

## From School Libraries to Media Resource Libraries in Secondary Schools in Singapore, 1946-2010: Critical Issues of Training and Manpower Planning for Teacher Librarians

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### ABSTRACT

Singapore was under British and Japanese rule from 1819 to 1945. In 1946 the British provided free primary schooling in the Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil streams and there were only secondary schools in the English and Chinese streams. The first professional library association was formed in 1955 and the first short course on librarianship was conducted for 55 teachers in the primary and secondary schools. Subsequently, only two short courses were conducted in 1959 and 1961. After attaining self government in 1959, Malay and Tamil secondary schools were established for the first time. In 1964 the Commission of Inquiry into Education recommended that teacher librarians should be given training on school librarianship. Courses were conducted at the Teachers Training College (TTC) from 1968 to 1969. A survey on secondary schools was conducted in 1968/69 and it was discovered that school libraries were run by untrained personnel and were not given sufficient time to do the job. The first "Recommended minimum standards for secondary school libraries" was published in 1972 stating that a trained teacher-librarian should be in charge of the school library. The Institute of Education (formerly TTC) and the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) began to conduct courses on school librarianship from 1973 to 1979. The courses were discontinued after 1979. In 1973 the Ministry of Education (MOE) established a School Library Unit with one officer in charge of 352 primary schools and 93 secondary schools. However, it was only in 1977 that MoE provided funding for schools to convert classrooms into libraries and the purchase of books. In the same year the position of Library Coordinator (LC), a trained teacher, in charge of all teacher librarians in a school, was created. In 1992 Temasek Polytechnic (TP) conducted the part-time Certificate in Library and Information Studies course. Its Diploma in Information Studies courses were organized six years later. In 1993 the Division of Information Studies was set up at Nanyang Technological University to conduct part-time two-year Master of Science courses in information studies, offering a specialization track in managing media resource libraries. In 1997 the MOE launched its "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" vision to teach creative teaching in schools and introducing project work. Since 1999 the MOE outsourced the management of its library automation system and staff to manage media resource libraries (MRLs, formerly called school libraries). In a survey of 112 LCs (out of 159) conducted in 2001, they agree they lack professional training and recognition. The School Library Unit was dissolved in 1999 and in 2005 TP stopped offering courses in information studies. The outsourcing has completed two cycles from 2000 to 2005 and from 2006 to 2010. The third cycle commenced in the third quarter of 2010. The vendor would find difficulty to recruit suitably trained personnel to managed MRLs. This paper attempts to identify the gaps in the supply of qualified staff and provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute the lack of manpower training, including the perceived challenges to initiate manpower planning for MRLs.

**Keywords:** Manpower planning; School librarianship; Library coordinators; School library officers; Media resource libraries

### INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to study the post war school reforms in Singapore and the lack of training and manpower planning to run secondary school libraries which have evolved into Media Resource Libraries (MRLs). It attempts to identify the factors that contributed to the lack of training of para-professional and professional staff in school libraries. It also search for factors that prevented the MOE to formulate and manpower planning for school libraries/MRLs. The research method looks at the history in the provision of training teacher librarians and support staff since 1955 until 2010 and identifies the gaps in the training process. The findings showed that there was a critical shortage in the provision of training for teacher librarians, library officers and library assistants. It poses challenges to stakeholders to develop and deliver specific courses for the MRL staff.

### ***The Founding of Singapore and its Migrant Communities***

Sir Stamford Raffles founded Singapore on behalf of the East India Company (EIC) in 1819 (Chew, 1991, pp. 36-37). In 1826 the three British settlements of Singapore, Penang and Malacca were amalgamated to form the Straits Settlements (Jarman, 1998, p. v). Singapore did not have a native population and the three main races of Chinese, Malay and Indian came into the island at some time or another. By 1891 the Chinese was the major racial group consisting of 67.1 per cent of the population, followed by the Malays with 19.7 per cent and the Indians with 8.8 per cent (Saw, 1969, p. 41).

### ***Schooling during British and Japanese colonial rule***

The Education Department was established in 1872 to expand Malay and English schools (Wong & Gwee, 1980, p. 11). In 1891 the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) was introduced marking the beginning of English secondary schools (Hill, 1892, p. 267). The Education Department decided to start libraries in English and Malay schools in 1899 (Wilkinson, 1900, pp. 136-137). In 1937 there were four English secondary boys' school (Keir, 1938, p. 57). All had school libraries (Watson, 1930, p. 21; Johnston, 1930, pp. 78-79; Brown, 1987, p. 28; Lau & Teo, 2003, p. 58). There were three English secondary girls' schools and Raffles Girls' School was known to have a school library (Corner, 1981, p. 158). There were three Chinese secondary schools in 1937 (Keir, 1938, p. 107) and two had school libraries (Morten, 1936, p. 75; Tan, 1991, p. 80).

