

---

# School Libraries in the Netherlands

*Albert K. Boekhorst*

*Universiteit van Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

*Maarten J.P. van Veen*

*Open Universiteit Nederland, The Netherlands*

---

*Recent developments in education in the Netherlands have emphasized the role of school libraries in the learning process. In order to assist secondary schools in updating their school libraries and preparing them for a new role in learning, research was conducted on the position of school libraries in the schools. An input-output research design was used to provide an analysis of the distinct elements that constituted the system (input) in relation to the products of the system (output). The input factors included organizational structure, library staff, financing, technical infrastructure, collection, and collaboration both in the school and with other organizations. The output included access to the collection, facilities, and instruction. The main finding was that school libraries differed greatly one from the other and that the person of the school librarian seemed to be the most important factor in the success of a school library. However, in more than half of the schools, none of the library staff members had any library training, and many school libraries relied heavily on volunteers. The lack of professional staff led to school libraries being excluded from policy-making decisions and from integration into the educational system.*

## Introduction

School libraries in the Netherlands have a long tradition. From a few books in a corner of a classroom to a fully equipped department, some form of library has been present in schools for a long time. School libraries themselves use different names such as *School mediatheek* to indicate that they have a collection that contains a variety of information media and information channels. Here we stick to the traditional word *library*.

Until recently, publications on school libraries stemmed mainly from librarians working in school libraries. These publications consisted mainly of documents asking for attention to the librarians' position in the school and of handbooks on how to organize and operate the school library. The oldest entry in the Central Union Catalogue of the Netherlands on school libraries dates from 1863 (Heim). Since 1945, there have been peaks in the number of publications related to school libraries, when new subjects were introduced in the curriculum or when the structure of the educational system was changed. This time, however, not the school librarians themselves, but the government stressed the central role of school libraries. Attention to school libraries stemmed from a government agency responsible for the organiza-

tion of the secondary stage of the educational system. This attention to school libraries had three interrelated causes:

1. The introduction of ICT in schools;
2. Changes in information services in general due to ICT; and
3. Changes in the educational system from teaching to learning and "lifelong learning."

From 1993 to 1996, a Steering Committee Profile Second Stage Secondary Education (Stuurgroep Profiel Tweede Fase Voortgezet Onderwijs) advised the Assistant Secretary of State for Education, Culture and Science on the reorganization of the second stage of secondary education. The Stuurgroep introduced the concept of "Home of Study" (Studiehuis). To assist schools in updating their school libraries and in preparing them for the tasks envisaged in the new educational structure, the Stuurgroep initiated a survey into the position of school libraries in secondary schools. In this article, the most important data from that survey are described.

### The Dutch Educational System

After 1945, the educational system in the Netherlands was changed several times. In the last decade, extensive and far-reaching changes again took place in the educational and school system. A central aspect of these changes has been the emphasis on individual development of students and on the alignment of consecutive stages of education to one another.

In the Netherlands, for all children from the age of 5 to 16, full-time education is compulsory. Most students start their school careers at the age of 4 in primary schools. Then they move on to secondary education where they can choose between:

1. pre-university education (VWO—6 years);
2. senior general secondary education (HAVO—5 years);
3. junior general secondary education (MAVO—4 years); or
4. pre-vocational education (VBO—4 years).

Since 1993, the secondary education system has been divided into two stages. The first is called basic secondary education (Basisvorming). This is meant for pupils between the ages of 12 and 15 and lasts no longer than three years. The emphasis in this stage is on acquiring skills within an integrated curriculum. Compulsory minimum standards are expected to be achieved by the end of basic secondary education. The core curriculum contains 15 subjects (1,000 periods of 50 minutes per year). The remaining 20% of teaching time (840 hours) may be used by schools for lessons and other educational activities at their own discretion.

New attainment targets have been formulated for 1998 to 2003, the aim of which are:

- to achieve a better alignment of primary education, basic secondary education, and the second stage of secondary education;

- to update the attainment targets for 1993 to 1998, especially with regard to the use of information and communication technology; and
- to encourage pupils to take an active, independent approach to learning.

After the first stage of secondary education, students move on, at about age 16, to secondary vocational education or to the second stage of HAVO or VWO. In August 1998, the second stage of secondary education in HAVO (classes 4 and 5) and VWO (classes 4, 5, and 6) started for the first time. This second stage is organized according to the concept of "Places of Study" or "Home of Study," which emphasizes learning instead of teaching and encouraging students to take an active, independent approach to learning. In this concept, the teacher's role shifts from that of instructor to that of supervisor or facilitator.

