Money and Leadership: A Study of Theses on Public School Libraries Submitted to the University of the Philippines' Institute of Library and Information Science

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Abstract. The biggest challenge facing public school librarians in the Philippines today is the thought that there is no money to pay for the improvements that need to be made. This mindset is reflected in the findings, conclusions or recommendations made by graduate and undergraduate students who focused on public school libraries in theses submitted from 1940 onward at the University of the Philippines (UP): the government should allot a regular budget for public school libraries.

After all of these years, it is time perhaps to accept that the government does not consider public school libraries a priority in the allocation of scarce resources. But why is it that despite government neglect, some public school libraries have flourished, while most have remained the same? Could it be that there are other factors that need to be considered aside from money?

As seen in the case of the two most developed public secondary school libraries in the Third District of Quezon City, leadership is also very important. After all, two individuals given similar amounts of money will not necessarily achieve similar goals. The word “leadership,” however, appears in only one of the abstracts of 19 theses on public school libraries submitted from 1940-2005. This lone thesis is the basis for this paper.

The State of Philippine Public School Libraries

The Philippines is a Third World nation with a government that has allocated almost 20 percent of its annual budget to education since 1997 (Chua 1999, 161) and is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that allot the greatest portion of its budget to education (NSCB 2004). And yet every year, the same problems regarding lack of school buildings, teachers and textbooks occur.

In a country where a great number of the population lives below the poverty line, it is not surprising that public libraries are not given much thought, much less allotted a regular budget. The situation is worse for public school libraries, which, unlike private school libraries, have not been able to charge library fees since 1964 with the passage of Republic Act 4092 (Sanchez 1971, 5). It is perhaps indicative of the lack of financial resources allocated to public school libraries that in an investigation of corruption in Philippine education, the public school library is never mentioned, whereas the school canteen is given a section all its own (Chua 1999, 95-96).

Profile of the Information and Communication Technology Capabilities of Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Philippines (2003) highlights the inadequacies of elementary and secondary schools in the Philippines in terms of information and communication technology (ICT) capabilities through the results of a survey on the existence of electricity, telephones, computers and audiovisual equipment, and computer proficient staff. While the study is not about libraries but the ICT-readiness of both public and private schools in the Philippines, its results indicate the difficulties that will be encountered if public school libraries are to be transformed into media centers.

Singh (2003), meanwhile, begins his study of Southeast Asian school libraries by comparing the populations, and economic, education, and information and telecommunication indicators of ten nations. The Philippines is usually fifth or sixth, except for education-related indicators—where it is first in terms of enrollment, second to the last in adult illiteracy, third in government spending for education, and third in daily newspaper circulation.

But does this translate into good public schools, not to mention good public school libraries? Not necessarily. Peralejo presents the likely reason for the Philippines’ high standing for education-related indicators when she explains that public elementary and secondary education are free. But she also indicates that the government’s high education spending does not necessarily translate into quality public school education when she says that, “90% of the education budget is spent on salaries and benefits alone and only 1-2% on textbooks and virtually nothing on libraries and laboratories” (2003, 4).
This observation is backed up by Edilberto de Jesus, the current Secretary of Education, who says that 90 percent of [the budget for education] goes to salaries, only 3.5 percent for capital expenditure, and 6.5 percent for monthly operating expenses…. It’s embarrassing to admit that we are not even able to provide the expenses for light and water (Playtime Staff 2003, H4).

De Jesus is referring to the budget for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) that is used by public school principals to pay for their monthly utility bills and, if there is any money leftover, to finance other important school expenditures—which do not usually include library development.

The relationship between funding from the national government and the local government can be appreciated further in a statement made by the current mayor of Quezon City, Feliciano Belmonte (2003, 7):

While the national government is supposed to provide for the maintenance of local school buildings, due to fund shortage and bureaucratic delays in releases of funds, the local government often has to undertake the repairs, renovation and rehabilitation of school buildings, including provision of utilities (water and light).

Belmonte has declared that his aim is to "make [Quezon City’s] public schools at par with leading private schools in the country," but it is worth noting—because perhaps it will explain Belmonte’s generosity toward public schools—that Quezon City has just recently emerged from being a financially distressed local government unit (LGU), confronted with claims for payment amounting to over P1.4 billion and a bank debt of P1.25 billion, to become the LGU with the highest revenue collections in the Philippines in 2002 (The Belmonte Administration 2003, 11).