After the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, except for the school libraries at Raffles Institution and Raffles Girls' School (Corner, 1981, pp. 158), most school were left vacant with furniture destroyed and books and libraries looted (Frisby 1948, p. 139; Neilson, 1949, pp. 553-554; Zheng & Gwee, 1975, pp. 312-314).

### ***The Post War Ten-Year Education Plan (1947-1956)***

In 1946 the settlement of Singapore was separated from the settlements of Penang and Malacca, to become a separate Colony (McKerron, 1947, p. 11). The Ten-year programme for education was implemented in 1947 to provide universal free primary education in the Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English language streams (Balakrishnan, 1978, p. 1).

### ***First Course on Librarianship for Teacher Librarians***

The period of modern school librarianship began with the formation of the (Malayan Library Group) MLG in 1955, the first library professional group to be established in Singapore and Malaya (Chan, 1980, p. 45). In the same year the MLG organized the first course "in the rudiments librarianship" for 55 teacher librarians" (Lim, 1955, p. 34). Two five-day courses were conducted in 1959 for 59 participants (Chan, 1980, p. 45), and in 1961 for 45 participants (Wang-Chen, 1962, p. 50) respectively. In the same year there were 387 English schools, 242 primary Chinese schools, 46 Malay schools and 15 Tamil schools (Thong, 1962, p. 3).

### ***New Secondary School System in the English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil Streams***

After the first local government took office in 1955, the Ministry of Education was established, replacing the former Education Department (McLellan, 1957, p. 1). In 1959 the People's Action Party (PAP) won the elections enjoying complete self-government (Wilson, 1977, pp. 82-83). In 1960, Malay and Tamil secondary schools were introduced for the first time (Yusoff Ishak, 1960, p. 18). By 1963 a common education system in the four language streams was established (Seah & Seah, 1983, p. 241).

### ***First Survey on Secondary School Libraries***

In 1958 the MLG changed its name to the Library Association of Malaya and Singapore (LAMS) to indicate the association covered the two territories of Malay and Singapore. The LAMS was dissolved on 27 February 1960 and the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) was inaugurated

(Chan, 1980, p. 45). In the same year the LAS conducted the first survey on secondary school libraries in Singapore. Among the 77 respondents out of 120 schools, 50 schools had teacher librarians (Eu and Anuar, 1971, pp. 31-32). The LAS used the survey findings and sent a memorandum to the MOE and to the Commission of into Education on the role of the school library as an integral part of the school (Lim, 1962, p. 100). The memorandum made statements about training for teacher librarians and the school library standards (Lim, 1964, pp. 37-38). In 1964 the Commission recommended the appointment of a School Library Advisor at the MOE, funding for school libraries, training and time given to teachers to manage school libraries (Lim, 1964, p. 97).

### **First School Librarianship Course for Teachers (1968/1969)**

The first Teachers' Training College (TTC) was opened in 1950 (Owen, 1957, p. 90). In 1968 a Fulbright-Hay lecturer in library science, Marion Bernice Wiese, was appointed to conduct teacher librarianship courses at the TTC until 1969 (Wiese, 1969a, p. 1586). Ninety-two secondary school teachers and 12 primary school teachers attended the school librarianship courses (Wang-Chen, 1971, p. 2). Prior to her stint at the TTC, Wiese was involved with the Knapp School Libraries Project in the United States to develop model school libraries (Sullivan, 1968, p. 112). She was also Director of the Bureau of Library Services at Baltimore City Public Schools and was advisor to the MOE in Malaysia from 1964 to 1965 (Wiese, 1969a, 1586). In 1969 she formulated a proposed manpower plan for school libraries as shown in Table 1. Wiese (1969b) wrote the detailed job descriptions for library administrators, lecturers, teacher librarians, school library clerks and school library volunteers. However, this plan was never discussed or implemented probably because there was no department in the MOE in charge of school libraries and there was a serious shortage of teachers estimated between 600 and 1,000 personnel (*Straits Times*, 1970, p. 2).