National attainment targets indicate the expected level of learning in terms of knowledge, understanding, and skills for each stage. To update the infrastructure for the school library, schools were given extra money that they could spend as they wished for rebuilding the library or for buying library materials. Secondary schools were required to draw up a school plan, incorporating into one document the old staff establishment plan, annual report, inservice training plan, and school work plan. This document had to be discussed in the participation council of the school and updated every four years. The ministry gave directives for describing arrangements for the school library in this school plan.

### The School Libraries Study

To supply the Stuurgroep with information for a brochure on updating the school libraries, a research study was designed in which the problem was formulated as: "What is the position of school libraries in schools for secondary education in the Netherlands?" Data were gathered via printed questionnaires and interviews.

#### *Methodology*

The research used the input-output model, as this model can be used for an analysis of distinct elements that constitute the system (input) in relation to the products of the system (output). In the research, the input was perceived as organizational structure, library staff, financing, technical infrastructure, and collection. The output was perceived as access to the collection, working place or facilities, and instruction. Figures such as the number of loans, the number of visitors, and number of information lessons enabled the functions of the school library to be measured. The input elements contained both quantitative and qualitative aspects. These are presented in Figure 1. Later in the research, we found that the place of the school library in the school can also be considered as a relevant input factor.

For the purpose of the research, a school library was defined as:

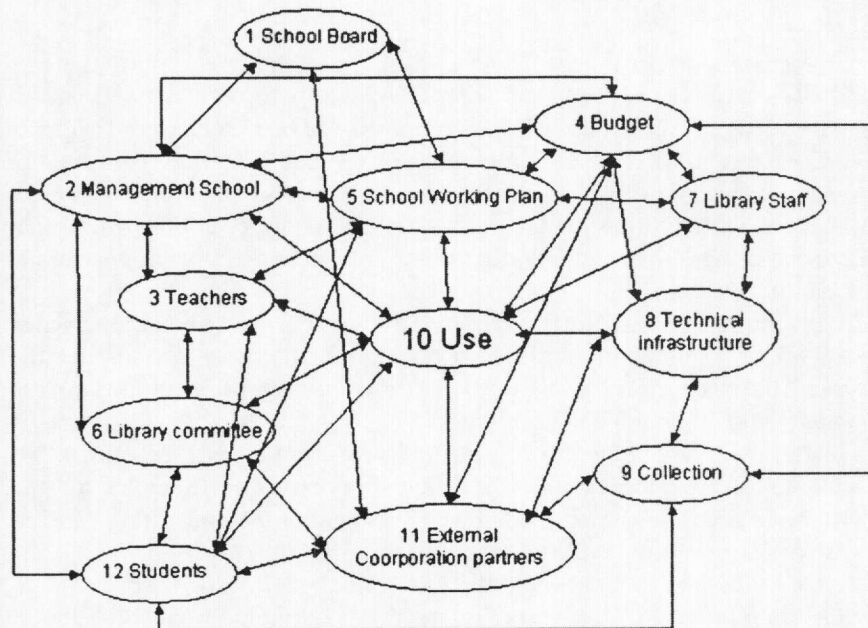


Figure 1. Schema relations entities.

A (separate) room in which books and/or other information media are stored that are used by students of the school in support of the educational program, both in the school as outside.

Two types of questionnaires were constructed to obtain data: one for schools that had a school library and one for schools that did not have a library, but where some form of school library facilities were available. The extended questionnaire contained questions on the following subjects:

1. General data on the school;
2. General data on the school library;
3. Staff, responsibilities, tasks;
4. Library commission;
5. Finances;
6. Collection;
7. Technical facilities;
8. Use of the library;
9. Collaboration with teachers;
10. Collaboration with other organizations.

The short questionnaire asked about the presence and numbers of books, periodicals, and other information media; for whom the collection was aimed; who was responsible; and if library instruction was given.

## Response

In the Netherlands in the past few decades, willingness to participate in social research has diminished considerably. It happens regularly in research that a response rate of less than 30% is reported and even considered satisfactory. The combination of ongoing reorganizations, extensive compulsory reporting to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, combined with requests for participation in research to monitor changes in the educational structure has made it extremely difficult to get staff in schools to participate in research.