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…[S]chool library conditions are not conducive to effective library service as required by modern education…. Books are merely accessioned, but neither classified nor catalogued…. This is accompanied by an unbalanced or disproportionate distribution of books…. The housing conditions provided for the library, if any, are poor, and the furniture and equipment are inadequate…. The library is not open long enough for students to use it to the fullest extent. Opening the library is only a matter of “if time permits” for the librarian. Some schools do not even open their libraries at all…. Library instruction is given; but [it] is inadequate, disorganized, and has no definite place in the curriculum…. The… librarians have not had any training in library work. Even liberally interpreting the term “trained librarian” to mean a librarian who has taken any course in library science, the data compiled show only 29 per cent who qualify as possessing “technical training.”

The findings quoted above—though they sound like they were written about public school libraries in the Philippines today—were taken from a thesis written more than 65 years ago (Sanchez 1940, 74-76). This thesis was one of the two written about public school libraries before the Institute of Library Science (ILS) was set up in 1961. ILS—later Institute of Library and Information Science (ILIS) in 2002—was the first institution to offer graduate and undergraduate degrees in library science in the Philippines (Vallejo 1992, 2). It has also had the most number of students who have taken—and passed—the Librarians’ Licensure Examination, which was instituted in 1992. In fact, ILIS has had the most number of students passing the exam every year since it was first given (ILIS Newsletter 2005, 3).

According to Perez (2005, 49), before 1961, students of library science graduated with degrees in BS Library Science, BS Education (minor in Library Science), Master of Arts in Education (minor in Library Science), and Master of Education (minor in Library Science). With the establishment of ILS, students began graduating with Master of Library Science (MLS) degrees in 1966, Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degrees in 1998. Initially, undergraduate students did not need to write theses, but with the institution of the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) degree in 1995, undergraduate students were also required to submit theses as a requirement for graduation.

It must be noted, however, that not all of the studies submitted by graduate students were actually theses. Most were “special problems.” The difference between a thesis and a special problem was that the former needs to be defended before a panel, while the latter only has to be accepted by the adviser.
According to Vallejo, “Majority of the students of UPILS opt for the special problem because they are afraid to face the examining panel” (1992, 20). Undergraduate theses are similar to special problems in that they also need not be defended before a panel.

Public School Libraries

Of the 474 MLS/MLIS theses and special problems produced since 1966, only 13 (36 percent) were on public school libraries. Of the 13, only one was a thesis, while the rest were special problems. Of the 316 BLIS theses written since 1998, four (13 percent) concerned public school libraries. See Appendix A for the graphs.

Most of the 19 studies on public school libraries were conducted on schools based in Metro Manila, while five focused on provincial schools, and only one—Sanchez’s 1940 MA thesis—covered the entire Philippines. There were more studies involving secondary schools (11) than elementary schools (8), and 17 studies relied mostly on questionnaires. Most evaluated school libraries using standards set by the American Association of School Librarians (1960), Bureau of Public Schools (1960) and the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (1988 and 1998); while four compared public schools with their counterparts in the private sector.

To summarize, most of the researchers who conducted studies on public school libraries in the last 65 years did the following: (1) distributed questionnaires to librarians, teachers, administrators or even students; (2) compared existing facilities, books, or equipment, among others, with foreign or local standards and/or private schools; and (3) concluded by saying that the public school libraries studied were inadequate and that more resources should be allocated by the government annually (see Table 1).

As early as 1981, Sandiko observed that there were hardly any differences among the findings of studies conducted from 1938-1979. All these studies, according to her, were saying the same thing in different words, using public school libraries located in different places, with minimal differences in methodology: “School libraries do not meet official standards for book and periodical collections…. Funds are insufficient to enable the libraries to discharge their functions” (Sandiko 1981, 21).

In fact, while these studies detailed how public school libraries did not meet minimum requirements or fared poorly when compared with private school libraries, the majority had as their most important recommendation—whether first or last—the necessity of having an adequate and regular budget for the library. And even those that neglected to mention the budget in their recommendations explicitly underlined the need for it very clearly in their summary of findings and conclusions.

