

Mònica Baró, Teresa Mañà, and Àlex Cosials

4 Guidelines and Standards for School Libraries in Catalonia, Spain

Abstract: School libraries were long underdeveloped in Spain. However, under the influence of the 2002 *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines*, the situation has significantly improved over the last ten years. Using the example of Catalonia, this chapter sheds light on policy initiatives adopted at both the Spanish and Catalan levels, as well as on their implementation on the ground. After a review of the Spanish political and legal framework in the field of school libraries, we discuss the Catalan programme Puntedu and describe the elaboration of the regional *Guidelines and Standards for School Libraries*.

Keywords: Spain; Catalonia; Puntedu Programme; Role of the school librarian; Local Guidelines

The Political and Legal Framework of Spain

Spain is a quasi-federal state made up of 17 regions, called autonomous communities. This political system was established in 1978, with the return of democracy. Although the balance of powers has shifted over time, education and culture were always primarily regional responsibilities in regions such as Catalonia, and these powers have now been handed over to most of the regions.

In the educational system, the national government ensures the homogeneity and unity of the educational system, which is regulated by a law establishing a common framework. However, each of the 17 regional governments has exclusive powers in education, under which they can establish their own policies and even legislate on education. The education offered by the education system is divided into different stages: nursery (from 0 to 6 years), primary education (six school years from 6 to 12 years of age), obligatory secondary education (*ESO*) (four school years from 12 to 16 years of age), high school (from 16 to 18 years of age) and intermediate vocational training, intermediate vocational education in art and design and intermediate sports education (from 16 to 18 years of age).

Primary and secondary education is compulsory and free, and can be delivered in state or subsidized private schools. Private schools may apply for government funding to provide these mandatory levels of education. When they obtain such funding, they are referred to as *centros concertados*, or state-assisted private schools. The percentage of pupils attending state schools is around 68%. Within

the state system, education takes place in two types of schools: nursery and primary schools (*CEIP*) for the first stages and Institutes of Secondary Education (*IES*) for the stages of obligatory secondary education, high school and vocational training. State-assisted private schools can offer all these levels of education.

Until recently school libraries in Spain were neither organized by law nor supported by policies for creating or developing them. They relied almost exclusively on the individual efforts of proactive and enthusiastic teachers, who believed their school needed a library. As revealed by a 2013 study on school libraries (Miret et al. 2013), four shortcomings characterized school libraries at the time: insufficient resources, lack of services, low usage, and short-lived existence. These libraries were hardly comparable to other European ones and far from the standards promoted by international institutions and organizations such as UNESCO and IFLA.

Over the last ten years, however, both the Spanish government and some regional governments have implemented specific policies to promote school libraries. Legislative initiatives such as the 2006 Organic Law on Education (LOE), which was adopted under the socialist government of Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004–2011), created, for the first time, a legal framework for school libraries. Article 113 states that “schools will have a school library,” and urges educational authorities to sustain library implementation in state schools. These libraries are directed to pursue two aims: to contribute to the improvement of reading skills and to provide “access to information and other resources for learning in other areas and courses, and for developing the critical use of these tools” (LOE 2006).

Since then, the situation of school libraries has improved. Over the years, the Spanish government has dedicated €70 million to this plan, an amount further increased by the financial contribution of some regional governments; several of these governments adopted programmes to establish and develop school libraries, leading to an improved resource allocation. As a result, schools increased and updated their library collections, automated processes and services, renovated furniture and technological infrastructures and even, in some cases, dedicated specific staff to their library.

The recent study *Las bibliotecas escolares en España. Dinámicas 2005–2011* (Miret et al. 2013) describes the progress made during this period. It includes the involvement of management and of teaching coordination staff, the official recognition and presence of school libraries in centres, the promotion of library activities on the internet (blog, webpages), and the improvement of technological processes.

Nevertheless, unlike in neighbouring countries, the figure of the school librarian remains nonexistent. This role is often performed by teachers – as library managers – who dedicate a few hours a week to the library. Some of these

managers take specific courses given by regional educational services or universities, but most of them lack any kind of adequate training. It is important to note that school libraries are not addressed at all in the basic training of teachers and many library managers receive no specific training about school libraries. Finally, school libraries are scarcely used for developing curriculum. They are only regarded as tools to improve reading skills and their mission statements do not include diversification of services or information literacy (Miret et al. 2013, 197–201).

Over this period, some regions have created coordination focal points to support school libraries. Programmes for improvement have been launched, studies and publications have appeared, and specific training for library managers has been developed. Technical assistance is also available, and specific meetings are organized to allow for contacts between teachers and librarians. All this has undoubtedly facilitated the introduction of a new school library model that is more in tune with today's educational needs.

