The School Library Evaluation Model 2014-17: A Tool for Guiding Assessment And Improving

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Abstract:

Evaluation is fundamental to the successful implementation of a library programme. In Portugal, the School Libraries Network Programme has implemented a School Library Evaluation Model that is put into practice in all the groups of schools in the country. The model is now in its second cycle of implementation. Each cycle has a four-year duration and, at the end of the first cycle, a new and revised edition of the Model was published.

After presenting the School Libraries Network Programme, this paper explains the School Library Evaluation Model 2014-2017, its principles, structure and organization, implementation methodology and expected outcomes. It also points out how the evaluation process is focused on improvement, has boosted the quality of school libraries, and created a vision of what is desirable for them in the future.

Keywords: school libraries, evaluation, assessment, improvement, SLNP.

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The School Library Network Program – History and Present

The School Library Network Program (SLNP) was launched in 1996 by the Portuguese Ministries of Education and Culture. Its mission was to create and develop school libraries in public K12 schools, providing their users with the necessary resources for

reading and for the access, use and production of information in all media. It is managed by an Agency and articulates with other central and regional services of the Ministry of Education, with municipalities, public libraries, universities, etc.

There is an intermediate structure that guarantees the support and monitoring of school libraries and the transmission of the orientations from the SLNP Agency. This is the work of a group of regional coordinators who are responsible for a number of school libraries and who provide technical support and training to teacher librarians.

Schools in Portugal are organized in groups or clusters. In each of these groups there may be several school libraries integrated in the SLNP. Depending on the number of school libraries and on the number of students in each group of schools, there may be one, two or three teacher librarians who are in charge of the school libraries management and of the collaboration with the curriculum for the development of literacies. Teacher librarians also provide library services to all the schools that don't have a library.

There are around 2450 school libraries integrated into the SLNP, which means a very good coverage of the territory (Figure 1).
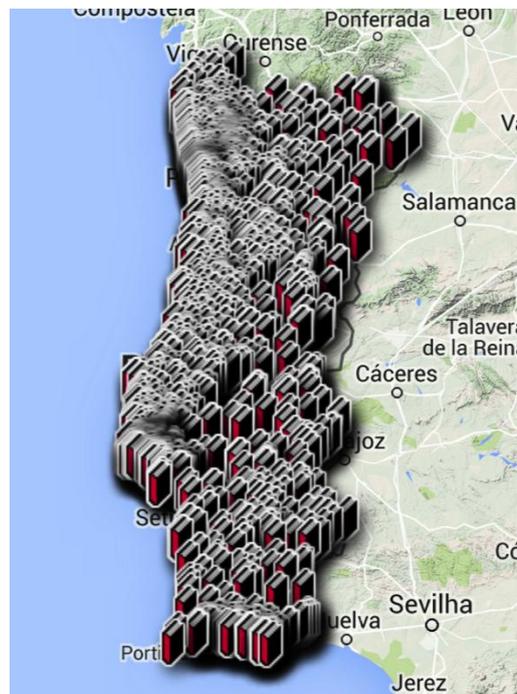

Figure 1: School library distribution in Portugal

Each year schools apply to integrate their libraries into the SLNP. There has been a gradual and sustained integration throughout the 19 years of existence of the programme (Figure 2). Since 2011, there have been considerably fewer integrations, due to two factors: the financial crisis and the fact that the number of schools lacking a school library is already rather low. Nevertheless, the SLNP has invested each year in refurbishing older libraries and in funding good practices in school libraries.
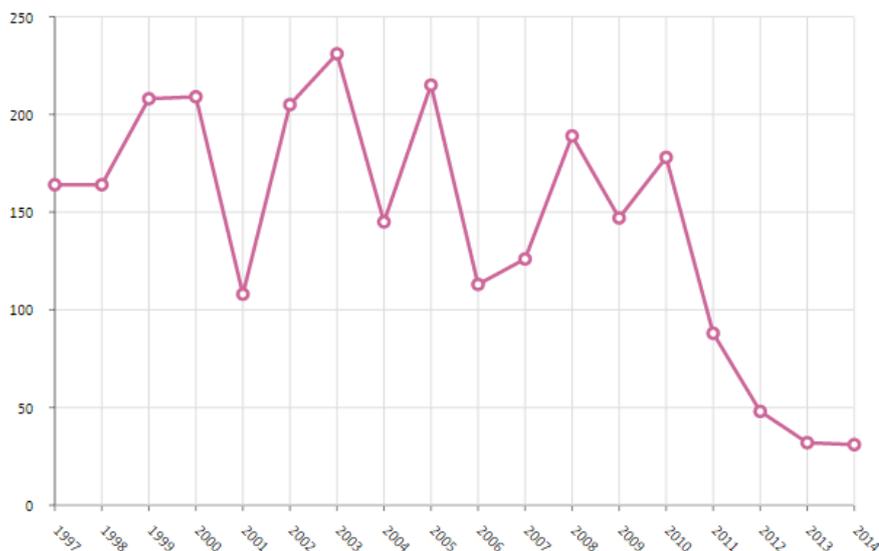
Figure 2: Number of libraries integrated per year

