
Title	Principals and teachers' perspectives of their school libraries and implications for school library policy
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Principals and Teachers' Perspectives of their School Libraries and Implications for School Library Policy

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Principals and Teachers' Perspectives of their School Libraries and Implications for School Library Policy

Abstract

Abstract (100 words)

Research has demonstrated that school librarians can make a meaningful contribution to student reading proficiency, learning and academic achievement. This study examines the perspectives of school leaders and teachers in Singapore schools to better understand how they use their school library, their attitudes toward the library collection and environment, and their perception of their library coordinators' roles. Findings suggest that school leaders and teachers under-utilize the library, perceive it to be mainly a study space for students, feel that the library space and book collection should be improved, and were not clear about the roles of their library staff. The study suggests that it is crucial to implement policy and professional development courses to support collaboration between principals, teachers, and school librarians.

Keywords: school libraries, librarians, school leaders and teachers, learning environment, collection

Introduction

While student learning and achievement in schools are optimized when libraries are well-designed, resourced and staffed (Lance, 2002; Lance & Kachel, 2018; Radlick & Stefk-Mabry, 2018; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005), the presence of a qualified librarian is also an important factor for academic achievement, notably in English Language Arts (ELA) and literacy (Hughes et al., 2013; Lance & Hofshire, 2012; Merga, 2019a; Small et al., 2009, 2010). Despite clear evidence for the important role played by qualified school librarians, the policies and practices with regard to staffing school libraries is uneven across countries and school districts, in part due to unclear knowledge about the role and work of school librarians (Cremin & Swann, 2017; Merga, 2019a; Loh et al., 2019; Mokhtar & Majid, 2004). This lack of clarity often leads to the librarians' work being under-valued (Hochman, 2016; Merga, 2019a, 2019c), and school librarians are often the first to go when there are educational funding cuts.

One reason for the tendency to under-value the librarian is the school leadership and teachers' lack of familiarity with librarians' contribution within schools, with a respondent in a recent study of Australian teacher librarians noting, "I don't think a lot of principals understand the role of a teacher librarian and what they can bring to a school" (Merga, 2019a, p. 26). Public and educators' perceptions of traditional school library work may also be dated, neglecting the important role of school librarians in scaffolding access to books and technology in this digital age (Hochman, 2016). Thus, it is important to examine the perspectives of leaders and educators involved in designing policy and implementing practice toward their school libraries, to understand how better to support the work of libraries and librarians in service of greater student learning.

Current Research

Professional Librarians and Student Learning

The School Library Manifesto by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) states that

The school librarian is the professionally qualified staff member responsible for planning and managing the school library, supported by staffing as adequate as possible, working together with all members of the school community, and liaising with the public library and others. (IFLA, 2015, p. 60)

This suggests that the school librarian should have adequate training and that his or her role is to collaborate with other staff members to encourage student learning. In order for that to happen, school leaders and teachers need to have sufficient understanding of the role of the school librarian and intentionally work with the librarian.

What educational attainment is required to constitute being a “professionally qualified” school librarian varies considerably across nations, and furthermore, there may be considerable variation in nomenclature both between and within nations (Merga et al., 2021). For example, Australian and U.S. school librarians may be typically dual qualified with degree qualifications in both education and librarianship (Kaplan, 2007; Merga, 2019b), while U.K. library staff rarely hold this dual qualification, and are far less likely to hold degree-level qualifications than their Australian or U.S. counterparts (Streatfield et al., 2011). However, despite the high qualification attainment expectation of Australian teacher librarians, recent research findings from a comprehensive school census in South Australia found that while “94% of schools have someone to manage the library collection and to select resources”, “in just 23% of schools the person in this role is a qualified teacher librarian” (Dix et al., 2020, p. 4). In Singapore, it is not the norm to

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have qualified librarians staff the library, though a teacher (known as the “library coordinator”) is typically assigned to manage the library, whereas in Hong Kong, teachers take a diploma course to be trained as teacher-librarians only to be promoted to other leadership roles within the school (Loh et al., 2019).

Nomenclature is inconsistent and variable, and therefore degree of professional qualification cannot be reliably inferred in relation to the title of library staff. For example, in 2010 the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) decided to revert to the title school librarian from their privileging of school library media specialist (Scholastic, 2016), however a very recent content analysis of U.S. job description documents found that schools were still more typically using the title school library media specialist (51.6%) rather than school librarian (9.5%), whereas most school librarians in Australia are known as teacher librarians (82%) (Merga & Ferguson, 2020). Singapore secondary school educators typically use the term “librarian” to refer to anyone who works in the library, qualified or unqualified. In most government schools in Singapore, the term “librarian” refers to the clerical staff who assists with the loans and day-to-day management of the library. Thus, the use of the term “librarian” needs to account for the lack of international or even national standardization around professional standards and nomenclature.

Contemporary school libraries need to support students' collaborative and innovation needs as well as traditional needs of reading and studying (Loh et al., 2019). Crucial work done by certified school librarians include the selection of materials for the library collection to support the school's general curriculum (Merga, 2019b; Small et al., 2009) and the development of information literacy skills for independent self-directed and project learning (Harada et al., 2008; Kuthau, 2010). Librarians can support struggling readers by identifying them, providing choice

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and book matching, and organizing programmes to support pleasure and academic reading (Cremmin & Swann, 2017; Merga, 2019c). They can also support students' experiences of school libraries as spaces for learning and well-being (Harper, 2019; Hughes et al., 2019; Loh et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2019).

Enabling the school librarian to make important decisions about learning and the direction of the school library in supporting and amplifying school-wide educational initiatives is important given the changing contexts of 21st century learning (Hay & Foley, 2009; Loh et al., 2019) with its focus on connectedness, collaboration, technology and innovation. Recent research suggests that the facets within the role of the school librarian can be extremely diverse, with teacher librarians expected to instruct, collaborate, manage the collection, support the acquisition of diverse literacies including information and communication technologies, and manage a complex learning environment, amongst numerous other commonly expected aspects of the role (Merga & Ferguson, 2020). The expertise of the librarian is required to help students learn to access technology and online information in an ever-expanding online universe of instant access (Calvert, 2016; Morris, 2005; Wine, 2016).

