intercultural aspect. This expansion resulted from the fact that many foreigners (migrants and refugees) were being integrated into Portuguese schools and it was necessary to work with pupils of Roma ethnicity. The objectives are now the following:

- To foster participation and increase opportunities for reading with all, taking into account the diversity of readers, expectations and needs;
- To encourage reading and writing practices in different contexts, formats and accessible media, promoting equity and inclusion;
- To mobilise the specific means necessary for the development of autonomous reading and reading for pleasure;
- To contribute to inclusive education through increased participation in the learning process and community life.

The projects presented, with a duration of two school years, include the following information:

- Diagnosis that triggers the presentation of the project;
- Summary of the project;
- Members that make up the team;
- Participants;
- Objectives;
- Actions to develop;
- Methodologies/strategies to be used;
- Expected impacts;
- Partnerships;
- Ways of dissemination;
- Project budget;
- Opinion of the school headmaster.

Applications are selected according to the overall quality of the project, the contribution to the consistent development of inclusive reading and writing programmes as well as its impact on the school community. The criteria for the selection of projects are as follows:

- The experience of the school library in fostering reading and writing practices that promote equity and inclusion;
- The existence of consistent reading practices, appropriate to the needs and potential of the recipients;
- The coverage of the different levels of education/teaching of the school cluster/secondary school;
- The formation of a multidisciplinary team to develop the project;
- The involvement of several educational actors (children and young people, teachers, families), implying collaborative practices;

- The establishment of partnerships with schools, municipalities, municipal libraries and/or other institutions/entities;
- The dissemination and sharing of activities and materials produced within the project.

Since the beginning of the project, 130 clusters/secondary schools have been covered, which included 440 libraries and involved more than 12 00 pupils, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: *School clusters/libraries covered by the project “All Together We Can Learn”*

School year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	Total
School clusters	5	10	22	20	15	15	11	10	12	10	130
School libraries	17	41	80	73	53	51	32	40	27	26	440
Number of pupils	557	938	2331	2284	1199	1723	645	642	716	1197	12232

The evaluation of the projects is performed by the schools through the submission of a report that contemplates the following areas:

- Degree of achievement of objectives;
- Degree of implementation of actions;
- Recipients of the actions;
- Evaluation of impacts;
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of the project;
- Ways of dissemination.

All projects are monitored by the Inter-Council Coordinators, *in loco*, and by the national coordinating team of the project, which:

- Prepares the documentation for the diagnostic evaluation and implementation of the project in the school clusters;
- Visits the schools to monitor the development of the projects;
- Holds meetings of the project "All Together We Can Read" to disseminate and share knowledge, experiences and resources within the scope of promoting reading and inclusion;

- Prepares the evaluation form to be carried out by the teams responsible for its implementation;
- Prepares an "Evaluation Report" on the implementation of the project, to be disseminated annually at the project meetings.

Purpose of the Research

To know the projects that are being implemented in Portugal in detail, under the application "All Together We Can Read", and to identify strengths and weaknesses that can improve the action of the School Libraries Network team, we analysed the sixty two applications of schools/school clusters approved in the last five school years, namely: 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. Since it is also important to know the impacts of these projects, the sixty-two reports sent by schools were also analysed.

This analysis was performed through the technique of document analysis, by collecting the project plans and respective assessment reports. The qualitative data from these two types of documents allowed us to make rich descriptions and explanations (Yin, 2003).

All documentary data has been sorted and archived. Figure 2 presents the various components under analysis.

Figure 2 – Documentary Corpus

Documents	Collected data
Applications from schools/school clusters for the school years 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objectives - Actions - Methodology - Expected impacts - Required resources

<p>Schools/school clusters' reports for the school years 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved • Not achieved - Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accomplished • Not accomplished - Project effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution for learning improvement • Stakeholders' participation
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Documents	Collected data
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of the school community • Affirmation of the library as a structure of pedagogical innovation and inducer of knowledge

The analysis of these documents made it possible to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon that was intended to be investigated.

Processing of Data

The qualitative nature of the collected data - applications created by the schools/school clusters and assessment reports - implied a careful and precise analysis, as only a systematic organisation could make them understandable, i.e., allow their interpretation. This analysis was performed through content analysis of the collected documents, to categorise the data into descriptive themes (Anderson, 1994). This content analysis allowed us to make valid and replicable inferences (Krippendorff, cited by Vala, 1999), enabling the objective and systematic description of their content and, consequently, their interpretation (Bardin, 2004).

