

# School libraries, information literacy and reading promotion initiatives in Spain

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*School libraries in Spain have evolved very quickly in recent years. The educational authorities have been approving school library development policies, and this has greatly improved the situation of these libraries in Spain. This paper will discuss three different aspects of school libraries in Spain: their current situation, plans to promote reading, and information literacy activities. First, the current situation of school libraries in Spain will be discussed, based on different types of data relating to these libraries. Second, the information literacy initiatives that are being implemented in Spain will be analysed. Finally, the different plans approved in Spain to promote reading will be studied.*

Spanish libraries have undergone a major transformation in the last decade. University libraries have been at the same level as those in any other developed country for some years now; public libraries are on the upswing, with some noteworthy, internationally significant experiences; and the focus is now on school libraries. Educational authorities are committed to consolidating libraries at schools, an area that had received little attention. Furthermore, Spanish professionals are very much aware of their responsibility in achieving information literacy, and are thus mobilising to promote joint projects. National and regional policies to promote reading, which are often linked to libraries, must also be mentioned. Libraries, literacy, and the promotion of reading are the three subjects that this paper will analyse in order to present a comprehensive look at the current status of these issues in Spain. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the facts with an eye to informing readers outside of Spain of the situation in this country, as most will not be familiar with it.

## School libraries in Spain

### *Background*

School libraries in Spain have never had the recognition they deserve. Spanish educational legislation has given little decisive support to the creation of school libraries; therefore, most of these libraries were set up at the initiative of the schools themselves. One of the first general studies on the situation of school libraries in Spain was conducted by Ramón Salaberría (1991), who found three reasons why libraries of this type were lacking: the overall backwardness of the Spanish library system compared to the country's economic, industrial and social level; the

passivity of the Ministry of Education and Science of the time, which was demonstrated by the lack of legal provisions regarding school libraries; and the quantitative rather than qualitative development of the educational system.

Some years earlier, in 1989, the Hispano-British Seminar on School Libraries had been held, in which some worrying conclusions were expressed: the lack of a legal framework, the virtual non-existence of libraries of this type, the dearth of trained staff, the absence of a national policy to allocate resources, the lack of space and services, etc. The situation that was presented was of great concern. In March 1997, the National Conference on School Libraries was held, the only one of its kind to date. At this conference, some guidelines were established defining what a school library should be, and the existing deficiencies were decried. In that same year, the report entitled “*Situación de las Bibliotecas Escolares en España*” (The situation of school libraries in Spain), coordinated by professional associations, was prepared. According to this study, 92% of the schools surveyed claimed to have a central library; the average number of books was estimated at between 1000 and 3000; and 64% of the libraries were not computerised. With regard to the staff in charge, 58% of the libraries were run by a person with no specific training.

In the last decade, both the national government and several Autonomous Communities have initiated school library development projects. Camacho (2004) carried out a comprehensive study on these projects, and his work has become an exceptional source of information on the state of development of school libraries in Spain. In 1995, the Pilot Programme for an Experimental Support Network for School Libraries (*Programa Piloto para la Experimentación de una Red de Apoyo a las Bibliotecas Escolares*) was implemented in five provinces through cooperation between teaching staff and public libraries. In 1997, the School Library Improvement Plan (*Plan de Mejora de las Bibliotecas Escolares*) was initiated. This plan continued until the year 2000 and some 400 schools participated in it. After that time, national actions relating to school libraries have come under the successive plans to promote reading, which will be discussed further on.

### *Current situation*

The recent educational reforms sponsored first by the conservative government and then by the socialist government have not involved any major changes affecting school libraries. The current Quality in Education Act (*Ley de Calidad de la Educación*), approved in December 2002, only mentions school libraries in its introduction, and refers to them as a means to develop reading habits. In a later law establishing the minimum requirements for schools, libraries are included as part of the infrastructure, and their minimum dimensions are even established: 45 sq m in primary education and 60 sq m in secondary. For schools where both levels are taught, the minimum size is set at 90 sq m. For vocational training schools, the law states that there must be a library appropriate to the number of school places, but the dimensions are not established. It should be pointed out that this is the first time that Spanish legislation makes libraries mandatory at schools.