To optimize response for this research, we emphasized the importance of the research for the respondents' own position. To increase response for the research, three channels were used to draw the attention of the person responsible for the library in each school:

1. A letter in an envelope of the Stuurgroep was sent to the directors of the school with an extended and a short version of the questionnaire, a letter of recommendation from the chairperson of the Stuurgroep, and instructions on how to fill in the questionnaires.
2. A letter was sent to the principals of all schools informing them that questionnaires had been sent to the school and that their collaboration was requested.
3. All LWSVO (school library association) members received a letter announcing the research.

From the 809 questionnaires distributed, 523 schools responded (an overall response of 65%). Twenty schools were closed during the time of the research (2.5%), 14 questionnaires were returned blank (1.7%), and 16 responses could not be used. Seventy schools (9%) did not have a school library as defined for the research; they filled in the short questionnaire. A total of 403 schools returned the extended questionnaire for a net response rate of 50% (see Table 1). The relatively high response rate of 403 out of 809 schools suggests that those in the school library feel very involved with their positions.

Table 1  
Response

	N	%
Library present	403	49.8
No library	70	8.7
Closed school	20	2.5
Empty	14	1.7
Other	16	2.0
Missing cases	286	35.4
Total	809	100

Basic data about the schools obtained from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences (CFI) enabled a check between the response group and the nonresponse group in relation to the number of students, the denomination of the schools, and distribution of schools around the country. We clustered the schools in the study into three groups according to the original denominations of the schools: public schools, religiously based schools, and specific schools. Specific schools are for children with physical disabilities, impaired hearing or vision, or chronic illnesses. Children with learning and/or behavioral difficulties also frequently attend this type of school. No significant differences between the schools were found for any of these aspects. Significant differences were found related to the number of students attending the schools that returned the extended questionnaire, the schools that returned the short questionnaire, and the nonresponse group. However, because the mean of the number of students in the nonresponse schools was between that of the schools that returned an extended questionnaire and that of those that returned a short version, the number of students was not relevant for participation in the research.

## Results

### *Short Questionnaire*

By returning the short questionnaire, the schools indicated that they had school library materials, but not a school library space as defined for this research. The numbers of books in their possession ranged from several hundred to more than 1,000. The main reason for not having a school library room was limited funds.

"The space for the school library is used for other activities. The books are in the subject sections." "We closed our department informative books: it has become impossibly dear to maintain a complete and actual collection of informative books."

### *Extended Questionnaire*

#### *General data*

*Age of the school library.* The age of the school libraries at the time of the research varied between one and 70 years. The oldest school library dated from 1926; the mean age was about 16 years. About 32% of the school libraries were no older than 10 years, 45% were between 11 and 20 years old, and 17% were older than 30 years (see Table 2).

#### *Size of the School Library*

The surface area of the school libraries varied from school to school. The available space ranged from 8 to 780 m<sup>2</sup>. The average was 108 m<sup>2</sup> (mean), and 100 m<sup>2</sup> was most often mentioned (mode). About 20% of the school libraries were smaller than 50 m<sup>2</sup>; 43% were smaller than 100 m<sup>2</sup>; and 38% were larger

Table 2  
Age of the School Libraries

Age	N	%
1-10 years	120	32
11-20 years	169	45
21-30 years	64	17
More than 30 years	23	6
Total	375	100

than 108 m<sup>2</sup> (see Table 3). As an average classroom in these schools was about 50 m<sup>2</sup>, the school library space most often equalled that of two classrooms.

In 60% of the cases, the school library was used for other purposes such as meetings, conferences, and examinations. One respondent reported that she had to close the school library during examinations. In the vast majority of the schools (82%), students could use the library to work independently. The number of places available for this was up to 200. The average, however, was 22 (mean). In 15% of the schools, no individual working places were available. Another 15% offered working places for one to 15 students. In half of the schools, there were working places for 11 to 30 students. In about 20% of the schools, more than 30 working places were available (see Table 4).

### *School Working Plan*

In 20% of the schools, the school library was mentioned in the School Working Plan, and 34 of the survey respondents (9%) sent us a copy of their School

Table 3  
Surface Area of the School Libraries

Surface in m <sup>2</sup>	%
1-50	20
51-100	43
>101	38

Table 4  
Number of Working Places

Working places	N	%
None	56	15
1-10	56	15
11-30	188	50
>30	75	20
Total	375	100

Plan. In 52% of the schools, the school library was not mentioned in the School Working Plan; 28% of the respondents did not know whether the school library was in the School Working Plan. The attention given to the library in the School Working Plan varied a great deal. For example, one School Working Plan devoted 14 pages to the mission of the school library; others limited mention of the school library to opening hours, lending periods, staff tasks, and financial arrangements.