A process of selection, simplification, abstraction and transformation of the collected data was carried out (Miles & Huberman, 2003), having segmented the data into meaningful units, which were inductively categorised according to an organisational structure, which was mainly derived from the data themselves.

Discussion

We now proceed to the presentation and discussion of the results obtained. In this way, the data collected will be read, in order to describe and analyse the working methodologies favoured by schools/school clusters in the projects "All Together We Can Read", identifying strengths and weaknesses, as well as to assess their impact.

In regards to the applications submitted, the data clearly show that the main objective of the schools/school clusters is to improve the reading skills of the students involved, with 97% of the schools indicating this objective for their projects. It is followed, as shown in table 1, by the definition of objectives related to the inclusion and integration of students, with 79% of the schools selecting this objective; interculturality and citizenship are referred by 53% and the development of writing skills by 47%.

Table 1: *Objectives of Applications*

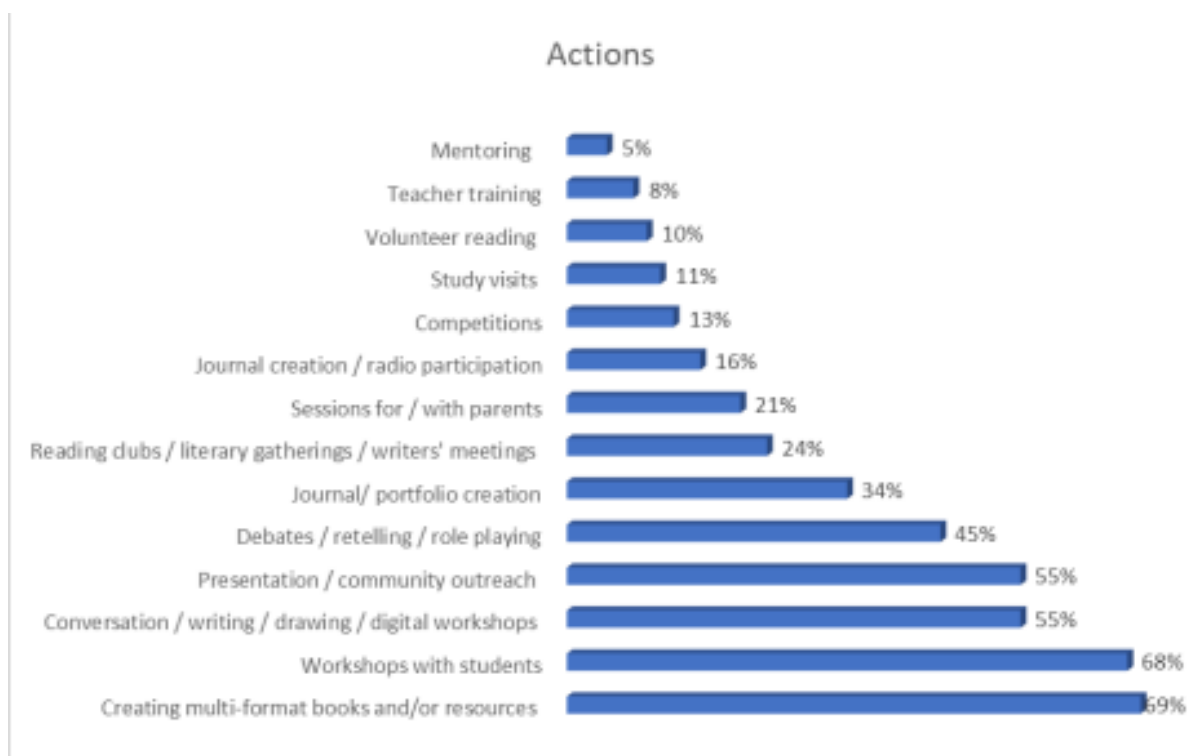


In a smaller percentage, but still significant, there are objectives related to family involvement (37%); the development of autonomy, responsibility and a critical sense of the students involved (32%); the promotion of the academic success of the students and the development of literacy skills (both with 31%); the creation/availability of inclusive spaces and resources (27%); and with a smaller percentage the mastery of the Portuguese language (16%).

The data obtained show the schools' concern to meet the challenges set by the School Libraries Network in this application, namely to foster participation and increase reading opportunities with all pupils, promoting equity and inclusion.