**Table 1: Wiese's manpower plan for School Libraries, 1970-1985**

First Five-Year Plan, 1970-1975	Proposed		Actual	
	Professional	Clerks	Professional	Clerks
Library officer in the MoE	1		1	
Lecturer in Library Science in Teachers' Training College: Full-time	1		0	
Teacher-librarian positions: Full-time				
Secondary schools (Each serving 2 schools half time)	10		0	
Primary schools: Full-time (Each serving one or two schools as model schools)	1		0	
Library clerk positions: Full-time (To serve schools without teacher-librarians)		25		0
Total	13	25	1	0

  

Second Five-Year Plan, 1975-1980	Proposed		Actual	
	Professional	Clerks	Professional	Clerks
Assistant school library officer for primary schools	1		1	
Secondary schools (Each serving 2 schools half time)	20		0	
Primary schools: Full-time (Each serving one or two schools as model schools)	1		0	
Library clerk positions: Full-time (To serve schools without teacher-librarians)		25		0
Total	22	25	1	0

	Proposed		Actual	
	Professional	Clerks	Professional	Clerks
Third Five-Year Plan, 1980-1985				
Assistant school library officer for secondary school schools: Full-time	1		1	
Secondary schools (Each serving 2 schools half time)	25		0	
Primary schools: Full-time (Each serving one or two schools as model schools)	5		0	
Library clerk positions: Full-time (To serve schools without teacher-librarians)		25		0
Total	31	25	1	0
Fifteen Year Totals	70	75	3	0

Source: Adapted from Wiese, 1969b, p.56.

### **School Library Section, LAS, 1969 – 1980**

On 2 August 1969 the Standing Committee on School Libraries was dissolved and the School Library Section of the LAS was inaugurated (Chan, 1980, p. 49). From the years 1969 to 1978 the School Library Section organised short courses on school librarianship (National Library, 1969, p. 12; Wee, 1978, p. 76; Cheong, 1978, p. 7). The LAS's School Library Section was dissolved in 1980 (Lim, 1980, p. 23), probably due to the lack of interest or leadership or both.

### **Second Survey on Secondary School Libraries**

Douglas Koh (1970, pp. 36-38) conducted a survey on 117 secondary schools in Singapore in 1968/69 and had a response rate of 100 schools or 85 per cent. He discovered that school libraries were put in charge "by untrained personnel" who were "not given sufficient time to do their job". None of the school libraries had a full-time librarian. Teacher-librarians were largely dependent on student assistants to do the routine work of supervision, issue and return of books, shelving and processing of new books. Koh's full findings were presented for discussion at a two-day seminar on school libraries attended by 150 teacher librarians. The seminar recommended that:

1. A School Library Unit to be set up at the MOE.
2. Teacher librarians should be trained at the TTC.
3. Library periods should be included in the school time table.
4. Teacher librarians should be given time to manage school libraries effectively (Shen, 1970, p. 22).

The first *Recommended minimum standards for secondary school libraries* was published in 1972. It specified that a trained teacher-librarian, who has completed a recognised course in school librarianship and has the status of a specialist teacher, should be in charge of the library (Standing Committee for School Libraries, 1972). However, it was not mandatory of schools to implement the standards.

### **From TTC (1950-1973) to Institute of Education (1973-1991)**

In 1973 the TTC began to function as the Institute of Education (IE) (Lun and Chan, 1983, p. 9). In the same year school librarianship courses were offered for pre-service teachers in book classification, library organization and information retrieval (Wong, 1972, pp. 8-9). The half optional credit course was conducted from the years 1973 (Institute of Education, 1973, p. 10) to 1979 (Institute of Education, 1980, p. 21) and it was discontinued thereafter. In 1991 the IE became the National Institute of Education (NIE), an institute of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). However, until March 2011, the NIE has never conduct any courses on school librarianship.

### **MOE's School Library Unit, 1973-1998**

In 1973 the MOE set up a School Library Unit within the curriculum section and was assigned the responsibility of coordinating school libraries (Chan, 1978, p. 5). In 1977 there was only one Library Officer (Publication Division, 1977, p. 132) to co-ordinate 352 primary schools, 93 secondary schools and 24 full schools (schools with primary and secondary classes) in the four language streams. In the same year the MOE created the post of Library Coordinator (LC) (Tan, 1977, p. 34). The LC is a trained teacher "entrusted with the job of developing the library as a resource centre for both teachers' and students' use while performing duties as a full-time teacher. In many cases the Library Coordinators have no prior knowledge on how to run a library". Training was provided by the School Library Unit (Lee, 1992, p. 74).