The importance of financial resources is echoed in the few success stories about public school libraries in the Philippines that have appeared in magazines and newspapers. These stories tend to give the impression that all that is needed to have a good library is a donor with money. We hardly ever read about the difficulties that had to be overcome. What happened between the “before” and the “after”? How exactly can others replicate their success? Is it really just about money?

Beyond Money

This researcher was the author of the only thesis among the 13 graduate studies that have been conducted on public school libraries in the Philippines since 1966 (Totanes 2004). This thesis was also the only one among the 17 graduate and undergraduate studies submitted so far to use the words “leader” and “leadership” in its abstract. (Note: The other two theses on public school libraries written before 1966 did not have abstracts.)

The development of seven public secondary school libraries was the focus of this researcher’s thesis. When one principal discovered the title of the study—Factors influencing the development of public secondary school libraries in the Third District of Quezon City—she said that there was no need to study the matter, that there was only one factor that mattered: money. This assertion, as the results of the thesis would show, was an overstatement.


- Physical facilities – Schools with an enrollment of 500 should have libraries with a floor area of at least 72 square meters.
- Librarian and support staff – If a school has 2,000 pupils, then it should have one full-time librarian and one part-time teacher-librarian.
- Programs and services – This includes library orientation during the opening of classes and library lessons as part of the curriculum.
- Collection – Encyclopedias, dictionaries, plus magazines, newspapers and professional books for teachers and librarians.
- Sources of funds – To pay for all these, the 1998 Guidelines state: “Library funds shall be 5-10% of the school funds (based proportionately) as released by the Division office.”

(Note: This document looks good on paper but it seems that only researchers know about it because librarians who were asked about the 1998 Guidelines did not know of its existence. The same is true of the earlier 1988 Guidelines.)

**Table 1. Findings, conclusions, or recommendations drawn from studies done on public school libraries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Finding, Conclusion or Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanchez (MA)</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>In the final accounting, the efficiency of library service depends a great deal on the money available (p. 89).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunio (MA)</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>…all dependent upon a sufficient and continuing outlay of library funds (p. 201).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parayno</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Libraries should be given adequate and regular appropriations for collection building (p. 100).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valderrama</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Secure adequate, regular allotment for the school libraries (p. 126).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intengan</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>There should be definite financial provisions for the support and improvement of the physical facilities, material resources and library services in the public school libraries (p. 115).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mago</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>That an appropriate, regular and adequate budget for all central school libraries be allotted annually (p. 140).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandiko</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Adequate annual allotment of funds for library support should be provided (p. 75).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangilan</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>With adequate financial support, the other following recommendations should not be difficult to implement (pp. 102-3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bautista</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Finally, an adequate budget must be allotted for the school libraries (p. 129).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sianghio</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Additional funding is needed to augment the meager library fees collected from the pupils (p. 97).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macabata</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>…lack of funds is a serious problem that prevents their improvement… (p. 114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acleta</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The school library should be… provided with adequate and continuing financial support… (p. 105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Torres**</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The local government and the school authorities should allot enough budget for the school library (p. 46).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinto**</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The division schools of Quezon City should allocate adequate funds… for the regular library budget of the school libraries (p. 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manalo**</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>…it is apparent that for a public [school library] having no funds to depend on, a good administrator is needed (p. 37).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faelnar**</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>…majority of public school libraries are crippled by the lack, or more specifically, absence of library budget (p. 124).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Torres</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>…limitations in resources, especially monetary or financial resources, exert a great influence on the ability of libraries to meet the demand of its population of clients (p. 47).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castillo</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>… limitations in resources, especially monetary or financial resources, exert a great influence on the ability of the libraries to meet the demand and information needs of their faculty and students. (p. 71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Extracted from studies done by UP-ILIS students, 1940-2004
** Undergraduate theses

This researcher quantified the level of development of each library, and focused on the two school libraries with the highest scores. By comparing these two libraries, it was determined that both were “developed” according to the 1998 Guidelines, but one was more developed than the other. Not because one had more money, but because one had a factor that the other did not: leadership.