Regarding the actions chosen by schools to implement their projects, the content analysis of the applications allowed us to identify fourteen categories that enable the characterization of these actions. The creation of books and resources in multiple formats was the action with the highest incidence, with 43 schools implementing this action, which corresponds to 69%, followed by the promotion of working sessions with pupils involved in the projects, in 68% of the cases, as shown in table 2.

Table 2: *Types of Actions Defined by Schools*



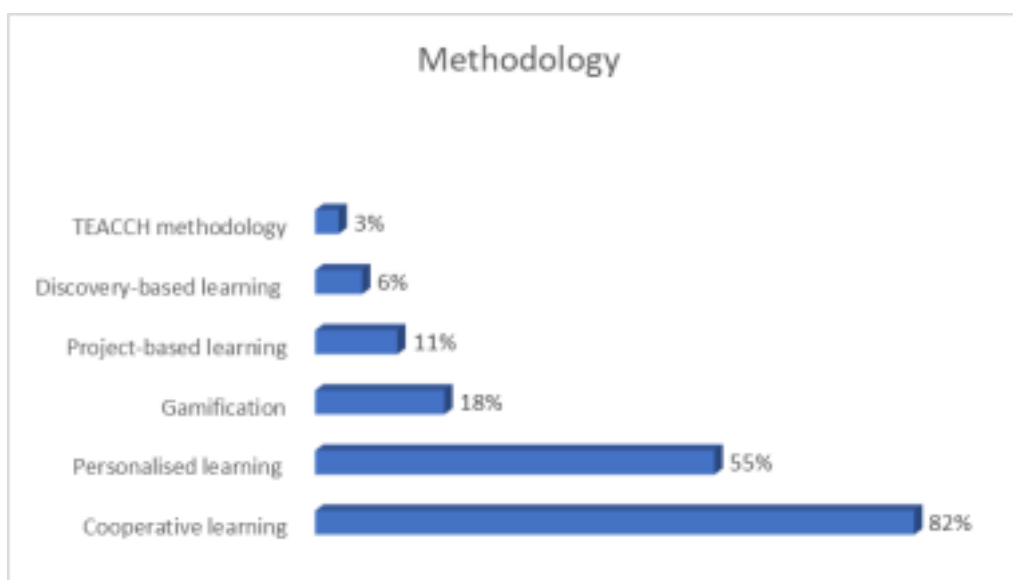
Among the actions suggested by schools, it is worth mentioning the organisation of workshops of different types, according to the profile of the pupils, namely conversation, writing, drawing and use of digital tools and resources workshops, as well as the presentation and dissemination to the community of the resources and work created, in 55% of the schools.

There are also other actions of different types and with different recipients, namely: the organisation of debates, the retelling of works read or their role plays (with 45%); the creation of diaries and portfolios (34%); the organisation of reading clubs, students' meetings or meetings with writers (24%) or sessions for/with parents and families (21%); creating school newspapers or participating in school or local radio programmes (16%); running competitions (13%); organising study visits (11%); creating volunteer reading grants (10%); training teachers involved in projects (8%); and sponsorship/mentoring (5%).

Among this diversity of actions, there are two common objectives. On the one hand, to promote actions that directly involve the students covered by the project and, on the other hand, to involve teachers (for example, through specific training actions) and other external partners (for example, local radio stations or sponsors) in order to involve them in the achievement of the projects.

In regards to the methodology used for the implementation of these projects, there was a preference for cooperative learning, chosen by 51 schools (82%), followed by personalised learning, with 34 schools selecting this methodology, which corresponds to 55%.