The school has a well equipped school library for the students, where under the supervision of a female librarian assisted by several parents, books, study material and video tapes can be borrowed and where there is an opportunity for individual studying. The library is open from 10:15 to 13:45.

*Mission*

To gain insight into the mission of the school library, five propositions were formulated:

- 1. The school library must promote the reading of students;
- 2. The school library must give students insight how to retrieve information;
- 3. The school library must provide material to support the teaching program;
- 4. The school library must contribute to independent learning of students;
- 5. The school library must give students opportunities to study between and after classes.

Respondents were requested to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a scale of five. There was strong unanimity on the mission of the school library as formulated in the propositions. Promotion of students' reading received the highest agreement; 69% strongly agreed with this as a mission for the library. This was immediately followed by giving insight into how to retrieve information and providing material to support the teaching program. Then followed the contribution to independent learning and offering places to study. Just a few respondents were neutral or strongly disagreed with these propositions (see Table 5).

Table 5  
Mission of School Libraries

<i>Mission</i>	<i>Promote reading %</i>	<i>Insight in retrieval %</i>	<i>Provide material %</i>	<i>Independent learning %</i>	<i>Working place %</i>
Strongly agree	69	62	61	53	51
Agree	25	32	33	35	35
Neutral	2	3	4	4	8
Disagree	2	2	2	1	5
Strongly disagree	2	1	1	1	2
N=401					



### Staff

Two thirds of the school libraries had a female head of the library or librarian ( $N=392$ ). The average age of the head of the library was about 47 years; 29% were younger than 43 years, 37% were between 43 and 51 years; and 34% were older than 51 years. On average, they had been working in that specific library for 10 years; 35% had been working in that library for fewer than six years, 33% for between six and 12 years, and 32% for more than 11 years. One person had been working for in the same school library for 57 years! (Note: in the Dutch educational system the term *teacher-librarian* does not exist.)

### Education

A vast number of respondents had completed some form of higher education (70%,  $N=386$ ); 38% had higher vocational education and 32% academic education; 6% had finished secondary vocational training, and 21% had stopped their education after secondary school (high school)). More than half of the respondents reported having no library technical training (63%,  $N=390$ ). Five percent of the respondents had completed a course or courses at GO, a private nonprofit organization that has given courses in library and information work since 1950. GO has a close relationship to the working field, where it also recruits its teachers and exam commissions. Others reported having a relevant diploma from higher vocational education, including variants of the library and information school (16%) or some other library training (16%) (see Table 6).

In 17% of the school libraries, there was some other LIS-qualified staff besides the head of the library. In 2% of the libraries the head did not know if his or her staff had any LIS training. The following combinations resulted from combining these data and those from Table 7 (see Table 8).

1. Neither the head of the library nor staff member(s), if any, had any LIS training. This was true for 54% of the respondents.
2. Both the head of the library and one or more staff member(s), if any, had LIS training. This was true for 8% of the respondents.
3. The head of the library had LIS training, but none of the staff members, if any, had LIS training. This was true for 29% of the respondents.

Table 6  
General Education of Head of the Library

General Education	N	%
Secondary education	81	21
Secondary vocational training	23	6
Higher vocational education	147	38
Academic education	124	32
Other	12	3
Total	386	100

Table 7  
Library Training Head of Library

<i>Library Training</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
GO	20	5
LIS	62	16
Other	62	16
None	246	63
Total	390	100

4. The head of the library had no LIS training, but one of more of the staff member(s) had LIS training. This was true for 9% of the respondents.

As a result of this calculation, it becomes clear that in more than half of the school libraries (54%), none of the staff members had any LIS training (see Table 8).

Nearly 64% of the respondents did not belong to either of the two relevant professional organizations, LWSVO and NVB. LWSVO is an organization of fellow professionals; it functions both as a pressure group and as an aid for feedback and support of members in their performance. LWSVO recognizes both individual and organizational membership. The NVB is the Dutch Association for Professionals in the Library, Information and Knowledge Sector. It has several special branches, but none for school librarians.

In a quarter of the school libraries, one of the teachers in the school was in charge of the library. For 64% of the respondents, being in charge of the school library was their main function; for 12%, running the school library was an additional job. About a quarter of the respondents (27%) reported that they had a job description; 69% did not have one; and 4% did not know if they had a job description.