School Libraries in Catalonia: The Puntedu Programme

Catalonia is one of the regions where regional authorities have decided to go further than state regulation. Catalonia is an autonomous region with seven million inhabitants located in the north-east of Spain, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Autonomous regions have their own government with authority over all areas, including education and culture, within a quasi-federal system headed by the Spanish government, which adopts general laws. The public school system has 1,500 centres, and the private system another 1,200 centres. The public library system includes 404 libraries across Catalonia.

The left-leaning regional government (2003–2010) adopted an ambitious development plan, the Puntedu (“dot edu”) Programme, in 2005 to improve Catalan school libraries. This programme was one of seven major programmes of educational innovation in Catalonia. Puntedu pursued three goals: “promoting and consolidating the library as a basic learning tool in the development of all areas; fostering reading habits; and turning the library into a service and a resource for teachers as well as an open space for the whole educational community” (Generalitat 2004). Grants were given on the basis of an open tender, which took territorial balance and the public/private nature of schools into account. Schools had to propose a library project endorsed by educational institutions to regional authorities.

Out of the 2,700 Catalan public schools, 1,062 have joined the programme. These schools, which were selected yearly over a period of three years, also received a symbolic grant from the regional government (on average € 2000), had free access to the library management software developed by the regional ministry, and could apply to a technical training scheme specifically designed for library managers (that was, in fact, open to all teachers who wanted to deepen their knowledge of school libraries). In addition, most schools could devote one half-time teacher for managing the school library, which represented the main part of the programme budget.

This programme has also initiated various working groups to prepare reference documents and support material. For instance, the report *Mobiliari i biblioteca escolar* [Furniture and the school library] (Generalitat 2011) was produced by a group of librarians and architects. It establishes the basic furniture requirements for a school library and gathers numerous suggestions to help schools acquire the needed furniture. Similarly, *Esporgar la biblioteca* [Weeding the library] (Abeyà Lafontana 2010) helps librarians to weed their collections, reminding them that they should not accumulate outdated books and documents. The webpage *La Biblioteca escolar 2.0* (Generalitat 2012) is a third example. It addresses the challenges raised in school libraries by digital tools and resources, as well as by social networks. This webpage, which offers various resources, is meant as a response to questions raised by library managers.

Despite the economic crisis, the Puntedu programme has been maintained, although in a different form, with an increased involvement of the Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris-Documentalistes (COBDC), the professional association of Catalan librarians.

Guidelines and Standards for School Libraries in Catalonia

In 2009, the regional Education minister of Catalonia set up a committee to determine guidelines and standards for school libraries in order to establish an action plan and to guarantee the durability of the project. This document was aimed at providing schools with parameters for evaluating their own situations and providing ways for improving them. It was also designed to offer tools for planning school libraries more successfully, covering both their creation and everyday functioning.

The guidelines were produced by a committee representing the two main groups involved in the matter, that is, teachers and librarians. This committee

met for the first time in 2009 and completed its work in 2012. These guidelines were published at the 5th School Libraries Conference in March 2013 (Directrius 2013). Teachers were represented by persons collaborating in the Puntedu programme, as well as by some library managers. Professional librarians were represented by the COBDC, by academic institutions such as the Library Faculty of the Universitat de Barcelona, and by public library services such as the Servei de Biblioteques del Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya and the Gerència de Serveis de Biblioteques de la Diputació de Barcelona. This committee was coordinated by the heads of the Puntedu programme.

The COBDC and the Library Faculty have a long tradition of cooperating with those involved in school libraries. Since the 1990s, they have regularly organized conferences on school libraries that have become key events in Catalonia. They have also significantly contributed to the improvement and promotion of library services and their vitality. They contributed to the dissemination of the 2002 *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines*, which they translated into Catalan and published as a booklet. Other examples of Catalan translations of IFLA documents are the *Guidelines for Easy-to-read Materials* (in 1999) reedited in 2012; *The Public Library Service: the IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development* (in 2002) reedited also in 2013 after the publication of the *IFLA Public Library Service Guidelines*; the *Guidelines for Digitization Projects* (in 2006); *The IFLA Internet Manifesto* (in 2006); *Guidelines for Library Services to Babies and Toddlers* (in 2008); *Guidelines on Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning* (in 2009); *IFLA Digital Reference Guidelines* (in 2011); and the *Guidelines for Libraries of Government Departments* (in 2012).

In the domain of school libraries, the COBDC translated the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto* in 1999 and printed the 2002 *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines* in 2005, in collaboration with the Catalan Education Ministry. These two documents served as the starting point for producing the *Directrius i estàndards per a les biblioteques dels centres educatius de Catalunya* [Guidelines and standards for school libraries in Catalonia].