Another central concern of the SLNP has been the professional training of teacher librarians in order that they can correspond to the financial effort that has been made over the years to build this network and to answer the challenges of a rapidly changing context. According to the SLNP school libraries must be spaces of multiple information resources and knowledge building, promoting change in education practices, supporting learning and the curriculum, developing reading, media and information literacy and creating competent readers, critical thinkers and intervenient citizens.

SLNP Strategic Guidelines

The document that marks the foundation of the SLNP, *Launching the school libraries network*, dates back to 1996. It describes the state of the art in Portugal at that time and establishes the guiding principles and conditions for the progressive setting of a national school library network. This document is still relevant in many aspects, but, after the stabilization of the network, there has been the need to evolve and create new guidelines adapted to the new situation and the changes of paradigm we have been experiencing.

The first need that was felt was to assess the quality of the work of school libraries and, in 2008, the SLNP produced a school library evaluation model.

In 2012 another structuring document was produced: *Learning with the school library*. It answered the need of establishing a set of standards in the areas of reading, media and information literacy to guide the work of the school libraries in collaboration with the curriculum. This document is being put into practice, first in a pilot experience and presently in a very large and growing number of libraries.

In 2013 there was the publication of *SLNP Strategic Framework: 2014-2020*. This document defines a set of scenarios and action lines that describe the vision and global policy of the Programme for the future.

In the same year a revised evaluation model was published: the *School Library Evaluation Model: 2014-2017*. This will be the main object of this paper.

The School Library Evaluation Model

The model was first tested in a two-year pilot and after the necessary revisions and adaptations it was generalized. In 2010 and 2011 the SLNP launched training courses on the model for all teacher librarians, involving many regional coordinators as trainers. This had a double effect: it enabled teacher librarians to apply the model and it boosted the quality of the work done by school libraries, since the model constituted a reference and promoted the consciousness about the priorities of action in order to reach the desirable standards.

The school library evaluation takes place over four-year cycles. The first occurred from 2010 to 2013. In this period of time, school libraries have served annually an average of 21 000 teachers, 23 000 parents and 100 000 students and have produced their final reports. Positive or very positive overall results were reported by 75% of the libraries (Figure 3).
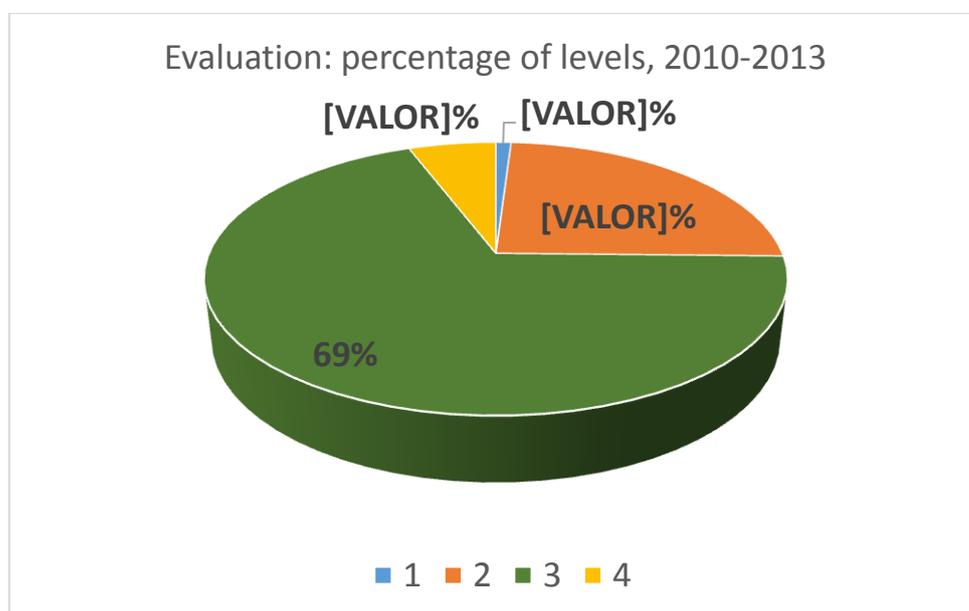