When school librarians are enabled to take on active leadership roles, they are empowered to create conducive environments for reading, collaboration, and development of information literacy skills (Lance, 2002; Howard, 2017; Wine, 2016). While this expectation may be explicitly imbedded in the professional role (e.g., Australian School Library Association (ASLA), 2014), it is often not recognized as a necessity by school leaders or teachers (Collins & Doll, 2012; Mokhtar & Majid, 2004). Thus, the support of school leaders and teachers is required for school librarians to effectively use their position and resources to support and extend student reading and learning.

The Role of the Principal and School Teachers

Besides relevant training, the support of the principal and school is crucial for optimization of the library space for learning. As early as 1959, Robert L. Amsden emphasized that a principal should have high expectations of the school librarian in order for his vision of an effective school library to be fulfilled. Correspondingly, Amsden (1959) suggests that the principal must respect the school librarian and work together, committing to the high standards exacted by the American Library Association.

The vision of the school principal continues to be vital for driving the place and role of the school library in the school's learning ecosystem (Hay & Foley, 2009; Henri et al., 2002). In a study of the seven teacher librarians in two Alberta (Canada) school districts, Oberg (1995) found that principals can show their support for the librarian in three ways: by (1) working directly with teachers to develop their understanding of the programme, (2) clearly demonstrating personal commitment to the programme, and (3) using the management role of the school leader to enable the programme. The exact impact of the principal's beliefs on the school library was quantified in an earlier Singapore study preceding this survey. Using a time-freeze method of counting observed student behaviours in the library over a period of 15 to 17 days in each library, Loh (2017) was able to quantify the kinds of behaviors observed in each school library. It was found that the top three behaviors observed in the six school libraries studied corresponded exactly to the principal's stated aims of the library. In schools where reading was prioritized, and the teachers in charge of the library were empowered to create spaces and programmes for reading, more reading behaviours were observed.

Other than the support of the principal, integrating libraries and librarians into the school curriculum contributes to improved student engagement and academic achievement (Lance et al.,

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2000; Lance & Kachel, 2018; Radlick & Stefk-Mabry, 2018; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005). However, few teachers are aware of the potential of collaboration with librarians, perceiving librarians in their traditional roles of managing book collections and loans (Montiel-Overall, 2010; Merga et al., 2021). In a survey study involving 76 teachers from seven schools in Singapore, Mokhtar and Majid (2004) found that teachers generally did not use their school libraries and its resources effectively. This was partly because of the perceived shortage of educational materials in the library and absence of a qualified librarian. There was also a lack of collaboration between teachers and library staff, leading to under-utilized school libraries. Teachers with greater understanding of the potential of collaboration are more likely to engage the librarian and use the library facilities and resources for learning (Montiel-Overall, 2010). Researchers have thus proposed a number of models to enhance collaboration between school librarians and their teacher colleagues (Haycock, 2007; Merga, 2019b; Merga et al., 2021; Montiel-Overall & Grimes, 2013).

A concerning commonality experienced by school library staff across multiple contexts in recent times is their vulnerability to staffing cuts. Hochman (2016) notes that stereotypes of librarians as loners whose job is to shelve books and keep patrons quiet has led to misperceptions of the real behind-the-scenes work of the librarian, resulting in budget cuts by school leaders and governments. She argues that the work of librarians should be made more salient and visible through advocacy of library programmes and work. Similarly, a 2011 Australian government-led inquiry into the state of school libraries noted that “the value of teacher librarians’ work has been eroded over the years and undervalued by many in the community, be it by colleagues, principals, parents or those in the wider school community” (House of Representatives, 2011, p. 117).

Research Focus

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Understanding school leaders and teachers' perspectives of the school library and the library personnel is a starting point from which to optimize the use of the school library and its staff, by understanding user usage and perception. This study thus examines how school leaders and teachers use and perceive their school libraries, their views on the collection and the library as a learning environment, and their perceptions of library staff. This study also provides valuable foundational work from a novel context about the potential impact of qualified as opposed to non-qualified school librarians on library usage and perception.

The research questions (RQs) for the study are:

1. How do school leaders and teachers use and perceive their use of the school library?
2. How do school leaders and teachers perceive student usage of the school library for reading, studying, and research?
3. What are school leaders and teachers' perceptions about their school library space and collection?
4. How aware are school leaders and teachers of their library coordinators' roles and duties?

Method

Research Context

Within the Singapore context, qualified librarians are not typically part of the typical library ecosystem. Instead, a qualified teacher (who is not professionally qualified as a librarian and does not have a degree in library and information science) is appointed as a library coordinator (LC).

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The LC is tasked to manage the library, on top of his or her teaching duties. The Singapore Ministry of Education guidelines recommends a Media Resource Library committee of different subject-teachers support the work of the LC, but this is unevenly implemented across schools and some library coordinators may not have the support of a Media Resource Library committee. Every school library has a library officer, a clerical staff that supports the LC and manages the library system. A few schools with greater independence may hire librarians who have a degree in library and information science to manage their library space, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Participants and Sites