Table 3: *Methodology to be Implemented*



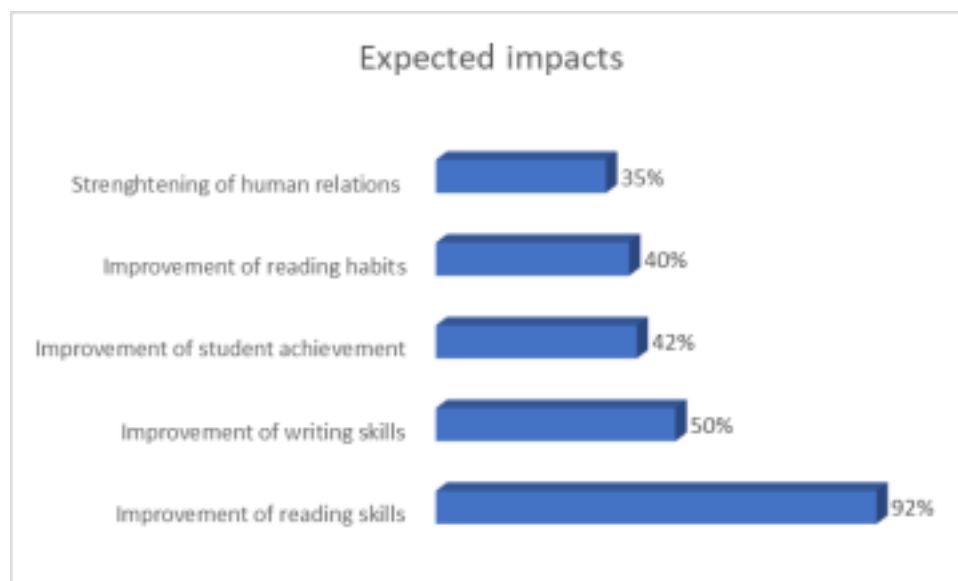
With less relevance, as shown in table 3, there was also gamification (18%); project-based learning (11%); learning by discovery (6%); and the TEACCH methodology, aimed at autistic pupils (2 schools, which corresponds to 3%).

The choice of methodologies fits the typology of the projects, as, in addition to the issues of reading and writing, the aim is also an inclusive education, where students feel integrated and participate in the learning process and in the life of the community, i.e. There are more student-centred approaches, which take into account their profile (Jacobs & Renandya, 2019), examples of which are collaborative learning and personalised learning.

In fact, cooperative learning is based on group work and the creation of teams working towards a common goal. One of the characteristics of this methodology is that students help each other and learn to trust each other to achieve a defined objective, and it is therefore a teaching-learning strategy that is suitable for these projects (Bessa & Fontaine, 2002). This methodology favours socialisation in the classroom, stimulates autonomy and develops cognitive and socio-emotional skills (Fontes & Freixo, 2004). In turn, personalized learning adapts the strategies and resources to the profile of each student, taking into account their needs and interests, focusing on a more individual teaching, which adapts to the students' ways of learning and pace (Maslow, 2019).

In regards to the expected impacts of the projects, the schools' choices focus on five main areas: improving reading skills, writing skills, student achievement and reading habits, as well as strengthening human relations, as we can see from the analysis of table 4.

Table 4: *Impacts Expected from the Implementation of the Project*



The overwhelming majority of schools (92%) identified as expected impact the improvement of students' reading competence, followed by writing competence (50%). Related to these impacts, in the area of reading and writing, are the improvement of students' performance (42%) and their reading habits (40%). It should be noted that the schools are also defined as an expected impact on the strengthening of human relations, about the students involved in the project (35%).

Finally, regarding the last category identified in the content analysis – resources needed to implement the project –, most schools (60 schools, which corresponds to 97%), bought documentary resources, chosen according to the type of actions to develop with students, with the funds allocated by the project. This choice is articulated with one of the main objectives of the application "All Together We Can Read", which is to promote reading and the pleasure of reading, given the diversity of readers, expectations and their needs.

Also selected as necessary resources are mobile devices (79%) and computers (45%), which allow reading and writing practices to vary in different contexts, as well as equipment which allows the creation of new reading and writing proposals, such as cameras and audio recording equipment (32%).

Table 5: *Resources Schools Need to Implement Projects*



As shown in table 5, schools also suggested the acquisition of specific software (47%) and