Figure 3: Evaluation: Percentage of levels, 2010-2013

This first version of the model contemplated four areas of the school library work and in each year the evaluation focused on one of those areas. After collecting all the evidence on that area, strengths and weaknesses were identified and there were actions for improvement proposed by the school library and approved by the pedagogical board. Those actions should be put into practice the next year while the evaluation was focusing on another area. This was recognized to be one of the weaknesses of the model, since both processes somehow interfered with each other. Besides, the model was considered to be too complex and effort consuming. So, after gathering all the opinions and suggestions, the SNLP started the revision of the document and published its new edition in order to guide the school library evaluation in the period of 2014-2017.

The School Library Evaluation Model 2014-2017

The update of the evaluation model was based on analysis of information and results collected over the first four years of implementation and also on the opinion and knowledge of evaluation experts from the General Inspection of Education and Science and from scientific studies and guidelines published by institutions responsible for policies in the areas of assessment and school libraries.

This update aims to adapt the contents and methodologies of the evaluation model to the changes that have occurred in the role and work of school libraries, namely: the expansion of the intervention areas of the school library; the growing importance of the teacher librarian's role; and the need to promote students' successful learning through training in the several areas of literacy.

The Strategic Framework produced by the SLNP defines a set of quality standards for school libraries to achieve within the time frame of 2014-2020, determined by the Europe 2020 Strategy, that Portugal and the Ministry of Education and Science subscribed to. The establishment of these standards guides the action of the school libraries. The areas of the Evaluation Model proceed from the standards established in the Strategic Framework and it is expected that, at the end of the evaluation cycle 2014-2017, all the evaluated libraries present an evaluation equal to or higher than 3.

The School Library Evaluation Model contemplates all the different approaches enumerated in the *IFLA School Libraries Guidelines Draft* (2015, Section 6.3): program quality, stakeholder perceptions, program content, program impact and evidence-based practice.

Structure and organization of the Model

The document maintains the structure, organization of information and intentionality that characterized the previous edition. It contemplates four areas:

> A. Curriculum, literacy and learning
> B. Reading literacy
> C. Projects and partnerships
> D. School library management

These areas are partial units of analysis and evaluation. They correspond to core areas of the library work that are associated to critical success factors and all information on the corresponding evaluation processes.

Each area is organized into indicators based on the principles and factors identified as critical to the success and fulfilment of the school libraries' mission such as are set out in international studies and guidelines.

Each indicator is unfolded in several critical success factors that are assumed as quality descriptors and serve as reference, helping to monitor the performance in each indicator and identify strengths and weaknesses.

Related to each indicator, examples of evidence sources are provided as well as the indication of the corresponding online questionnaires. These questionnaires are answered by students, teachers, parents and the school board and contemplate items of all the indicators of the model.

Finally there are general suggestions of improvement actions that libraries can adapt to their own contexts and needs.

As an example we present an extract from one of the areas:
Area: A – Curriculum, literacy and learning

Indicators	Critical success factors	Evidence collection tools	Improvement actions
A.1 Support to the curriculum and training for media and information literacy.	(The school library) • Discusses the integration of curriculum resources and collaboration with the school library with the school board and pedagogical supervisors. • Develops user training activities to promote the value of library and motivate for its use, explaining its organization and how to take advantage of its different services. • Proposes activities, resources and work tools, to facilitate teaching and learning. • Is familiar with the curricula and suggests curriculum integration possibilities through the implementation of *Learning with the school library.* • Promotes joint work with teachers, in order to plan	• Questionnaire for teachers. • Questionnaire for students. • Questionnaire for parents. • Questionnaire for the school board. • Library activities plan. • Statistics of library use. • Observation records of library use. • Students' works. • Records of projects and activities planned by the library or developed in collaboration. • Produced contents and supporting materials. • Data of the implementation of the document *Learning with the school library.* • Diachronic analysis of students'evaluations. • Other.	• Work with the school board, promoting the role and value of the library as a platform for work and access to resources that are a significant contribution to learning. • Participate in educational decision-making centers and in the planning of activities, in order to integrate and explore the possibilities of school library work and intervention. • Introduce a policy in the school for the systematic teaching of media and information skills in curriculum context. • Strengthen the relationship between the library and the classroom work. • Develop the literacies included in the document *Learning with the school library*, disseminating it and training to its