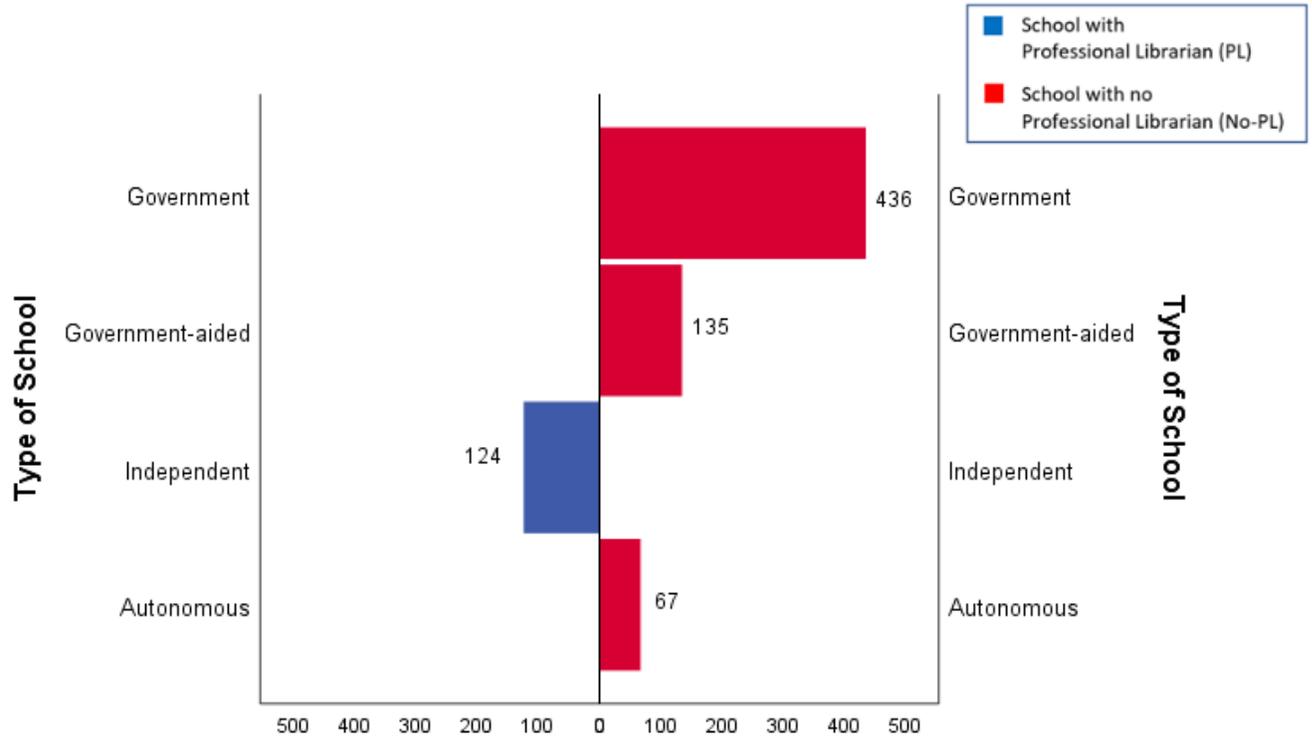
At the time of the study, there were 150 schools in Singapore. A total of 45 schools were chosen in a purposively randomized fashion to include all types of schools for representation of the different kinds of schools in Singapore. Email invitations were sent to the principals and/or library coordinators of these schools, out of which 14 schools agreed to participate in the online survey. Due to the specialized nature of one school, it was excluded from the final data analysis.

Schools in Singapore are banded according to the following types: Independent, Autonomous, Government and Government co-aided schools (see Figure 1). Independent schools, with autonomy to manage their own finances, curriculum, and programming are better placed to focus their hiring based on the needs of their school, which accounts for the presence of qualified librarians in the independent schools studied. At the time of the study, only seven secondary schools in Singapore had hired qualified librarians. Of the 13 schools included in the analysis, 11 schools were typical schools managed by LCs, and two of the independent schools hired qualified librarians. One of the librarians was a former teacher who obtained library and information

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science (LIS) qualifications after teaching for some time and the other had obtained her master's degree in LIS, accumulating experience working in various secondary school libraries. For the purposes of this paper, schools with a professional librarian will be labelled PL schools and schools without professional librarians will be labelled no-PL schools. This nomenclature was selected in consultation with the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE), a research partner in this study.

Figure 1. Distribution of participants according to school type.



A total of 764 school leaders (SLs) and teacher respondents completed the survey online. However, one respondent was excluded due to irrelevant comments made in the survey indicating that this individual did not take the survey seriously. Another was excluded as s/he was not a

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member of the teaching staff but was a media resource personnel. The distribution of the 762 participants according to the school type and professional roles are detailed in Figure 1 above and Table 1 below. 602 (78.9%) of the respondents indicated that they were readers with 76.4% having visited their school library at least once a semester in the last 12 months. For the purposes of this study, principals, vice-principals, and heads of departments are considered school leadership as they form the school management committee.

Insert Table 1. Characteristics of (N = 762) of survey participants by percentage.

Role	Number
Principal	8
Vice-Principal	14
Heads of Departments	104
Senior Teachers	54
Teachers	582
Library Coordinator	8
Library CCA Teacher	2
Media Resource Committee	1

An invitation was extended by the researchers to evaluate the physical space of their school library and provide practical recommendations after their visit. On request, a debrief was provided to the school at the end of the researchers' visit. In total, nine schools accepted the offer to evaluate their library space. These visits also enabled the researchers conduct informal interviews with the library coordinator or librarian in order to understand the library context with which to read the individual school reports. A report on the physical space as well as the final survey report was sent to each school and to MOE. This paper focuses only on the analysis of the quantitative data, while drawing on selected qualitative comments in the survey to extend the discussion.

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Procedure

An online survey, comprising five-point Likert-scale and open-ended questions, was created using the survey platform, Qualtrics. The Qualtrics platform was used to disseminate the survey. Participants' attitudes toward and usage of their school libraries were measured by 47 questions across 11 subscales that related to considerations arising from the literature reviewed previously. However, to answer the research questions set out in this paper, the questions answered in seven of these subscales were considered (see Table 2).

Table 2. Examples of items from the seven subscales in the *School Library Perspectives* Study.