Volunteers were an important phenomenon in the school libraries. Volunteers were present in 775 of the school libraries. On average, a school library had 11 volunteers. The most frequently mentioned number of volunteers was 10. In 56% of the schools, there were 1-10 volunteers; in 34% 11 to 20; and in 10% 21 to 35 (see Table 10). On average, these volunteers worked 28 unpaid hours a week, with a minimum of one hour and a maximum of 162

Table 8  
Matrix LIS Training in Library

	<i>Library training other staff</i>		<i>N</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
Library training	8%	29%	139
Head of library	9%	54%	234
	<i>N=63</i>	<i>N=310</i>	373

Table 9  
Number of Staff

Number of persons	Librarian	Administrative	Educational	Volunteer	Other
1	155	51	60	19	26
2	20	5	11	19	2
3	3		1	13	4
4	1			15	1
5		1	2	21	
6			1	20	
7				15	1
8				14	
9				13	
10				23	2
11-20		1		106	
>21				31	
	N=179	N=58	N=75	N=309	N=36

hours a week. The number of hours most mentioned was 20 hours. Mostly they worked on tasks that did not require library technical training (see Table 11).

*Library Committee*

Only 25% (N=102) of the respondents mentioned the existence of a library committee. The size of those committees varied from one to 40 members, with an average of five members. A committee of four members was mentioned most frequently. Teachers were represented on the library committee in 89 schools, a member of the library staff in 65 schools, the management of the school in 57 schools, parents in 28 schools, and students in 6 schools. In 7 schools, someone from another interest group participated in the library committee (see Table 12).

In 16% of the schools, the respondent reported that there was no job description for the library committee; in 6% of the schools, the respondent did not know if there was one. The function of the library committee can be

Table 10  
Number of Volunteers

Number of Persons	N	%
1-10	218	56
11-20	133	34
21-35	39	10
Total	390	100

Table 11  
Hours of Volunteers

<i>Number of hours</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
1-0	59	20
11-20	68	23
21-30	74	25
31-40	33	11
41-162	62	21
Total	296	100

considered as an outcome of the attitude in the school toward the school library. Therefore, the following statements were made in response to the request to indicate how strongly the respondent agreed or disagreed with the statement:

1. The Library Committee should stimulate new developments in the library;
2. The Library Committee must build interest in the library within the school;
3. The Library Committee must translate the school policy into a policy for the library;
4. The Library Committee is responsible for the functioning of the library;
5. The Library Committee has a coordinating function, to facilitate the daily management.

The stimulation of new developments in the library was considered as the most important function for the library committee. Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement ( $N=210$ ). Nearly half of the respondents (46%) strongly agreed with the statement that the library committee should build an interest in the library within the school (see Table 13).

When we combined the responses *strongly agree* with *agree* and *strongly disagree* with *disagree*, we found that these outcomes corresponded with the strongest opinions mentioned above. The library committee was considered not to be responsible for the management of the school library or for its coordination (see Table 14).

Table 12  
Composition of the School Library Committee

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Library staff</i>	<i>School management</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>School board</i>	<i>Other</i>
89	65	57	28	6	1	7
$N=102$						

Table 13  
Function of the Library Committee

Function of the Library Committee	Responsible for managing		Build interest within school		Library policy		Stimulation of new developments		Coordination	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	69	33	95	46	69	33	110	52	60	29
Agree	69	33	82	40	87	42	72	35	70	34
Neutral	34	16	24	12	37	18	21	10	38	18
Disagree	28	13	5	2	8	4	2	1	28	13
Strongly disagree	10	5	2	1	6	3	5	2	12	6
Total	210	100	208	100	207	100	210	100	209	100

### Financing

In some schools, the school library received a budget from which all costs were paid; others received a budget for the collection, as the other costs were paid from other resources. In some schools, the acquisition of the collection was also partly paid for from other resources. For example, one of the respondents gave the following explanation:

In addition to the library budget, each section makes its own budget, which is subdivided into teaching material and library budget. So the acquisition of books and other information media is paid from the budget of the sections.

As the report of budget figures varied greatly as result of the policy and practices in the different schools, we present here only some total figures available for the school library. The yearly budget for the school library varied from 68 to 22,721 Euro, with an average of 3,464 and a mode of 900 Euro (one Euro is worth slightly less than one US dollar). In one third of the schools, the budget for the library was between 1,000 and 3,000, in 23% between 3,000 and 6,000, in 15% between 6,000 and 9,000, and in 29% over 9,000 (see Table 15).