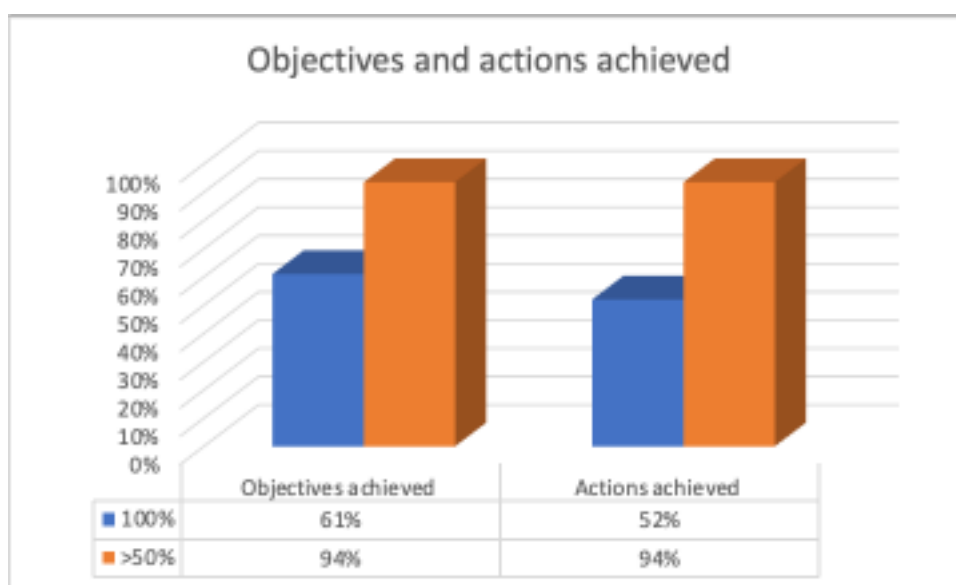
hardware (13%) to help students who need measures to support learning and inclusion and who, due to physical, sensory, cognitive, socio-emotional and cultural circumstances, have difficulties in reading and writing. There is also the category of didactic games (15%), which is related to specific school projects involving the playful use of games as a learning tool. Four schools also requested the acquisition of furniture (6%), to meet the needs of school libraries and the need to adapt their space to the approved projects.

In summary, it can be said that there is a balance between the applications of schools, both in relation to the objectives they define and the actions they outline to achieve them, the expected impacts, and the assumptions of the project "All Together We Can Read". As it was already referred to, the project aims to involve the different educational actors in programmes to develop literacy levels, respecting equity in the definition of objectives, methods and strategies that ensure the effective participation of all students.

After the implementation of the projects, the schools were invited to carry out an evaluation report, taking into account the achievement of the set objectives, the implementation of the planned actions and the effectiveness of the project (see figure 2).

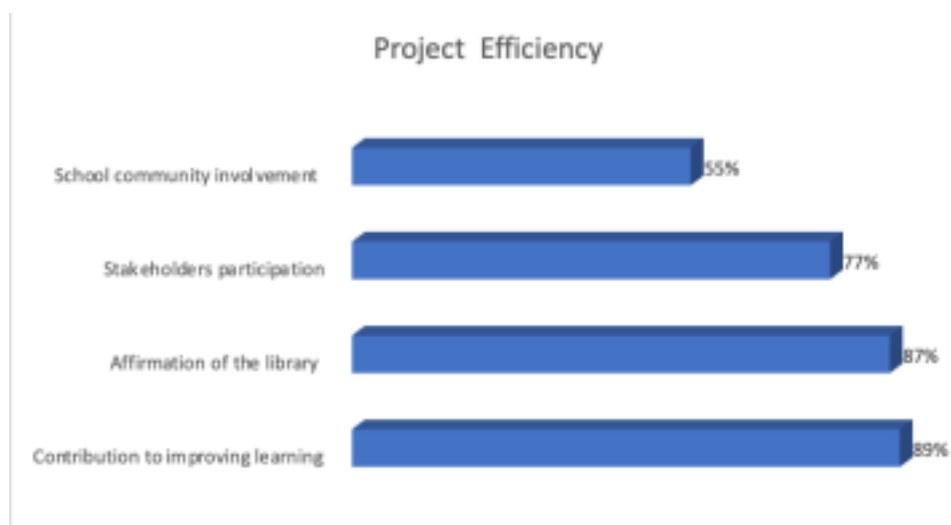
Regarding the achievement of the objectives and actions defined for each of the schools' projects, the assessment that is made points to a percentage of overall implementation in the order of 61%, with 38 schools confirming the achievement of all the objectives defined and 52% confirming the achievement of all the actions, which corresponds to 32 schools. It should be noted that 94% of schools have achieved at least 50% of the objectives and respective actions.

Table 6: Objectives Achieved and Actions Carried Out



In what concerns to the project effectiveness, the four parameters under analysis—contribution to improving learning, participation of stakeholders, involvement of the school community, and affirmation of the library—were considered to have been achieved by most of the schools, with emphasis on the role that the projects had in improving the academic success of the students involved (89%) and in the affirmation of the library as a structure of pedagogical innovation and inducer of knowledge (87%), as the data in table 6 reveal.