Scale name	Example of statements/questions asked
Library Usage	Based on your observation/opinion, the library is well used by the students for a. reading b. ... Based on your observation/ opinion, the library is well used by the teachers for a. reading b. ...
Library and Studying	The library is conducive for students to study.
Diversity of Book and Media Collection	In our school library, we have a wide selection of a. fiction b. ...
Library and Information Literacy Skills	Students generally have access to computers or laptops for work in the school library.
Learning Environment	The library needs a. more chairs b. ...
Professional Development – for SLs	My library coordinator and teachers have a library-related diploma or degree.

Principals' and HODs Library Support and Perception of Library Needs – for SLs	I feel that my library coordinator is competent for the job. Please elaborate.
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Approval was obtained from the University's Institutional Review Board, and the survey was piloted at two secondary schools with a sample of 66 teachers. Pilot data was not used in the final data set and the survey was refined based on analysis of the pilot survey and feedback from teachers who participated in the pilot survey.

Following each school's agreement to participate in the study, an email invitation containing the hyperlink to the survey and a QR code were sent to the school's liaison personnel between 15th January and 7th February 2018. The liaison personnel subsequently forwarded the email invitations to all academic staff members of their schools. After subsequent reminders, the survey was closed on 15th March 2018.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS 26 was used to analyse the data¹. The survey gave rise to many variables; to aid in the statistical analysis, Dimension Reduction using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax orthogonal rotation was used to reduce the data for some of the scales. The survey gave rise to 11 dependent variables: Library usage by students for reading, library usage by students for research, library usage by students for studying, (teachers' library) usage with student contact, (teachers' library) usage with no student contact, diversity of hardcopy collection (in terms of quantity and quality), diversity of e-collection, diversity of mother tongue collection, courses at-

¹ Lenhard, W. & Lenhard, A. (2016). Calculation of effect sizes. https://www.psychometrica.de/effect_size.html. (

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tended for professional development, certified professional status, and benefits of professional librarian. These variables were analysed with the Mann-Whitney Test with participants' role in the school (i.e., school leader versus teacher) as the independent variable to answer research questions 1-3 and "professional librarian" as the independent variable to answer research question 4.

For the open-ended questions, open coding was used to analyse the responses. The percentage calculated is based on the number of respondents who answered that particular question. For example, 656 respondents answered the question regarding their main purpose when visiting the library, and 122 responses fell under the theme of searching for resources, which led to the percentage of 18.6%.

Findings

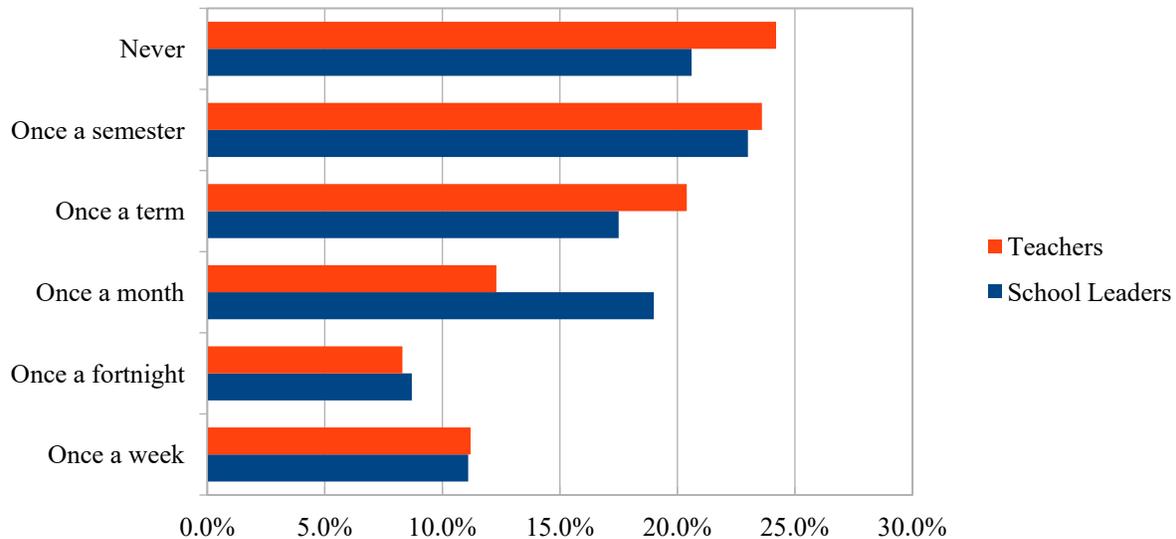
School Leaders and Teachers' Actual and Perceived Usage of Teachers' Use of the Library (RQ1)

School leaders and teachers' actual usage of the library is generally irregular, with only 19.8% of school leaders and 19.5% of teachers visiting the library weekly or at least once a fortnight. Meanwhile, 20.6% of school leaders and 24.2% of teachers have never visited the school library (see Figure 2). This suggests that the opinions of the school leaders and teachers may be outdated or based on occasional impressionistic visits. The lack of regular usage may also explain why school leaders and teachers stated they were unsure about some aspects of their school library.

The Mann-Whitney Test did not show a significant difference between school leaders and teachers when it came to the actual usage of the school library ($U = 37692.5$, $p = .283$, $d = .08$).

Figure 2

School leaders and teachers' school library visits in the last 12 months (%)



When asked to provide information on the main purpose of their visit to the library in an open-ended question, 656 respondents answered. A majority of respondents (18.6%) indicated that they use the library to search for resources, for example, to read up on materials related to their subject area, to search for suitable materials for students with low reading ability, or just to search for interesting materials that they can recommend to students. Other main purposes include consultations with students (11.6%) or meetings with other teacher or visitors (10.4%).

School leaders and teachers were asked about their perceptions of the school library. A detailed overview of school leaders and teachers' responses can be found in Table 3.

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Table 3. School leaders and teachers' perspectives on the use of library space by teachers.