In addition to income from the school budget, some school libraries received money from other sources such as donations from parents, from fines for overdue, and from sales and sponsorships. In Table 16 these sources of income are specified: fines as an extra income are common in some

Table 14  
Function of the Library Committee 2

Function of the Library Committee	Responsible for managing %	Build interest within school %	Library policy %	Stimulation of new developments %	Coordination %
Agree Strongly agree	66	86	75	87	63
Disagree/Strongly disagree	18	3	7	3	19

Table 15  
School Library Budget (in Euro)

<i>Budget</i>	<i>%</i>
1-3,000	33
3,000-6,000	23
6,000-9,000	15
>9,000	29
<i>N</i> =327	

libraries. Parents supplied a substantial amount of money, but only in a small portion of the schools.

The data on the budget varied greatly, and much of the data received were unusable. Therefore, the data on satisfaction with the budget in relation to the costs were more relevant. The respondents were most dissatisfied about the budgets for staff and automation and most satisfied about the book budget (see Table 17).

Table 16  
Alternative Income

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>N</i>
Parents	360	14,500	3,563	1,000	41
Fines for overdues	20	7,000	861	1,000	274
Sales	5	300	80	100	27
Sponsors	100	2,000	770	100	5
Other	20	5,000	1,205	20	17

Table 17  
Satisfaction with Budget

<i>Budget</i>	<i>Very dissatisfied</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Neutral</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Satisfied</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Very satisfied</i> <i>%</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>N</i>
Staff	16	27	29	22	5	275
Books	6	22	21	43	9	355
Periodicals	6	22	27	39	6	342
Other material	6	18	30	39	7	325
Management costs	5	17	28	43	7	321
Automation	18	23	28	24	7	291
Other	10	9	51	26	5	167

## Collection

In 327 (81%) of the schools, the collection of the library was aimed not only at students, but also at teachers. A few of the respondents (4%) indicated that teachers also used the collection. Printed material still dominated the collections. An average of 7,660 book titles was found, ranging from 100 to 50,000. The most frequently mentioned number was 10,000. On average, 4,788 books were available. The ratio of fiction to nonfiction for books was 2/3 to 1/3. The number of electronic media (CD-ROMs, CDs, CD-Is) was very small (see Table 18).

## Technical Infrastructure

### Catalogue

In only a few libraries (5), there was no catalogue; in 79% (320), there was a card-index system for access to the collection. A computer system was available in 40% (162) of the libraries. In the libraries with an automated system, 39 had an OPC (Online Public Catalogue), and 121 had a lending module. In 51 libraries, the automated system had been developed in the school itself; 28% of the schools were using a system that has been especially developed in the Netherlands for school libraries.

At the time of the survey, almost half of the school libraries did not have a computer at their disposal (see Table 19). In those libraries with only one computer, students were allowed to use that computer in 42% of the libraries.

## Use of the School Library

### Opening Hours

The opening hours of the library also varied enormously. One quarter (101) of the libraries were open 10 hours or fewer a week, 20% were open between

Table 18  
Collections

Collection	Min	Max	Mean	Mode	N	%
Books	100	50,000	7,660	10,000	349	86
Periodicals	1	2,850	54	10	280	69
Documentation maps	1	2,100	350	100	198	49
Newspapers	1	5	2	1	147	36
Videos	2	3,083	169	30	91	23
MCs	1	600	99	30	42	10
CD-ROMs		30	4	1	32	8
Slide shows	1	500	78	10	24	6
CDs	2	150	30	2	10	2
CD-Is	1	20	6	1	6	1
LPs	2	70	32	2	3	1

Table 19  
Number of Computers

<i>Computers</i>	<i>%</i>
None	49
One	25
Two	13
Three	4
Four or more	9
N=403	

10 and 20 hours a week, 40% between 21 and 30 hours, and 14% between 30 and 40 hours a week. The number of visits to the library varied from 3 to 450 a day, and 50 was the most frequently given figure. The distribution of these figures was rather even, as can be seen in Table 20.

Although in 81% of the school libraries, the collection was also aimed at the teaching staff, only 16% of the respondents reported visits of teachers to the library. In 47% of the libraries, this was limited to one or two teachers visiting the library per day; in 30%, three to five teachers; and in 23%, more than five teachers (see Table 21).

An average of 6,858 lendings a year per library were reported. These circulation figures varied from several thousand to 45,000; the most mentioned number of lendings was 10,000 (see Table 22).