The two school libraries with the highest scores were among the 11 school libraries in Quezon City that were automated as part of the SB e-Library project, which would provide funds for automation and salaries of additional personnel. If money is, in fact, the solution to the problems faced by public school
libraries in the Philippines, then the two libraries should be at similar levels of development. But this is not the case.

They had similar budgets and populations, but one library was more developed than the other. Why? The more-developed library had a librarian who enjoyed the confidence of the school principal, district supervisor, and even the mayor. Whereas the librarians of the less-developed library—with its three full-time librarians, none of whom has been appointed head librarian—could not even get the different subject departments to entrust the collections in their offices to the library.

The Juan Sumulong High School e-Library

Susan Torres is the librarian of the Juan Sumulong High School e-Library, the library with the highest development score. Torres has the necessary leadership skills that the librarian from the other school does not. One of the most important things that a good leader does is to get people to listen, to pay attention. And Torres is able to do just that.

The Sumulong library began its journey to development with a proposal to automate the library, which was submitted by Torres as a requirement for her class in UP’s ILIS. But even before she finished her special problem in 2003, Torres had already begun instituting changes at the Sumulong library, including organizing the library’s collection and experimenting with the use of cataloging software—if only to convince others of the benefits of automation and how the use of technology could contribute to the library’s improvement (Totanes 2004, 56-58).

In the meantime, Torres’s proposal and what she was doing at her library had caught the attention of her school principal, an assistant schools division superintendent, and eventually the Quezon City schools division superintendent. A proposal for a larger project—later known as the SB e-Library project—was drawn up, which the superintendent recommended to the mayor for implementation. Before long, Torres found herself explaining what she had done to the mayor himself. And working on the development not just of her own library but ten others as well (Totanes 2004, 56-58).

The project continues to this day and expansion libraries have already been identified. Problems and delays have been encountered, of course, but after decades of neglect, this development in Quezon City’s public school libraries is definitely welcome. It is possible that this came about just because the local government has money to burn, but it is important to note that leadership—not Torres’s, but also the school and city administrators’—was crucial in the development of the Sumulong library and other libraries.

Money played an important part. But leadership came first.

Implications for LIS Education

Very few studies have been conducted on public school libraries since 1940. Perhaps because it seemed that the answer was obvious or that the situation was deemed hopeless, that government will never, in fact, allocate a regular budget for public school libraries. But as this researcher’s study has shown, money may be made available if the right kind of leadership is present on various levels. This leadership should, at the very least, be displayed by the librarian.

Librarians must be proactive. No one is obliged to recognize the importance of the school library—librarians must be the ones to convince others of its importance. Librarians need to realize that there are people who are willing to help develop libraries, but librarians will have to identify these people, present action plans, and show that they are capable of carrying out their plans.

Many librarians focus on organizing their collections and think that should be enough, they’ve done their job. But the truth is that jobs are never really just about the work—in any profession. The ability to communicate what we do, what we’ve done and what else we can do for our customers is very important. Librarians, especially in developing countries where people are less able to appreciate what they cannot eat, need to sell what they can do for their customers—whether it’s storytelling for children or information literacy for students.

Librarians in developing countries need leaders—leaders who can communicate a vision in a language that their internal and external customers can understand, leaders who can inspire confidence in their subordinates and superiors, leaders who will not excuse mediocrity with “We don’t have money.” Unfortunately, library and information science students in the Philippines are rarely—if at all—taught communication skills, much less leadership skills.

UP’s ILIS offers library management classes for graduate and undergraduate students. But it is a fact that management and leadership are two different things. More importantly, leadership is difficult to teach. Opportunities for leadership must be made available so that students can learn by doing—and
not just by reading books, listening in class, or answering exams. And not just in a management class, but in all other classes. This, however, can only be done through a conscious decision on the part of the faculty to provide such opportunities.

Conclusion

Money is very important. But before money can be allocated, there must be leaders who can communicate a vision for public school libraries that will catch the attention not just of those who are in a position to provide the necessary financial resources, but also those who can help achieve the vision by inspiring students, subordinates, colleagues and superiors. As this researcher discovered, two libraries with similar budgets will not necessarily achieve similar goals. After all, it is not money that will put knowledge to work. People will put knowledge to work.

References