Statement	School Leaders					Teachers				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reading	1.6%	15.1%	24.6%	42.9%	15.9%	2.5%	15.3%	35.2%	35.1%	11.9%
Curriculum Development	0.8%	36.5%	20.6%	30.2%	11.9%	5.3%	28.0%	34.9%	24.8%	6.9%
Remedial	11.1%	38.1%	15.1%	25.4%	10.3%	8.2%	36.6%	31.3%	19.2%	4.7%
Consultation	15.9%	47.6%	15.1%	13.5%	7.9%	12.9%	45.9%	21.7%	14.6%	4.9%
Classes	11.9%	37.3%	19.8%	27.0%	4.0%	8.6%	35.2%	30.3%	20.0%	5.8%

Dimension reduction using PCA for the above five questions led to the extraction of two factors; the questions on "remedial", "consultation" and "classes" clustered on the variable usage with student contact, and "reading" and "curriculum" clustered on the variable usage with no student contact. The Mann-Whitney Test was used to analyse these two variables to gather school personnel's perception of library usage by teachers. There were no significant differences between school leaders and teachers in terms of their perception of school library usage by teachers for usage with student contact ($U = 39343.5, p = .748, d = .02$) and usage with no student contact ($U = 36599.5, p = .124, d = .11$).

Overall, the majority of the school leaders and teachers perceived the library as a space for consultation, classes and remedial more than as a place for reading and curriculum development. It seemed that the school library was seen as a space for students and interactions with students rather than a space for teachers' personal and curriculum development.

School Leaders and Teachers' Perceived Student Usage of the School Library (RQ2)

Overall, the data showed that school leaders and teachers agreed that students used the library for borrowing, studying, and collaboration. Fewer teachers compared to school leaders were certain that their students used the library for reading. Given the research literature's documentation of

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the importance of the library in supporting these usages, it was surprising that a large percentage of teachers and school leaders (22.2% to 39.5%) were unsure about their students' use of the library for reading, borrowing, research, and collaboration. A detailed overview of school leaders and teachers' responses can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. School leaders and teachers' perspectives on the use of library space by students.

Statement	School Leaders					Teachers				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reading	0.8%	44.4%	22.2%	30.2%	2.4%	4.4%	32.2%	34.1%	24.5%	4.7%
Borrowing	1.6%	39.7%	31.0%	23.8%	4.0%	4.1%	36.3%	37.4%	18.6%	3.6%
Studying	31.7%	58.7%	3.2%	5.6%	0.8%	23.4%	58.2%	12.9%	5.0%	0.5%
Research	4.0%	31.7%	34.9%	24.6%	4.8%	7.2%	25.9%	39.5%	21.2%	6.1%
Collaboration	8.7%	46.8%	27.8%	13.5%	3.2%	6.9%	40.6%	33.5%	15.9%	3.1%

Dimension reduction using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted on the above five items with varimax rotation, with the aim of extracting three variables. The factors "borrowing" and "reading" loaded onto a single component representing "reading"; likewise, "research" and "collaboration" loaded onto a single component representing "research". "Studying" was a component on its own. The Mann-Whitney Test did not find a significant difference between school leaders and teachers' perceptions of students' usage of the library for reading ($U = 38884, p = .6, d = .04$) or research ($U = 38934, p = .615, d = .04$). However, there was significant difference between school leaders and teachers when it comes to their perception of students' usage of the library for studying ($U = 34178, p = .009, d = .19$). This difference can be attributed to the greater percentage of school leaders who were more certain that students used the library to study compared to teachers.

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School Leaders and Teachers' Perception of the Conduciveness of the Library Space (RQ3)

When asked specifically about the school library as study space, school leaders and teachers affirmed that the school library was conducive to studying (SLs: 95.2%, Teachers: 86%), with materials for self-studying (SLs: 71.4%, Teachers: 53.3%), sufficient tables and chairs (SLs: 75.4%, Teachers: 61%), and consultation help provided by teachers (SLs: 66.7%, Teachers: 58.8%). SLs were more confident than teachers but overall, there was a strong sense that Singapore secondary school libraries supported the use of the library for studying activities. A detailed overview of school leaders and teachers' responses can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. School leaders and teachers' perspectives on the use of library space as study space.

Statement	School Leaders					Teachers				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Conducive to Study	23.8%	71.4%	2.4%	1.6%	0.8%	18.9%	67.1%	6.3%	6.8%	0.9%
Materials for Self-Study	12.7%	58.7%	16.7%	11.1%	0.8%	9.6%	43.7%	33.0%	12.4%	1.3%
Tables and Chairs	17.5%	57.9%	5.6%	18.3%	0.8%	10.7%	50.3%	10.1%	25.2%	3.8%
Consultations	11.1%	55.6%	13.5%	17.5%	2.4%	10.2%	48.6%	20.8%	16.7%	3.8%

When asked more specifically about the use of the library as research space, school leaders and teachers were more confident than not that students had access to computers (SLs: 79.4%, Teachers: 64%) and WIFI (SLs: 88.1%, Teachers: 76.3%). However, more SLs (48.4%) and teachers (57.2%) were likely to be unsure about whether the students were provided with information literacy skills. This is likely because information literacy has not traditionally been part of the Singapore curriculum or included in library curriculum. A detailed overview of school leaders and teachers' responses can be found in Table 7.

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Table 7. School leaders and teachers' perspectives on the use of library space as research space.

Statement	School Leaders					Teachers				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Access to Computers	17.5%	61.9%	8.7%	11.1%	0.8%	10.4%	53.6%	20.4%	14.3%	1.3%
Access to WIFI	24.6%	63.5%	7.9%	2.4%	1.6%	15.9%	60.4%	18.7%	4.2%	0.8%
Provides Information Literacy	1.6%	34.1%	48.4%	12.7%	3.2%	3.3%	28.0%	57.2%	10.8%	0.6%

When asked about whether the library provided enough computers, SLs and teachers affirmed that the libraries needed more computers.