As shown in this chapter, the Catalan *Guidelines* were largely inspired by key reference texts from IFLA, especially the 2002 *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines*. The Catalan *Guidelines* update some general aspects of IFLA's guidelines and adapt them to the Catalan context in which regional authorities are responsible for deciding on matters related to the management of educational centers without the involvement of local authorities or institutional support from public libraries. These guidelines also establish a model for a school library network and outline the role of the various regional agents therein. However, despite these achievements, the lack of specific regulations on school libraries prevents the development of a cogent framework beyond the LOE.

The Catalan guidelines support the updated IFLA recommendations, as shown by this comparison with the 2014 *IFLA School Library Guidelines Draft* (IFLA2015). For instance:

- They consider the digital dimension of the library. They insist on the development of both digital collections and a virtual space;
- They detail the role and the missions of library coordinators, and establish their profile and type of dedication to the library. This is crucial because neither the Spanish nor the Catalan law recognizes the need for professional school librarians and support staff;
- They discuss the competences and the role of library committees, which are made up of teachers from different educational areas and levels, as well as the coordinator of the school technological area;
- They insist on the importance of assessment, and they recommend bringing together a basic repository of data and indicators on the resources, uses and costs of the library so that each library can assess its own situation. A more thorough assessment protocol, which is specifically designed for school libraries, is available online. (Miret et al. 2011)

However, the Catalan guidelines also diverge from the 2015 *IFLA School Library Guidelines Draft*:

- They do not insist on aspects related to informational competences, which are briefly mentioned in the section on services. They mention the need to establish programs to support learning and the development of the *curriculum*, but they only refer in general terms to training in the use of the library and its resources;
- They include quality standards applicable to the sections on collections, services, spaces and staff. These are crucial to the administration for planning the setting-up and equipping of libraries from the beginning, in order to ensure the quality of library services. These parameters are also useful to the centres themselves because they help them to determine their own situations and to plan actions for improving them;
- They do not include examples of good practices to support library managers in their jobs. However, the Puntedu programme offers a website which gathers successful experiences and innovative practices.

The shortcoming of library resources and services is mostly related to the non-existence of librarians in Spanish schools, which impedes the elaboration and the execution of more complex programs. Therefore, considering the importance given to these issues in the new guidelines, this section of the Catalan *Guidelines*

should be revised to strengthen the role of school libraries in education in the 21st century.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The improvement of school libraries in Catalonia between 2005 and 2010 is directly related to the increase in public funding, and also to the development of support programs that not only provide more resources to libraries but also involve investment in training teachers and in designing tools for implementing and developing school libraries. Amongst these tools, it is important to emphasise the regional *Guidelines and Standards for School Libraries*, which are especially relevant in a country where each new government may change the education laws and authority is divided across levels of power. This makes long-term policies particularly difficult to implement, thus impacting directly on the development of school libraries.

These programme documents are even more important in times of economic crisis, which can see some of the advances made in recent years reversed. Indeed, the economic crisis has led to a decrease in resources dedicated to education over the last ten years, especially in the field of school libraries. This has had an impact on the implementation of the guidelines, including a decrease in both the functions and the budget of the Puntedu Programme, thus impeding any further development of the *Guidelines* in Catalan schools.

As seen above, many aspects of the Catalan *Guidelines* echo the 2015 *IFLA School Library Guidelines Draft*. Both documents insist on the need to adapt school libraries to the new digital context, both in terms of resources and services, and stress the importance of assessment as a means to improve school libraries and to justify investment in them.

However, the Catalan *Guidelines* also have crucial shortcomings. First, although the guidelines insist on the need of a skilled staff and establish time dedication in relation to the size of each school, they do not guarantee the presence of school librarians (that is, full time professionals) in every Catalan school library. Second, issues related to the training dimension of the library should be further developed, particularly in relation to reading and information skills. If schools had a qualified staff with enough time to devote, they could embark on more ambitious programmes and further contribute to educational success.

Writing the Catalan *Guidelines* has offered an opportunity to discuss and reach agreement on how school libraries should be in Catalonia. These guidelines could become a reference for other regional administrations in Spain since

it is the first – and so far the only – document of this nature in the whole country. Its existence should foster continuity in school libraries policies in Catalonia, since they have been drafted with a deep and direct knowledge of the situation and they have been realistically developed with the agreement of the different stakeholders.

The drafting, the publication and the diffusion of these guidelines are a first step towards a needed legal framework on school libraries, which should develop the general principles of the Catalan Library Law and the Spanish Education Law. This framework should address some of the current shortcomings, such as the position of the school librarian and the time allocation for the position, or the obligation to dedicate a part of the school budget to the school library. This could also be a chance to move forward in developing a network of school libraries, which would benefit from collective services such as a common catalogue or the purchase of books and electronic resources together.

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