- contextualized learning of media and information literacy in curriculum standards.
- Integrates the research and use of information in school projects either of the initiative of the library or supported by it.
- Participates in the teaching of content and curriculum standards through the implementation of collaborative processes.
- Designs and supports study programs and activities for the preparation of assessment tests and other school assignments.
- Participates in learning disabilities recovery programmes.
- Explores the nature, language and discourse of the different media and the individual and social implications of their use.
- Trains to the management and personal use of information.
- Develops values and attitudes necessary to citizenship and lifelong learning.
- Evaluates processes and learning in collaboration with the teachers.

- integrated and cooperative use.
- Promote collaborative work, participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities.
- Increase the level of media incorporation in information and education services offered by the school library.
- Produce tutorials and other materials to support the research and use of information by students.
- Adopt a uniform research model for the whole school.
- Encourage the training of teachers and library staff in the field of media and information literacy.

Different performance profiles were established based on the indicators and success factors, so that libraries can be ranked at the end of the evaluation process. These profiles summarize and typify the performance of the school libraries through value patterns, allowing them to measure the quality and impact of their work in each area. Obtaining a final global level aims to help the school to identify the scenario the matches with the situation of its library and to realize what is necessary to improve to the next level.

Level	Description
4	The action of the school library results in a very good performance. It has a consistent and very positive impact. The strengths predominate in almost all indicators in evaluation and the results point to an above average level of efficiency.
3	The action of the school library results in a good performance. It has a consistent and positive impact. It presents a majority of strengths in the evaluated indicators and the results point to a good practice, although in need of some improvements.
2	The action of the school library results in a limited performance. It has little impact. It features a minority of strengths in the evaluated indicators and the results point to weaknesses, requiring consistent investment in improving services.
1	The action of the school library results in a performance far from desired. It has little impact. The weaknesses prevail and override the strengths in the evaluated indicators and the results point to a very limited action, requiring immediate intervention and a deep investment in improving.

The model is not only an evaluation tool, since the success factors and performance profiles work as a kind of orientation standards. Thus, this document has an important guidance and formative dimension.

Implementation methodology

In the second cycle of the Evaluation Model (2014-2017), the most significant changes occurred in the implementation methodology. It is still based on a four years cycle. (Figure 4)

1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year
Implementation of the improvement process	School library evaluation	Implementation of the improvement process	School library evaluation
Improvement plan		Improvement plan	
Improvement plan implementation report	Intermediate evaluation report	Improvement plan implementation report	Final evaluation report