A total of 531 respondents replied to the open-ended question asking which aspect of their school library needs improvement. The majority of responses were comments regarding: the need to improve the school library's layout or space (20.7%), the need for more and better books (20.9%), and the need for the library to be bigger (20.3%). Comments on improving the school library's layout or space generally focused on the need to allocate some space for quiet reading and discussions, while comments on the need for the library to be bigger typically involve complaints about the small size of the library.

School Leaders and Teachers' Perception of the Quality of the School Library Collection (RQ3)

When it came to their school library's collection, both school leaders and teachers agreed that the library had a wide collection of fiction (SLs: 67.4%, Teachers: 53.2%) and non-fiction (SLs: 61.1%, Teachers: 45.8%). However, it was troubling that a large proportion of the school leaders

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and teachers were unsure about the currency of their fiction (SLs: 45.2%, Teachers: 53.3%) and non-fiction collection (SLs: 48.4%, Teachers: 57.4%), as the attractiveness of school libraries to adolescent readers is very often dependent on the quality of the collection. A high percentage of school leaders and teachers were also uncertain about the attractiveness of the collection (SLs: 42.9%, Teachers: 48.4%) and the quality of the collection by subject area (SLs: 32.5%, Teachers: 43.6%), suggesting that the school library collection may not support student subject-specific learning.

However, despite the uncertainty, school leaders were more likely than teachers to demonstrate confidence that their library had a current collection of fiction (46.8%) and non-fiction (42%), as well as an attractive collection of books (50%) and books relevant to their subject area (48.4%). A detailed overview of school leaders and teachers' responses can be found in Table 8. It might be that school leaders tend to be optimistic or they had less opportunity to consider how the books might be used by the students, since they do not spend classroom time with students on a regular basis.

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Table 8. School leaders and teachers' perspectives on their school library's collection.

Statement	School Leaders					Teachers				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fiction	11.1%	56.3%	27.8%	4.8%	0.0%	8.2%	45.0%	39.8%	6.3%	0.8%
Non-Fiction	11.1%	50.0%	33.3%	5.6%	0.0%	6.8%	39.0%	45.1%	7.9%	1.3%
Current Fiction	8.7%	38.1%	45.2%	7.1%	0.8%	6.9%	29.2%	53.3%	8.8%	1.7%
Current Non-Fiction	7.1%	34.9%	48.4%	9.5%	0.0%	4.1%	26.6%	57.4%	10.5%	1.4%
Chinese Books	1.6%	27.8%	63.5%	7.1%	0.0%	2.0%	18.4%	68.7%	8.8%	2.0%
Malay Books	1.6%	19.8%	71.4%	7.1%	0.0%	1.6%	14.6%	74.5%	7.9%	1.4%
Tamil Books	1.6%	13.5%	71.4%	13.5%	0.0%	1.6%	10.1%	77.5%	7.9%	3.0%
Good Collection (Attractive)	4.8%	45.2%	42.9%	7.1%	0.0%	5.8%	33.2%	48.4%	11.0%	1.6%
Good Collection (Subject Area)	6.3%	42.1%	32.5%	18.3%	0.8%	5.2%	31.6%	43.6%	17.3%	2.4%
Good Collection (Magazines)	6.3%	36.5%	45.2%	11.9%	0.0%	5.8%	26.6%	57.2%	9.4%	0.9%
Good Selection (E-readers)	0.8%	12.7%	57.9%	24.6%	4.0%	2.5%	8.5%	70.1%	13.8%	5.0%
Good Selection (E-dictionaries)	0.0%	11.9%	57.1%	26.2%	4.8%	2.0%	7.7%	71.2%	14.0%	5.0%
Good Selection (E-journals)	0.0%	13.5%	54.8%	27.8%	4.0%	3.9%	9.3%	67.6%	13.5%	5.7%

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Both school leaders and teachers were generally unsure when it came to the library's collection of Chinese books (SLs: 63.5%, Teachers: 68.7%), Malay books (SLs: 71.4%, Teachers: 74.5%), Tamil books (SLs: 71.4%, Teachers: 77.5%), magazine collection (SLs: 45.2%, Teachers: 57.2%), and electronic materials such as e-dictionaries (SLs: 57.1%, Teachers: 71.2%), e-readers (SLs: 57.9%, Teachers: 70.1%), and e-journals (SLs: 54.8%, Teachers: 67.6%).

The PCA resulted in the above 13 items clustering on three components: "quantity and quality of collections", "e-collections" and "mother tongue collection". This was followed up with the Mann-Whitney Test which showed that there was a highly significant difference between school leaders and teachers' perceptions about the quantity and quality of the library collection ($U = 32107, p < .001, d = .26$). A likely explanation is that school leaders generally expressed their agreement that their library had a wide collection of fiction and non-fiction, while teachers were more unsure.

Similarly, there was a significant difference between school leaders and teachers' perceptions of the electronic collections ($U = 35607, p = .047, d = .14$); a greater percentage of teachers were not sure of the quality of the selection of electronic collections compared to school leaders, and felt that the library was lacking in this area. However, as mentioned earlier, both school leaders and teachers were equally unsure of the library's mother tongue collection ($U = 38740, p = .555, d = .04$).

A total of 340 respondents replied when asked in an open-ended question how to improve the library's collection. An overwhelming number of them (50.9%) mentioned the need to update the collection based on trends and/or student interests. For instance, a respondent commented that there is a need to "update the collection of non-fiction materials. Some are very old and look unappealing. Perhaps consider getting books that the students would be more interested in--for

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example, the latest books on the history of football clubs, on K-Pop, etc". Respondents also suggested working with students and teachers to determine popular books that can be bought for the library. Other comments on improving the library's collection focused on the need for more books in general (9.4%), or the need for audio or digital books (8.8%). A respondent also suggested tapping into resources from the National Library, proposing that schools should "encourage all students to get a digital NLB [National Library Board] account - students will instantly have access to all the books in NLB and other libraries the NLB has links to".