### *Library Instruction*

Instruction in the use of the library has always been an element of the school library. In some places, over the years, the instruction has developed from instruction on library rules and where to find materials into a systematic approach to help students to become information literate. The data collected in this study on the kind of instruction and how it was being given varied greatly. In 86% of the school libraries, instruction in some form was being given, mostly in traditional ways. These included: a guided tour by the librarian (59%); a class or lecture given by a librarian (43%); a guided tour by

Table 20  
Number of Students' Visits

<i>Visits</i>	<i>%</i>
=< 30	23
31-50	20
51-80	17
81-140	21
>141	19
N=403	



Table 21  
Number of Teachers' Visits

<i>Visits</i>	<i>%</i>
1 or 2	47
3-5	30
>5	23
<i>N=403</i>	

a teacher (33%); tasks to be carried out for a teacher (33%); or written instruction (22%) (see Table 23).

As for the content of the instruction, the layout and rules of the library, the use of the catalogue, and the various kinds of information sources and material were mentioned in descending frequency. A more comprehensive approach to instruction as part of helping students to become information literate was mentioned by 66% of the respondents (see Table 24).

### *Collaboration with Teachers*

About 80% of the school libraries reported teachers giving tasks to the students to be carried out in the school library. This varied greatly according to the subject area. Language teachers were reported to be most involved in this

Table 22  
Number of Lendings

<i>Lending</i>	<i>%</i>
=<1,500	20
1,501-4,000	24
4,001-6,500	16
6,500-10,000	24
>10,001	16
<i>N=310</i>	

Table 23  
Form of Instruction

<i>Instruction</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Guided tour/librarian	59	239
Lesson/librarian	43	174
Guided tour/teacher	33	135
Task given by teacher	33	131
Written instruction	22	85
Other	4	20

Table 24  
Content of Instruction

<i>Instruction</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Layout	95	331
House rules	90	314
Catalogue	87	303
Information sources	84	293
Information skills	66	231

activity, whereas teachers of vocational subjects and science teachers were reported to be the least active (see Table 25).

About 58% of the librarians reported being informally involved in educational developments in the school. This happened mainly in an informal way—ad hoc and “in the corridors.” For 16%, there was a form of structured consultation, whereas 25% were not involved in any consultation. Often the librarian initiated coordination activities. No data were collected in this study on the character of the collaboration.

### *Updating the Library*

We found in interviews with the librarians during the research that the initiative for action in schools for the school library mostly stemmed from the head of the library. However, often the librarians experienced these activities as “rowing against the stream.” These activities often required a lot of energy, perseverance, tirelessness, and fighting spirits while the outcome remained uncertain.

Another scenario for getting an adequate school library resulted from building a new school. In the process of merging schools into larger administrative entities, sometimes schools simply continued their activities in the old buildings. However, sometimes a new building was erected, which allowed for implementing a school library as a central facility according to the new

Table 25  
Use by Subject Group

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Once in a while</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>N</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	
Languages	11	18	41	30	387
Science	57	28	14	1	373
Social	15	22	49	14	381
Cultural and artistic	23	24	42	11	384
Vocational	60	21	15	4	322

Study Home metaphor. The burning down of a school proved to be a trigger for initiating such a process in one case!

### Summary

School libraries have a long tradition in the educational system in the Netherlands. Schools and school libraries have been confronted with the effects of the introduction of ICT and with changes in the structure and content of education. The school environment is changing into a place where students prepare themselves for their future, based on lifelong-learning. This emphasizes the need for students to become information literate and for the school to provide adequate library services. This means that the function of the school library and the school librarian must be adapted. The school library must become a service center where students can come to satisfy their information needs and where they can find support in acquiring the skills and knowledge they need to become information literate. The school librarian should be a professional who can not only manage such a center, but also can function as a central person for the integration of information literacy learning and teaching in the school.

In the past in the Netherlands, changes in the educational system often resulted in increased attention to the school library. This attention mostly stemmed from inside the school library and its supporting organization. The recent attention that has been given to school libraries, especially in secondary education, now stems from the government. By introducing the Study House as a metaphor for a system based on independent learning instead of teaching, the government has emphasized the importance of the school library. In the Study House system, the school library should take a central position as a resource for information and as a laboratory where students are helped to become information literate.

In spite of the attention given to school libraries, the position of school libraries in the Netherlands is not very good. Not all schools have a school library, and not all schools have an adequate school library.

Statistics enable us to calculate the "average" school library. However, after comparing the figures and calculating the average school library with the data in this research, we had to conclude that such a school library does not exist.