Table 7: Project Efficiency



It should also be noted a high involvement of the different stakeholders, students, teachers, and specialists, among others (77%), and some involvement of the school community (55%).

Implications and Conclusions

The analysis of the data collected over the past five school years points to a positive impact of projects implemented under the application "All Together We Can Read", with emphasis on a total achievement rate of the objectives in 64% of schools. The goals set by schools in their projects are linked to the goals set by the School Libraries Network for this application and are materialised in projects that aim to promote reading and writing skills in inclusive environments, in which all forms of exclusion are eliminated (UNESCO, 2019), with the coordination of the school library as a partner of teachers and technicians involved. The role

that the school library plays in these projects as a structure for pedagogical innovation and knowledge induction is undeniable as demonstrated by data from the reports (see Table 6).

Through these projects, besides reading, writing and different literacy skills, issues related to citizenship and interculturality are worked on, fostering students' autonomy, responsibility and critical thinking, in conjunction with families and, whenever possible, with the community. That is why most schools (89%) report that the projects contributed effectively to the improvement of learning and, consequently, to the academic success of the students involved.

The data point to the importance of the criteria set by the School Libraries Network for the selection of projects in the application phase, which are taken into account, in addition to the overall quality of the project, the contribution to the consistent development of inclusive programs of reading and writing, as well as its impact on the school community. These criteria ensure the quality of the projects and guide the action of schools, leading them to focus on the fostering of reading and writing practices that are appropriate to the needs and potential of the recipients and promote equity and inclusion, with the support of the school library. These actions rely on the establishment of a multidisciplinary team for the development of the project and the involvement of various educational actors (children and young people, teachers, families), and the creation of partnerships with other partners is valued, such as municipalities or municipal libraries.

In summary, the data collected show that the potential of this application relates to three central aspects:

1. Inclusion and equal opportunities: this application emphasises the importance of inclusion and equal opportunities, following the guidelines established by UNESCO (2019). Recognising the diversity of students and the need to ensure accessible and equitable education for all, the projects submitted by the schools promote inclusive policies and practices.
2. Positive impact on students' learning: The projects had a very positive impact on students' learning, especially on the development of reading and writing skills. Mastering reading skills has an impact on students' personal and academic success and promotes the development of many transversal skills (Krashen, 2004). Enriching and relevant learning situations were created, which enabled pupils, regardless of

their religion, disability, nationality, economic or social status (IFLA, 2021) to reach their full potential.

3. Library at the heart of the educational process: The projects presented show the importance of the school library as a central element in the educational process, a pioneer in the diversity of practices and work methodologies. This space, where the conditions are created for the development and participation of all (School Libraries Network, 2021), is inclusive by nature and a place where interculturality is fostered, modern and innovative learning environments are promoted and resources appropriate to each user are made available.

These three central aspects, present in the projects analysed, show that the School Libraries Network's application, "All Together We Can Read", promotes a comprehensive approach and commitment to ensuring inclusive education with the support of the school library.

Regarding the weaknesses, three areas were identified that should be taken into account by the School Libraries Network, so that in the near future these less positive aspects can be overcome, namely:

1. A high number of unfinished actions: one of the weaknesses detected in the data analysis is the large number of unfinished actions (only 52% of schools carried out all the planned actions). Despite the intentions and proposals present in the applications, the effective implementation of all the initiatives was less than desirable, so it will be necessary to reflect on the reasons behind this situation, which may be related to the lack of resources, physical and/or human, or planning difficulties. It is therefore important, in the near future, to make an exhaustive survey of the situations that led to the non-implementation of all the actions.
2. The non-diversification of educational methodologies: another weakness identified is the little diversification of the methodologies selected by schools in their projects. To promote effective learning, it is essential to adopt varied and innovative pedagogical approaches.
3. The low involvement of the school community: the involvement of the school community is fundamental for the success of these

projects, namely the participation of parents, teachers and other community members, as only then will a collaborative and enriching environment be created. It is important to identify effective strategies to involve and motivate all stakeholders.

Given the above, and in order to improve the weaknesses detected, it is suggested that the School Libraries Network provides documentation on the areas where the results are weaker, including action planning, diversification of methodologies and implementation of strategies to involve the school community in library projects. Inter-council coordinators can play an important role in accompanying schools, ensuring support in the planning phase of projects, but also in their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

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