A recent study offers a snapshot of the current situation of Spanish libraries: “*Las bibliotecas escolares en España: análisis y recomendaciones*” (School libraries in Spain: analysis and

recommendations), conducted by Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez (FGSR). The conclusions of this report provide an overall view of the status of libraries at Spanish schools that is both troubling and accurate. To find out the situation of the libraries, field work was carried out consisting of gathering data from a sample of 401 schools and surveying 3,849 teachers and 16,056 students. The results, along with those of other studies on school libraries in Europe and in different Spanish regions, were published in the aforementioned document (FGSR Report).

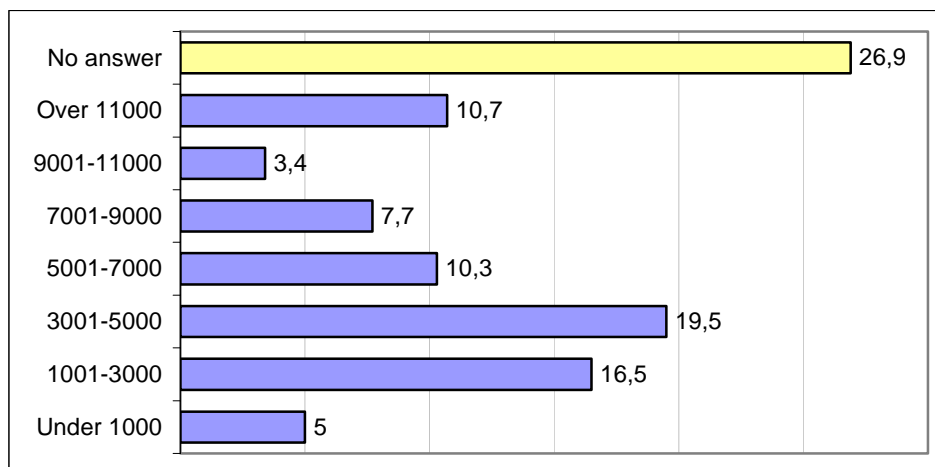
This study shows that 80% of schools have a central library, while 16.3% of them only have classroom libraries. The figure for schools with no library at all is 2.2%. The breakdown of the data by educational level is as follows:

	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Central library</i>	73.4%	91.1%	80.3%
<i>Only classroom libraries</i>	26.6%	0%	16.3%
<i>Only department libraries</i>	0%	3.2%	1.2%
<i>No library of any type</i>	0%	5.7%	2.2%

Existence of libraries, 2005. (FGSR Report)

The table shows that a centralised organisational scheme is the most common model among Spanish school libraries. The study also analysed how long the libraries had been in existence. It was found that 25.5% date from prior to 1989, 23.2% were created between 1990 and 1999, and 13.8% were opened between 2000 and 2004. The remaining 37.5% surveyed did not know when the libraries were first opened.

The school library collections are not very large. 31% of the libraries do not meet the IFLA recommendation of ten documents per student, although 28.2% exceed this figure. The IFLA recommendation regarding the proportions of fiction and non-fiction works is also not met. In 45.6% of the libraries surveyed, reference and non-fiction books accounted for 30% of the collection. The IFLA recommends that 40% of the stock should consist of fictional material and the remaining 60% non-fiction. The graph below shows the data corresponding to the total number of documents in the libraries surveyed.



Number of documents (%), 2005. (FGSR Report)

By thematic areas, the largest percentage corresponds to literature, representing 73.9% of the collections. The study makes it evident that the least represented subject area is technology, as it typically accounts for only 11.5% of a school library's total collection. One of the major deficiencies in school libraries in Spain lies in their organisation; the technical processing of the materials was complete and correct in only 30.1% of the schools in the sample. A variety of systems are used to classify the collections: in the absence of specialised employees, libraries opt for different procedures. However, the most common classification system, representing 38.3% of the total, is the UDC, the same one used in most Spanish libraries.