Overall, the findings suggest that school leaders and teachers are not confident in the quality of their collection. Notably, when asked in the survey about whether their library needed more books, 62% of SLs and teachers strongly agreed or agreed that their library needed more books. Given the importance of the collection in drawing students to the library, this suggests that school libraries might require more help in improving their collection and in their collection development policies.

School Leaders and Teachers' Perception of their Library Coordinators' Role (RQ4)

When asked whether the library coordinator (LC) or librarian had a strong direction for the school, more than 50% were uncertain or disagreed/strongly disagreed that their LC had a strong direction for the school. Given the literature on the important role of the librarian in driving the reading and learning curriculum, this suggests that LCs in Singapore are unrecognized and/or not given the time and space to work on the curriculum.

When asked to briefly describe the role of an LC and/or Media Resource Library (MRC), a total of 85 respondents from PL schools and 409 respondents from no-PL schools replied. Respondents from PL schools describe LCs as being responsible for managing and updating books

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for the library (27.1%) or being involved in library administration tasks such as the day-to-day activities (22.4%). There were 25.9% of respondents who were unsure about the role of an LC and/or MRC. In terms of no-PL schools, the top three responses were the same as well, although the distribution is different. Specifically, 36.7% of respondents were not aware of the role of an LC and/or MRC, with some respondents even being unsure if an LC exists at their school. Meanwhile, 22.7% of respondents from no-PL schools believe that LCs/MRCs are in charge of library administration, and 21.8% believe that LCs/MRCs deal with the management and updating of books.

When asked if they had any comments on the support for libraries and library coordinators at their school, 42 respondents from PL schools replied while 142 respondents from no-PL schools replied. The majority of respondents (57.1%) from PL schools had positive comments about their school libraries and LCs, writing comments such as “wonderfully helpful and effective” and “always helpful in finding the resources that teachers need”. There were some respondents who felt that both LCs and teachers need to work more together (14.3%), and that LCs need to be better at providing support (7.1%). For instance, one teacher expressed that working with librarians can improve teaching:

“Teachers should recognise that the library can provide students with information that is helpful for learning. If teachers can work with librarian to design their lesson to use library resources to help them in teaching and learning in an engaging way.”

While this comment is fairly positive, there were others who felt a little differently, commenting that LCs should “work with the departments, and stop making all the decisions on their own. Really - who decides what fiction books to purchase? Are the librarians simply making decisions based on what their suppliers / publishers tell them?”

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For PL schools, 23.9% of respondents provided positive feedback, while 13.4% of comments were regarding the need for more support and involvement from the school (13.4%). Examples of such comments include: “Whole school approach to support the work of the coordinator of the library” and “they can be more supported by all teachers in inculcating the love for reading in our students”. The lack of awareness or visibility of the LC (12.7%) was a prominent theme as well, with one respondent commenting “do we even have these people?” Also, 12.7% of respondents indicated the need for the library to work more to attract students. Suggestions to attract students include ideas such as “organizing quizzes and to enthuse the boys” and “library assistant to be introduced to the students so as to facilitate rapport building”. Lastly, 12.7% of respondents highlighted the need for teachers and LCs to work together, suggesting that “teachers can advised [sic] the different books/current books that are needed to support teaching and learning” and that “[LC can] give more insights to staff on how they can use the library more effectively”.

Discussion

Actual and Perceived School Library Use by School Leaders and Teachers

The findings show that school leaders and teachers in Singapore secondary schools do not utilize the school library regularly and perceive teachers to use the library more for student-interaction activities such as consultation, classes and remedial than for reading and curriculum development. The findings also suggest that the teachers see the library as a space for students rather than teachers, suggesting that the libraries' functions and collections may not be catered to teachers. Concerning teachers' perception that the library was not a place for curriculum development, it may be that Singapore secondary schools have the practice of housing curriculum materials within staff rooms for teachers' easy access.

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Moreover, Singapore school libraries lack qualified librarians and are typically manned by library assistants (trained clerical staff) who are neither trained in the subject-matter nor library science (Mokhtar & Majid, 2004). Given their limited training, the library assistants were unlikely to be able to support the teachers' curriculum planning. Moreover, when it came to book purchasing, most schools would rely on their teachers to make the book recommendations. As such, teachers do not see library staff as contributing to curriculum development.

The findings also suggest that the reading materials in the school library may not appeal to teachers and they are unlikely to use the library to support their own reading. In one study of preservice and in-service teachers in Singapore, it was found that a large number of teachers did not do much recreational reading and non-English teachers did not see instilling reading as a core part of their job (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018). This attitude may explain teachers' lack of interest in promoting reading, even when schools implement Sustained Silent Reading programmes to encourage reading (Loh, 2015; Wolf & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). School leaders and teachers should be role models for reading (Cremin et al., 2014). However, given their busy schedules, it may be difficult for them to obtain good books or recommendations. Singapore teachers have been found to work longer hours than the OECD average (Abu Baker, 2019), clocking in 46 hours per week in 2018. The school library could support teachers' reading, whether for pleasure or for disciplinary learning, by ensuring that the library collection is relevant to teachers.

Perceived School Library Use by Students

Our findings also showed that school leaders and teachers perceived that the students used the library for studying but were less certain about the students' use of the library for reading, borrowing, research, and collaboration. While 90.4% of the school leaders and teachers strongly

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agreed or agreed that students used the library for studying, only 45.2% and 41.3% respectively strongly agreed or agreed that students used the library to read or borrow books. In fact, 22.2% and 39.7% of school leaders and teachers were uncertain about whether students used the library for reading and borrowing respectively, and 32.6% and 27.8% strongly disagreed or disagreed. Considering that the library should support students' reading (Adkins & Brendler, 2015), this finding indicates that the collection in Singapore secondary school libraries may not be attractive or relevant to students for reading. The survey findings are corroborated by earlier survey findings from a 2017 survey with 6,005 students from six Singapore secondary schools. When asked about how their school library could be improved, students' top requests were for better book collections and books that were more relevant and interesting to them (Loh, 2017).