Figure 4: Stages of the evaluation cycle

The first year started by the elaboration of improvement plans by the school libraries. These were based on the results of the evaluation made during the first cycle. At the end of the first year there was a report by each library on the degree of implementation of the plan. (Figure 5)
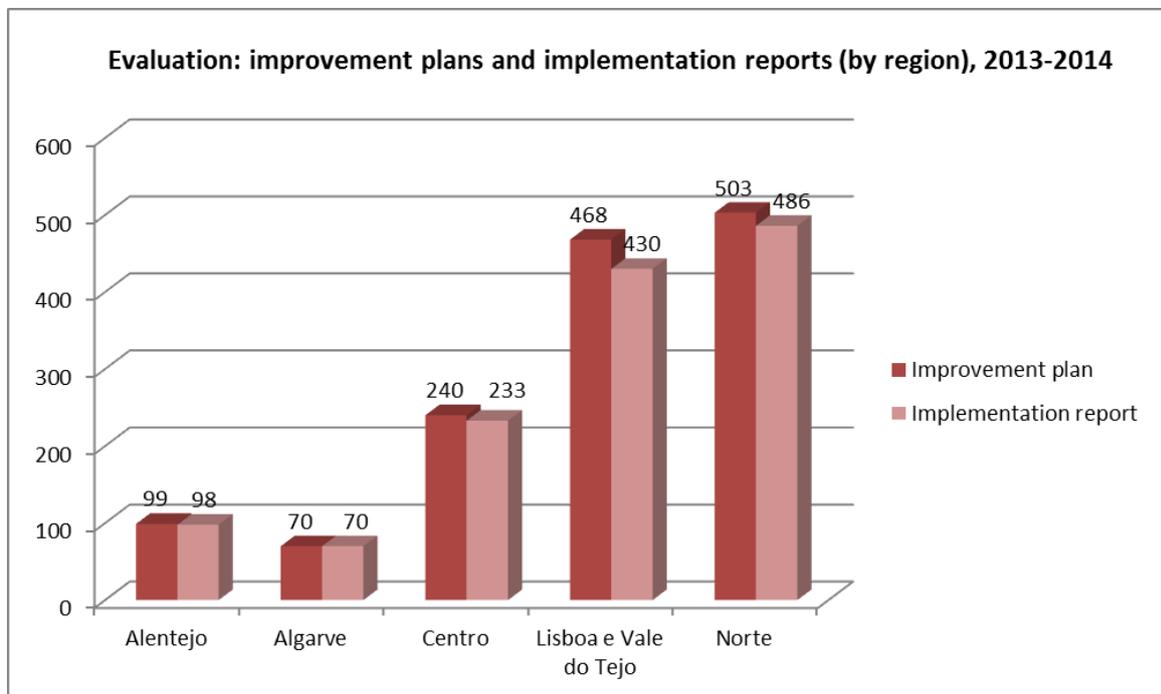

Figure 5: Evaluation: improvement plans and implementation reports (by region)

In the second year libraries continued to carry out their plans with the necessary adaptations, and they implemented the evaluation model questionnaires, contemplating all the four areas of the school library work. From this evaluation they will draw the conclusions that will lead to a new improvement plan.

The Model is a cyclical process, very focused on the improvement measures that can raise the quality of the school library service. So, the third year is similar to the first one.

Finally, in the fourth year, the Evaluation Model questionnaires will be implemented again. The school libraries that, at the end of this process, don't reach the expected level 3 will be closely monitored in order to overcome their weaknesses.

In the second and fourth years the process follows several stages. First of all, following the directions given by the SLNP, each group of schools decides which libraries will be evaluated, considering that each teacher librarian is responsible for the evaluation of one library. Then, there is the planning of the evaluation process. Throughout the year, data and evidence collection will take place, followed by the necessary analysis and interpretation. The school library is then placed in a performance level and finally there is the elaboration of a final report.

All these processes are carried out with the support of a web application elaborated by the SLNP. It allows the online answer to questionnaires and their data processing, the establishment of performance profiles and levels and the writing of the final report.

Conclusions

According to the International Standard ISO 16439 (2014:55),

> The measurement of the library's impact on users' sucess has particular relevance to libraries whose primary function is to address the information needs of learning and research, namely school and academic libraries. However, the approach may be applied in any library where evidence is being sought of the library's impact on learners and learning.

The SLNP aims at high quality school libraries and is conscious the main goal of their action is their impact on students' learning and skills. The Evaluation Model is not able, *per se*, to measure this kind of impact and schools seldom have the means to implement such a study.

Nevertheless the International Standard (2014:44) also contemplates other forms of measuring that the Model is able to do, combining qualitative and quantitative data:

> Qualitative methods add texture and meaning to the quantitative data and help identify library impacts. Together, they offer the potential of powerful tools for analysis and understanding of user interaction with the library.

Through statistical data on the use of the library and its resources, on the collection, on the number of actions successfully implemented, etc. and, on the other hand, through the opinion and satisfaction degree of its different users and the results of the observations made in several contexts of library use, it is possible to assess the library impacts.

As stated in *IFLA School Libraries Gidelines Draft* (IFLA, 2015, Section 6.4),

> Evaluation is a critical aspect of an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement. Evaluation helps to align a library's programs and services with the goals of the school. Evaluation demonstrates to students and teachers, to library staff and to the wider educational community the benefits derived from school library programs and services.

Following this line of thought, it is strongly recommended by the SLNP that the school library evaluation is integrated in the whole school evaluation and that all the stakeholders take part of it and are informed of its outcomes.

From the point of view of the SLNP, the Model allows benchmarking, facilitating the intervention in school libraries that don't meet the quality standards, showcasing the value of the school libraries' work, and promoting a global and updated vision of what is desirable for school libraries in the future.

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