The area where the Spanish school library system is most lacking is in the staff who run them. There are no specialised professionals, and in most cases the libraries are run by teachers who devote a few hours to them each week to fill up their schedules. In 53.9% of the libraries surveyed for the FGSR study, library staff were appointed based on their availability. In addition, they usually only devote from one to five hours to the tasks inherent to running a library; this was the case in 62.8% of the library supervisors surveyed. It is important to note that only 0.9% of the staff members in charge of primary school libraries perform this task on a full-time basis. This percentage increases to 17.1% among secondary school library staff. Nevertheless, in Spain this work is usually done on a part-time basis.

Many other results of the survey are not included in this paper, primarily relating to management, budgets, opening hours and relationships with other libraries. Detailed information and the results of user satisfaction surveys can be downloaded from the website of Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez, which published the study: [http://www.fundaciongsr.es/pdfs/bibliotecas\\_escolares.pdf](http://www.fundaciongsr.es/pdfs/bibliotecas_escolares.pdf). It is also important to note that this report served as the basis for a series of conclusions that were taken into consideration by the administration in drawing up the new educational legislation.

## Information literacy: the Toledo Declaration

Spanish libraries have extensive experience in organising user-training activities; thus, they have been able to quickly adapt to international information literacy trends. All libraries are used to carrying out activities geared towards developing information skills. The most significant action in Spain in the area of information literacy promotion has been the creation of a working group made up of specialists, which is coordinating discussions on information literacy. Professionals from public, school and university libraries, as well as university professors and representatives of the administrations, have formed a group whose first achievements included the organisation of the working seminar on “Libraries, learning and citizens: information literacy” (Seminario de trabajo: *Biblioteca, aprendizaje y ciudadanía: alfabetización informacional*). In late 2005 and early 2006, this group, which is made up of eighty persons, discussed issues such as the conceptualisation of information literacy, its application in schools and libraries, the evaluation of experiences and information literacy policies in the information society. The members of this group held a physical meeting on 2-3 February 2006, in which the discussions continued and certain actions were agreed on. In addition, a document that will serve as the basis for the development of information literacy in Spain, entitled “*Bibliotecas por el aprendizaje permanente: Declaración de Toledo sobre la alfabetización internacional*” (Libraries for lifelong learning: Toledo Declaration on information literacy), was approved. Because of its importance, this document is reproduced in its entirety in the following section.

### *Libraries for lifelong learning (Toledo Declaration)*

“We live in a knowledge society where we must learn throughout our lives and develop skills in using information in accordance with our personal, family and community goals, always in an atmosphere of social inclusion, cultural preservation and intercultural respect. This has been affirmed by numerous declarations of international organisations, and it has also been accepted by information professionals through institutions such as IFLA and manifestos such as the Prague Declaration: Towards an Information Literate Society and the Alexandria Declaration on information literacy and lifelong learning.

Information literacy is an essential tool for the acquisition of information competencies, as well as for citizen development, participation and communication. Knowing how to access information and use it effectively, critically and creatively have become necessary skills. Therefore, information and education professionals in Spain met in Toledo for the working seminar on “Libraries, learning and citizens: information literacy,” (*Biblioteca, aprendizaje y ciudadanía: la alfabetización informacional*) in order to analyse how this concept can be applied as well as the situation of information literacy programmes in Spain. Another of their aims was to propose priority lines of action in different regional areas. After their discussion, they formulated the following considerations addressed to society in general, authorities, institutions, social actors and professionals:

1. Libraries and their staffs contribute to maintaining and improving the educational level of the population as a whole through their facilities, resources and services and through the training and reading promotion activities they conduct.

2. Libraries and information centres should design and implement training activities in an effective manner, in coordination with the institutions responsible for providing training in basic competencies.

3. Institutions should promote the ongoing professional development of library employees in order to ensure that they are constantly updated on any type of information affecting the groups they serve.

4. Libraries should have a specific training policy for all of their staff members which would enable them to act in improving the information literacy of citizens and make it possible for them to work towards lifelong learning.

5. The compulsory educational system is the starting base for training in the use of information, and therefore, it is necessary to give school libraries a lead role as resource centres for learning and acquiring competencies.