The findings further show that a large percentage of the school leaders and teachers are uncertain or do not perceive the library to be a space for research (64.3%) or collaboration (44.5%). Given the emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving as necessary 21st century skills (Kuhlthau, 2010), school libraries could better support students' research skills through development of information literacy curriculum (Morris, 2005), introducing research tools (DelGuidice, 2015), and working with teachers to encourage dispositions of openness, collaboration, intrinsic motivation, problem-posing, and perseverance necessary to promote the spirit of inquiry (Jones et al., 2015).

Library Environment and Collection

The conduciveness of a library space (Sullivan, 2015) and the quality of the school library collection (Merga, 2019b; Small et al., 2009) are vital to supporting students' learning.

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Most school leaders and teachers affirmed that the library was conducive to studying, which explains the perception that students actually used the library space for studying. However, while school leaders and teachers were certain that students had access to materials for self-study, tables and chairs, consultations, access to computers and WIFI, they were less certain about the provision of information literacy skills. Although they felt that students had access to computers, they also noted that more computers were needed. Given the current pandemic situation where Singapore has expedited the provision of a personal learning device to every student by the second half of 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2020), further research is required to understand how best to integrate information literacy learning into the ecosystem of school.

In terms of book collection, school leaders and teachers perceived their school library to have a relatively wide collection of fiction and to a lesser extent, non-fiction. However, they were less certain about the currency and relevance of their fiction and non-fiction collection, as well as their subject-related, mother tongue, and magazine collections. At the point of the study, e-readers, e-dictionaries and e-journals did not feature strongly in school collections, with less than 15% of school leaders and teachers reporting their perceived availability. Significantly, teachers noted in the open-response section that book collections needed to be updated and relevant to the interests of current students. Schools thus need to improve on their book collection strategies to appeal to adolescent readers.

Another notable finding is that school leaders were often more certain about library conduciveness for research and the quality library collection. Teachers (who are likely to use the library more than school leaders) expressed more uncertainty about the quality and sufficiency of the library collection. These findings about the school leaders and teachers' perception of their library environment and collection explain their perceived dominant library use of their school

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libraries as study spaces rather than reading or research spaces. Since the school library collection did not support their reading for pleasure or learning needs, they under-utilized the library for reading and borrowing, preferring to use the space as a study space. Research has shown that students in schools with librarians or library coordinators that actively support reading for pleasure are more likely to report that they enjoy reading (Cremin & Swann, 2017; Loh et al., 2017; McKridy, 2021).

Perception of Library Coordinators'/ Librarians' Roles

Finally, the findings show a lack of knowledge about the role of library coordinators and librarians, with 27.9% of the school administrators unsure about the role of a librarian or library coordinator. It was worrying that 27.9% of the senior leadership in PL schools and 36.7% in no-PL schools were not aware that such a role existed in their schools. Leadership mainly associated the librarian or library coordinator with being involved in library administration or the managing and updating of books. It was hardly surprising that more than 50% were uncertain or disagreed/strongly disagreed that their librarians or library coordinators had a strong direction for the school library.

Although library coordinators were appointed for all schools, they lack time and support for school library matters, given that their main roles as subject teachers take up most of their time (Loh et al., 2019). Moreover, there is lack of collaboration and coordination between other teachers, the library coordinator and library staff (Mokhtar & Majid, 2004), which prevents the school library from scaling up impact and innovating to support students reading and learning needs. Qualified librarians, currently lacking in most Singapore schools, can help with curating a

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relevant collection and helping students to find books they are interested in reading (Merga & Mason, 2019; Merga & Mat Roni, 2017).

Conclusion

Librarians are literacy educators who can support schools' efforts in literacy building, providing expertise and resources to support students' engaged reading (Loh et al., 2017, Cremin & Swann, 2017), information literacy development (Kulthau, 2010), and foster student well-being (Harper, 2019; Merga, 2019b). However, their role as literacy educators and curriculum makers are often under-valued (Hochman, 2016; Merga, 2019a). This study has shown that principals and teachers may not know enough about the role of librarians or their school library, thus under-utilizing the potential of the school library for promoting future-ready literacy learning. Greater awareness of the work of qualified librarians and increased collaboration can empower librarians to do more for literacy learning within and beyond the school library (Merga et al., 2021). The study highlights the need for more evidence-based research (Todd, 2015) and increased communication between librarians and stakeholders to ensure direction and synergy towards school library improvement.

At the national level, this study provides a more in-depth understanding of the school library landscape within Singapore, particularly with regard to understanding the manpower needs of schools at a national and individual level. Moving on, the Singapore Ministry of Education and National Library Board, together with researchers from the National Institute of Education, are actively working on improving school libraries as future-ready learning environments for en-

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gaged reading and independent learning. The findings from this study affirm that renewing library space must be accompanied by a review of manpower issues to thoroughly understand how to build and sustain effective school libraries for the future learning of students.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is that it involved only 13 schools or just under 9% of secondary schools in Singapore, and only two of the schools hired qualified librarians. It is a significant limitation that only two of the 13 schools in the study were PL schools, and that a balance of PL and no-PL schools could not be achieved in the sample, due to the aforementioned issues around typical qualifications of library staff in Singapore. The present study has limited generalizability, though it highlights a need for further research in this area conducted in samples beyond the United States and Australia, which are more highly researched in this field. In this vein, we reflect the call of Ritchie (2009) who laments the comparatively limited library research conducted in the United Kingdom by also calling for greater research attention on school libraries in Singapore.

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