

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

VERNON R. TOTANES

*Institute of Library and Information Science, University of the Philippines
28 Dona Carmen Ave, Dona Carmen Subd
Commonwealth, Quezon City 1121, Philippines
E-mail: von.totanes@gmail.com*

Overview

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). Their solution: 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 allots 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.

There are many reasons for these problems; one of these is corruption. 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).

Another likely reason is 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” (Peralejo 2003, 4).

This observation is backed up by Edilberto de Jesus, the former 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).

Theses on Public School Libraries Submitted to the Institute of Library and Information Science, University of the Philippines

...[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). Since then 18 more graduate and undergraduate theses have been submitted to UP’s Institute of Library and Information Science (ILIS). (Note: The percentages that appear in the Proceedings are wrong. Please ignore those numbers.)

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.

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 to use the words “leader” and “leadership” in its abstract among the 19 studies that have been conducted on public school libraries at the University of the Philippines since 1940. (Note: The other two theses on public school libraries written before 1966 did not have abstracts.) But this was purely accidental. I was, in fact, hoping to come up with a manual on fundraising for libraries.

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—that is, 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.

The “Guidelines on the Implementation of School Library Policies and Programs” issued in 1998 by the Department of Education, Culture and

Sports (hereafter referred to as the 1998 Guidelines) set forth what should be available in public school libraries in terms of:

- Physical facilities – For example, 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 – Should include library orientation during the opening of classes and library lessons as part of the curriculum.
- Collection – Minimum number of 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.)

This researcher quantified the level of development of each school library, and focused on the two libraries with the highest development scores. 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 were, in fact, the solution to the problems faced by public school libraries in the Philippines, then the two libraries should have had similar levels of development. But this was 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 degree 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.

In the meantime, Torres's proposal and what she was doing at her library caught the attention of her school principal, an assistant schools division superintendent, and eventually the Quezon City 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. In time, 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 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 external and internal 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 not exactly the same. 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 management classes, 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 put knowledge to work.

References

- Acleta, Minda A. 1996. "The Implementation of the 1988 DECS Minimum Library Standards for Secondary Schools in Ilocos Norte: An Assessment." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- American Association of School Librarians. 1998. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Bautista, Elizabeth S. 1984. "Continuing Education for the Public Secondary School Library Personnel in the Division of Quezon City: Needs Assessment." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Belmonte, Feliciano R. 2003. "The Changing Role of Local Government in Education." *Innotech Journal* 27:1 (January-June) 1-11.
- The Belmonte Administration: The Quezon City Government, Year 2*. 2003. Quezon City: Mayor's Office.
- Castillo, Kathleen N. 2004. "An Assessment of Public Secondary School Libraries in the Division of City Schools, Manila." M.L.I.S. special problem, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Chua, Yvonne T. 1999. *Robbed: An Investigation of Corruption in Philippine Education*. Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.
- Dangilan, Beatriz C. 1983. "A Survey of Public Central Elementary School Libraries in the Province of Laguna, 1981-1982." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Faelnar, Marisol B. 2003. "Krus na Ligas High School Library: Meeting the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines and the DECS Minimum Library Standards." B.L.I.S. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- "ILIS' Performance in the Licensure Exams, 1992-2005." 2005. *ILIS Newsletter* (July-December) 3.
- Intengan, Priscilla A. 1971. "An Initial Survey of Secondary School Libraries in Quezon City." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Macabata, Nancy S. 1991. "Survey and Analysis of the Extent of Compliance to the 1988 DECS Minimum Library Standards of Secondary Schools on Occidental Mindoro." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Mago, Norma A. 1977. "A Survey of Public Central School Libraries in the Bicol Region, 1975-1976." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Manalo, Janice V. 2002. "An Assessment of Selected Public Elementary School Libraries in Quezon City." B.L.I.S. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- National Statistical Coordination Board. 2004. 1991-1998 National Education Expenditure Accounts. See <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/stats/nexa/default.asp>.
- Parayno, Emilda A. 1969. "A Study of the Public Elementary School Libraries in Manila." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Peralejo, Elizabeth R. 2003. "The State of School Libraries in the Philippines." In *Proceedings of the Regional Workshop on School Library Services in Southeast Asia*. Bangkok, Thailand, September 9-12.
- Perez, R. Dante O. 2004. "Philippine Libraries and Librarianship, 1900-2000: a Historical Perspective." M.L.I.S. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Playtime Staff. 2003. "The Headmaster Lectures on a Key National Headache." *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (June 1) H1-H4.

- Profile of the Information and Communication Technology Capabilities of Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Philippines.* 2003. Quezon City: Innotech.
- Quinto, Mae Lyn P. 1998. "Continuing Education for the Public Secondary School Library Personnel in the Division of Quezon City: A Follow-Up Study." B.L.I.S. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Sanchez, Concordia. 1940. "A Survey of Philippine Public Elementary School Libraries." M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines.
- . 1971. *Philippine School Libraries: Their Organization and Management.* Manila: MCS Enterprises.
- Sandiko, Nonelia L. 1981. "A Survey of Public Central School Libraries in the Division of Tarlac: 1980-1981." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Sianghio, Myrna L. 1987. "Perceptions of Intermediate Teachers and Librarians Regarding the School Library Programs in the Public Elementary Schools in District IB, Division of City Schools, Manila." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Singh, Diljit. 2003. "The Role of School Libraries in an Information Society: A Southeast Asian Perspective." In *Proceedings of the Regional Workshop on School Library Services in Southeast Asia*. Bangkok, Thailand, September 9-12.
- Sunio, Isabel S. 1952. "A Survey of Secondary School Libraries in Manila." M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines.
- Torres, Maria Donavie B. 1998. "A Survey of Public Elementary School Libraries in Marikina City Based on the Standards Set by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports." B.L.I.S. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Torres, Susana D. 2003. "An Assessment of Public Secondary School Libraries in the Division of Quezon City." M.L.I.S. special problem, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Totanes, Vernon R. 2004. "Factors Influencing the Development of Public Secondary School Libraries in the Third District of Quezon City." M.L.I.S. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Valderrama, Norma R. 1970. "An Appraisal of the Public Secondary School Libraries in the First District of Manila." M.L.S. special problem, University of the Philippines.
- Vallejo, Rosa M. 1992. "Research Studies of UPILS Graduate Students, 1966-1991." *Journal of Philippine Librarianship* 14 (1991-1992), 18-54.