The MOE introduced the Vice Principals and Head of Department (HOD) system for schools in 1985. The LC had the opportunity to be promoted to a senior position if he/she demonstrated leadership abilities. However, there were teacher-librarians who did not take up the role of the HOD as it meant more school administrative duties. The School Library Unit launched three training programs covering the administration of the school library, young adult literature and library use and study skills (Goh, 1993, p. 6). In 1993 the School Library Unit had six officers looking after 140 secondary and 260 primary schools. One officer did a Masters course in reading in an American university and none had professional library qualifications (Goh, 1993, p. 6). In 1998 there was one Curriculum Specialist and six Curriculum Specialist, Library Programme, in the Unit (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1998, pp. 243-244).

### **Division of Information Studies, Nanyang Technological University**

The Division of Information Studies, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), was established in 1993 (Butterworth, 1993, p. 15). The two-year part-time master's course offered a specialized track in "School Media Resource Management" (Division of Information Studies, 2004, p. 8). In 1992 Temasek Polytechnic (TP) and the National Book Development Council of Singapore (NBDCS) conducted a joint part-time six-month course for the Certificate in Library and Information Studies (Library 2000 Review Committee, 1994, pp. 98-99). The full-time course for the Diploma in Information Studies began in 1996 (Varaprasad, 1997). However, in 2005, TP stopped offering both courses (Temasek Polytechnic, 2006, p. 55).

### **Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN)**

In 1997 the MOE launched its *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* vision to equip students with skills and knowledge for a culture of learning beyond the school environment (MOE, 1998, p.16). The MOE reduced the amount of content students have to learn. Teachers and students were expected to spend more time on projects that develop skills and habits of independent learning (Goh, 1997).

### **From School Libraries to Media Resource Libraries (MRLs)**

The MOE began to upgrade all school libraries into MRLs. The MRL is (1) a resource centre for both print and non-print materials; (2) a learning centre where overt learning and teaching can take place with the traditional overt learning; and; (3) a reading centre where recreational and serious reading are pursued with equal diligence (Chen, 1997, pp. 1-2). Therefore role of the LC or teacher librarian has changed dramatically. The teacher librarian is expected to help students learn to search and evaluate information in print and electronic resources. Students are taught to be independent users of information (Khew, 1997, p. 6).

### **Media and Infrastructure Support Branch, MOE: Outsourcing of MRLs**

In 1999 the School Library Unit was dissolved. The Educational Technology Division (ETD) of the MOE was established in 1999 to provide direction on the use of educational technology in schools (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1999, p. 251). The Media and Infrastructure Support Branch was set up as part of the ETD to "set direction for school resource media library programme and activities" (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000, p. 258).

In 1998 the MOE awarded CARL and the National Computer Systems Pte Ltd to install a single library automated system (Hayworth, 2000, p. 43) that was intended to link all primary, secondary schools and junior colleges (Editor, 2000, p. 4). The MOE Integrated Library Network System (MERLIN) would enable teachers and students to search learning and reference sources beyond the collection in their MRL (Teo, 1999, p. 3). The second cycle of the outsourcing for the years 2006 to 2010 was given to a different vendor. The same vendor successfully won third cycle tender for 2010 to 2014 to managed the school library automation system and provide full-time library assistants and full-time library officers for the primary and secondary schools. However, there is insufficient supply of personnel with the Diploma in Information Studies or Certificate in Information Studies since TP has stopped offering such courses since 2005.

### ***A Survey on Competencies of Library Co-ordinators in Secondary Schools***

In 2001 they were 112 Government secondary schools, 24 Government-aided schools, 15 autonomous schools and 8 independent schools, all using English as a medium of instruction. In the same year Tsai (2001, pp. 41-44) did a survey on 112 (or 70 per cent) of 159 Library Co-ordinators in these schools. Ninety-six per cent or four were females, 82 per cent had degrees or post-graduate degrees and 18 per cent had diplomas or certificates. Several of the respondents had library related qualifications listed below:

- a. M. A. (Educational Technology)
- b. MSc (Information Studies) conducted by NTU
- c. Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies (University of Melbourne)
- d. Information and Library Skills Course for HODs (IT cum MRL) (MOE)
- e. MERLIN Workshops (MOE)
- f. Induction Course for LCs of New Schools (MOE)
- g. Library Management Sessions (MOE)
- h. Running a Small Library (NLB)