6. The curricula of universities that train information professionals should incorporate content relating to information literacy and the pedagogical issues involved in teaching it.

7. Professional associations should give priority in their offering of ongoing training activities to the new challenges posed by information literacy and lifelong learning.

8. The actors involved in the promotion of information literacy should establish local, provincial, regional and national fora as platforms for inter-institutional reflection, dissemination and cooperation.

9. The main points of reflection for these fora, which could represent the first steps in a national information literacy promotion agenda, should be:

9.1. Development of a model and specific framework for the key competencies included in information literacy.

9.2. Development of an information literacy curriculum proposal adaptable to different library, disciplinary, learning and life contexts, depending on the population segments targeted.

9.3. Implementation of an activities programme to develop social awareness about the need for information literacy.

9.4. Systematic gathering of examples of best practices in evaluating training programmes and the certification of individual levels.

9.5. Creation, maintenance and updating of a specific website on key literacies and competencies, as a resource and support centre for the fora and initiatives that are developed.

9.6. Identification of key partners in different areas in order to establish, update, promote and disseminate the agenda of actions.

9.7. Establishment of an effective and fluid mechanism for participation in the international lifelong literacy agenda, which would take the competencies and responsibilities in each area of action into consideration.

10. Cooperation in the development of key competencies and literacies should follow two lines:

10.1. On the one hand, information professionals should work on the interaction between theory and professional practice, and secure cooperation among information centres, so that information training advances and is in line with its educational objectives.

10.2. On the other hand, institutions, organisations and professionals interested in promoting information competencies should establish relations with each other in order to coordinate and develop joint activities.

Those in attendance at the Toledo Seminar will undertake to perform whatever actions are appropriate with institutions, organisations and associations in their professional and geographic spheres in order to obtain public support of the considerations reflected in this document and their commitment to act on behalf of information literacy.”

## Campaigns to promote reading in Spain

In 2001, the Spanish Ministry of Culture initiated its Plan to Promote Reading (*Plan de Fomento de la Lectura*), which has periodically been reviewed and updated. The national plans encompass different actions relating to the promotion of reading in collaboration with a variety of actors, which always include libraries, publishers and booksellers. Collaboration programmes with schools are usually included as well. Likewise, many regional and municipal governments have initiated specific plans to promote reading, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. It should also be mentioned that recent educational legislation has included the promotion of reading as part of the basic content of the educational system. In the 2004 law establishing the primary education curriculum, the Plan to Promote Reading and Develop Reading Comprehension (*Plan para el Fomento de la Lectura y el Desarrollo de la Comprensión Lectora*) was included in an annex. This plan makes it mandatory for all schools to organise reading promotion activities, using the library as an essential resource centre for any school initiatives.

### *The Plan to Promote Reading*

The first national plan to promote reading was initiated in 2001 and extended until 2004. Among the activities included as part of this plan were numerous publications and national conferences for reading and library specialists. A sizeable budget was earmarked for advertising

campaigns on television, radio, and in the press, and for advertisements on bus shelters and in stations, in cinemas and in football stadiums. Education-related initiatives included a parents' guide to beginning reading, literary tours for secondary-school students and author visits to schools. Another action that focused on elementary and secondary schools was the creation of the Reading Promotion Award (*Premio de Fomento de la Lectura*), aimed at recognising the schools themselves. In the first plan, as would occur with the subsequent ones, a large part of the budget was allocated to public libraries, to building and restoring facilities in order to expand public reading areas or to providing free Internet access at these libraries. One noteworthy experience from this plan, which is still active because it has proven to be so useful, is the Reading Guidance Service (*Servicio de Orientación Lectora* –Spanish acronym SOL), <http://www.sol-e.com>, where books for children and young people are featured and discussed. This plan had the support of numerous public and private institutions connected with books and reading, such as the Spanish Federation of Publishers' Associations (Federación de Gremios de Editores de España), Spanish Confederation of Booksellers' Organisations and Associations (Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros), Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez, Spanish Professional Football League, Coca Cola Foundation, Miguel de Cervantes Virtual Library Foundation (Fundación Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes), the NH hotel chain, the Spanish Newspaper Publishers' Association (Asociación de Editores de Diarios Españoles), Televisión Española (Spanish public television) and other radio and television networks, the Disney Channel, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias) and the Autonomous Communities.