In the research, the emphasis was on analyzing the input components of the school library as shown in Figure 1. To determine factors that could determine the functioning of the school library, possible relations between input and output variables were investigated. If a statistically significant relation was found, the correlation between these variables was very weak. This might be caused by the great variety of important variables that were present in the survey. For example, two relations that are statistically significant but with weak correlations are given here:

1. The number of students and the number of books in the library ( $p=0,000$   $F=0,2406$ );
2. The number of students in the school and the number of students that visit the library ( $p=0,000$   $F=0,2526$ ).

Based on the data in the survey, no clear relationships could be found to determine the functioning of the school library. This means that no single factor was decisive for the functioning of these school libraries. This confirms what became evident during the interviews with school librarians, namely, that the initiating and coordinating role of the head of the library is of great importance for the optimal functioning of the library.

In the report to the Stuurgroep, the following recommendations were made.

1. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences must supply adequate financing for the school library.
2. It is recommended that the mission, vision, and task of the school library be described explicitly.
3. There should be a budget for the school library that specifies estimated costs.
4. The head of the school library must be a well-trained information professional.
5. The number of working hours of the librarian should be enough to perform the basic activities.
6. There should be a library committee, composed of representatives from the school management, user groups, and teachers.
7. The ICT infrastructure of the school library should not be isolated, but must be integrated into the school network.
8. To enable a coordinated and aligned structure for helping students in acquiring information literacy, a coordination system of teachers and librarian is essential.
9. It is advisable to extend coordination on a regional level with other school libraries, public libraries, bookstores, and information services.
10. Further research into the contribution of the input elements as given in Figure 1 should be developed.
11. Research into the actual information use in the school library should be carried out, specifically in relation to the general information-satisfying behavior.

Now that an insight into the input side has been obtained, further research should be directed to the use of the library. Access to information, information media, and information channels for learning, development, and recreation are no longer isolated in functional areas. Investigating how students satisfy their information needs can supply the school library with the information needed to align its structure and services, to optimize its function in the school as an information source, as an information channel, and as a laboratory where students can learn to become information literate.

In another research study (Boekhorst, 2000), students were asked if they had received any library instruction in the primary school and in their present secondary school, what the content of these instructions was, and for what reasons they used the school library. These data were obtained in a school in the Netherlands and one in South Africa. Although the number of respondents was low and the respondents were most probably not representative, the responses are illustrations of who might be a "normal" patron. However, more extensive research is needed in this area. Attempts to acquire funds for such research into the output side—the users and their information behavior—have not been successful so far. Nevertheless, information stemming from such research is essential for the improvement of the services of the school library in the Netherlands.

### Notes

This article is based on Boekhorst and van Veen (1996).

All correspondence should be addressed to Prof. Dr. A.K. Boekhorst. Oude Turfmarkt 147, NL-1012 GC Amsterdam, The Netherlands or to [albert.boekhorst@hum.uva.nl](mailto:albert.boekhorst@hum.uva.nl).

### References

- Boekhorst, A.K. (2000). *Informatievaardig worden in het onderwijs, een informatiewetenschappelijk perspectief: Een vergelijkende gevallenstudie in Nederland en Zuid-Afrika*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria [Online]. Available: <http://www.hum.uva.nl/akb/publicaties.htm>
- Boekhorst, A.K., & Veen, M.J.P. van. (1996). *Schoolbibliotheken in het voortgezet onderwijs*. BBI-reeks nr. 5. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Boekhorst, A.K., & Veen, M.J.P. van. (1998). Ontdek de zin van de schoolbibliotheek. *Informatie Professiona*, 12(9), 34-35 [Online]. Available: <http://www.hum.uva.nl/akb/publicaties.htm>
- Education in the Netherlands. (1998). Zoetermeer: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen [Online]. Available: <http://www.minocw.nl/english/edusyst/index.htm>
- Heim, H.J., van der. (1863). *Schoolbibliotheken*. 's Gravenhage.
- Secondary school: A guide for parents, guardians and pupils 2000-2001 [Online]. Available: <http://www.minocw.nl/english/doc/secondarieschoolguide.doc>

### Author Note

Albert K. Boekhorst is an assistant professor in the Department of Information Science, Universiteit van Amsterdam and a visiting professor in the Department of Information Science of the University of Pretoria. His current research concentrates on information literacy, especially the content of teaching in formal education and the effects of not being information literate (see <http://www.hum.uva.nl/akb>). Maarten J.P. van Veen is employed at the Open Universiteit Nederland.