Twenty per cent or 23 respondents had ten or more years of experience in library work and almost half (49 per cent) three or less years of library experience. The study on the characteristics of exemplary library media specialists in the United States revealed that their average age was 47.7 years old, with 14 years experience as a practicing professional librarian (Christensen, 1991). The findings suggests that the LCs lack relevant skills and knowledge to manage a MRL effectively since the MOE no longer conduct the short courses listed above. No official guidelines or a comprehensive set of descriptive attributes that a LC needed to have were available in the Singapore context (Tsai, 2001, p. 66). (Tsai, 2001, p. 84) mentioned that the future of the MRL programme depended “upon more active promotion and marketing of professional development of these LCs”.

In fact many school teachers, HODs and Assistant Principals currently at the schools have completed their MSc in Information Studies since 1993 but did not want to be appointed as LCs because it is not a full-time position. Some may switched to be LCs, a HOD position, if the MOE decides to appoint full-time LCs. Up to 2004 there were about 23 MSc theses relating to schools libraries and most were likely to be written by school teachers.

### ***Training Needs of Library Support Staff***

In her focus group study of seven School Library Officers (SLOs) in 1999, Gee (1999, p. 56) discovered that “SLOs cannot perform the day-to-day operations without help from library professionals, and cannot provide intellectual support to the users because of their lack of training in educational theory and practice”. The appointment of a full-time trained teacher librarian is a long term solution.

## CONCLUSION

Although the first policies to start school libraries in the Malay and English schools began in 1899, it was the MLG that introduced a three-day course on rudiments of librarianship to school teachers for the first time in 1955. Two more short courses were conducted by LAMS and LAS in 1959 and 1961 respectively. But these were insufficient to train teacher librarians in all the schools in Singapore.

In 1964 the *Commission of inquiry into education, Singapore: final report* (Lim, 1964) was the first official document that recommended the MOE appointed a School Library Advisor and training for teacher librarians. From the years 1968 to 1969 Wiese was the first qualified person to teach school librarianship at the TTC. However, her manpower plans (1970 – 1985, Table 2) for school libraries, published in 1969, was not considered probably due to the shortage of teachers. Furthermore, the MOE's School Library Unit was set up only in 1973.

The first recommended minimum standards for secondary school libraries, published in 1972, specified that a trained teacher librarian should be in charge of the school library. But it was not mandatory for schools to implement. The IE conducted school librarianship courses for trainee school teachers from 1973 to 1979. These courses were discontinued probably because it was not mandatory to appoint trained teacher librarians in schools.

The School Library Unit began to run short courses on the administration of school libraries, young adult literature and user education since 1985. However, the Unit was dissolved in 1999. The TP conducted Certificate and Diploma courses in Information Studies from 1992 and stopped conducting these courses in 2006.

Therefore to be able to manage MRLs and conduct library programs effectively, the MOE should employ full-time LCs who are graduate teachers and have professional library qualification like the MSc in Information Studies offered by NTU. At the same time the NIE could also conduct degree courses in school librarianship. Moreover, in an interview with a Professor from NIE, he mentioned that if MOE instructs the NIE to conduct courses on school librarianship, the NIE will do it.

A detailed manpower plan can be formulated by the MOE through its internal surveys to find out how many LCs, SLOs and Library Assistants are needed. Most importantly the MOE must institutionalise these positions to ensure school librarianship as a recognised profession, including guarantee of proper career development. The organizational structure and set up of the MRL is too important to be left to chance (Foo, 1999, p. 77). According to Goh (1993, p. 10), "the history of school librarianship and libraries in Singapore has shown that the onus for school library development and improvement has been primarily with the Ministry of Education" (Goh, 1993, p.10).

At the same time the MOE should also employ full-time SLOs. The TP could begin offering the Diploma in Information Studies to train the SLOs. Alternatively, the National Library Board (NLB) Academy could organise its Professional Diploma in Library Management and Information Services for Library Officers and the LAS could organise the Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) training programme for the Library Assistants. The outsourcing of SLOs is a temporary and not a long term solution.

This paper provides an opportunity for stakeholders like NTU, NIE, TP, NLB Academy and the LAS to contribute to the training of school library manpower in Singapore. The challenge is to convince the MOE to engage the stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of a manpower plan for MRLs.

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