Subsequent plans were established on an annual basis and followed the same lines of action as the 2001 plan. New in the 2004-2005 Plan to Promote Reading was the investment in updating the collections at state-funded public libraries. Three million euros' worth of books were purchased and distributed among the libraries in the national system. This year's plan included the participation of several Ministries: Culture, Education and Science; Labour and Social Affairs; Home Office; Industry. The 2005-2006 campaign was based on the family as the key to promoting reading. Once again, there was a large advertising budget, with television and radio spots and heavy advertising in the public transport system, on bus shelters and in stations and on the vehicles themselves. The advertising campaign was also extended to cinemas, coinciding with school holidays. The 2005-2006 Plan to Promote Reading, the same as its predecessors, was based on six lines of action:

1. Development of analysis tools to learn the current situation of reading, libraries and bookshops: statistics on reading and book-buying habits, maps and an observatory for bookshops, statistics about public libraries.
2. Projects targeting the student population at schools: literary meetings at secondary schools, university visits by Spanish authors and the "Why read the classics?" programme (*¿Por qué leer a los clásicos?*).
3. Projects to develop public libraries as centres to promote reading: the renovation of libraries and construction of new ones, the expansion of new technologies, and above all, the continuation of the special plan for the allocation of resources to libraries.



4. Communication activities: television and cinema advertising campaign, different fixed and audiovisual advertising initiatives.

5. Activities to encourage reading: “Taking books to the streets” campaign (*Libros a la calle*), programmes to stimulate reading in small towns, participation at fairs, assistance to bookshops and schools, collaboration with foundations, associations and NGOs working in this area.

6. Actions to develop awareness and cooperation with other institutions, in collaboration with Ministries, foundations and other public and private institutions.

The financing for these national reading promotion plans has been maintained throughout the years that they have been in operation. These budgets normally include allocations for the renovation of library buildings or the purchase of collections for public libraries. Expenditures to date have been as follows:

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Budget</b>
2001/2004	125
2004/2005	40
2005/2006	31

National plans to promote reading (millions of euros)

### *School libraries in reading plans*

All national reading promotion plans include an area of action relating to carrying out initiatives at schools. A part of the budget for these actions has always been earmarked for school libraries. In 2001, the School Libraries Plan (*Plan de Bibliotecas Escolares*) included the following actions: a programme to design and develop educational materials for the improvement of school libraries and the promotion of reading at schools (*Programa de diseño y elaboración de material educativo para la mejora de las Bibliotecas Escolares y el fomento de la lectura en los centros*); a programme for ABIES automated management systems for school libraries (*Programa de gestión automatizada para las Bibliotecas Escolares ABIES*); a training plan on the use of school libraries (*Plan de formación sobre utilización de Bibliotecas Escolares*); and a programme to improve the collections of book and computer resources at school libraries under the management of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (*Programa de mejora de fondos bibliográficos e informáticos en las Bibliotecas Escolares*). As one can see, these measures were aimed at shoring up the areas where school libraries in Spain were lacking, such as training, the size of the collections or the lack of computerised management systems for the latter. In the year 2002, the School Libraries Plan was maintained as part of the Plan to Promote Reading. The measures included in this year's plan were less ambitious, as they were limited to the programme to design and develop educational materials for the improvement of school libraries and the promotion of reading at schools and the programme to improve the collections of book and computer resources at school libraries under the management of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, which at the time included only 53 schools in Ceuta and Melilla.

In 2003, changes were introduced in the projects to promote reading habits that targeted the student population at schools. The Plan to Update School Libraries (*Plan de Renovación de las Bibliotecas Escolares*) was initiated, based on a competition awarding prizes to projects to update, renovate and improve school libraries. The winning projects were to be given financial awards to improve their facilities, collections and equipment; one important detail was that initiatives relating to the promotion and use of the library were also awarded prizes. Another related 2003 activity was the school library management training programme. This was an interactive, multimedia course which included both theory and practical exercises relating to school libraries. The course was divided into the following modules: Library science; Revitalisation of school libraries and the encouragement of reading; Children's and young adult literature; and Development of a school library project. The Plan to Update School Libraries continued in 2004. Once again, a competition was held for proposals to convert school libraries into essential resource centres at primary and secondary schools. A first prize of €54,000 was awarded, along with two second prizes of €36,000 each, six third prizes of €20,000 each and fifteen fourth prizes of €10,500 each. This year also saw the continuation of training programmes in the form of on-line multimedia courses.

Some of these measures aimed at school libraries were dropped from the 2004/2005 annual plan, even though it endeavoured to maintain the lines of action from the previous plan. The 2005/2006 plan has a similar structure to the previous ones, and therefore its lines of action include "projects targeting the student population at schools." In this case, school libraries have been completely neglected, as there are no programmes that include actions to equip them or train their staffs.

### *Local campaigns to promote reading*

Apart from the national government, some regional and municipal administrations have implemented their own plans to promote reading, which are often linked to the schools. For example, the Regional Government of Andalusia has approved several programmes to promote reading, the latest just recently. First of all, the Plan to Promote Reading (*Plan de Fomento de la Lectura 2000-2004*) was approved, and then later the Comprehensive Plan to Stimulate Reading in Andalusia (*Plan Integral para el Impulso de la Lectura en Andalucía 2005-2010*). In March 2006, the Reading and School Libraries Plan for Andalusia's schools (*Plan de Lectura y de Bibliotecas Escolares en los centros educativos de Andalucía 2006-2010*) was approved. It is worth mentioning that in this latest plan, school libraries play a lead role in promoting reading, as one of the lines of action is "support for reading and for school libraries." In this regard, the plan provides for special budget items to equip school libraries.

Another region with plans of this type is Galicia, where the Galician Plan to Promote Reading and School Libraries (*Plan Gallego de Fomento de la Lectura y las Bibliotecas Escolares 2005-2008*) has been approved. Its aims include bolstering the role of public and school libraries as a basic public service to promote reading. Prior to that was the Plan to Promote Reading in Extremadura (*Plan de Fomento de la Lectura de Extremadura*), initiated in 2002, which provides for actions to be carried out in school libraries. One of the most ambitious programmes is Castile-La Mancha's School Reading Plan (*Plan de Lectura en los Centros*

*Escolares* 2005-2010). Its aims include promoting school libraries as resource centres where the entire educational community can learn. In order to achieve this aim, certain measures are proposed, such as the formation of a task force responsible for libraries at schools and the organisation of school libraries as resource centres for learning.

The Region of Murcia has also recently approved a Plan to Promote Reading and Develop Reading Comprehension at Primary Schools (*Plan para el Fomento de la Lectura y el Desarrollo de la Comprensión Lectora en los Centros Docentes que imparten la Educación Primaria*), in effect as of the 2005/2006 school year. This plan adapted national legislation regarding the promotion of reading in schools to Murcia's school system. There is a similar law in Castile-León, also in effect as of the 2005/2006 school year. In this Autonomous Community, the Castile-León Reading Plan (*Plan de Lectura de Castilla y León*) was approved in April 2006. Legislative changes were made that revolved around providing library services in towns and villages of over 1000 inhabitants. In this plan, school libraries are also considered the focal point in the promotion of reading. Other autonomous communities with regional plans are the Canary Islands and Madrid, where an Act to Promote Books and Reading (*Ley de Fomento del Libro y la Lectura*) was approved in 1999.

Some provincial and municipal governments are also carrying out important actions to promote reading. The County Council of Badajoz has a plan known as "A book is a friend" (*Un libro es un amigo*), which began in 2004 and is in effect until 2007 and is being implemented in a hundred cities and towns in this province of Extremadura. A similar example, but with a more local scope, is the "Let's Read" Programme to Encourage Reading in Schools (*Programa de Animación a la Lectura en Centros Escolares «Vamos a leer»*), which is being implemented in Pamplona.

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