



THE IMPORTANCE AND HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Shahlo Karimova

The Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture

Master's Student:

E-mail: shahlokarimova2398@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This article discusses the significance of school libraries, which play a crucial role in shaping students' knowledge and reading culture. It explores the development of school libraries from ancient times to the present day. School libraries are considered not only as sources that support the educational process, but also as institutions that foster students' independent thinking, information-seeking, and analytical skills.

Keywords: innovative technologies, school libraries, television, library history, source of knowledge, reading culture, educational process

It is widely recognized that in today's rapidly developing world, possessing knowledge and information skills has become one of the key factors of progress. In this regard, it is crucial for the younger generation to be well-educated and enlightened, as their ability to become highly qualified specialists in various fields will determine the success of future achievements.

At present, it is essential to instill educational and scientific competencies in individuals from early childhood, as this is the foundation for shaping intellectual capacity. In this process, reading — the eternal beacon and key to knowledge and enlightenment — plays an indispensable role. In our rapidly advancing era — the 21st century, known as the age of innovative technologies and the information revolution — the importance and necessity of reading books is increasingly being overshadowed by internet platforms on social media and the rise of technological artificial intelligence systems. These stages of technological development are, day by day, diminishing humanity's ability for independent thinking, weakening the desire for creativity, imagination, and thoughtful psychological approaches. As a result, people are gradually distancing themselves from reading books, becoming bored or uninterested, and instead filling their minds with easily accessible, superficial information. This shift contributes to the gradual decline of intellectual abilities, which are typically cultivated and strengthened over the course of years.

As previously mentioned, fostering an interest and desire for reading from early childhood is of great importance in shaping an intellectually capable and thoughtful generation. So, what role do we, as adults, play in this process, and how can we protect young children and adolescents from the distracting influences of today's technological and innovative era while increasing their engagement with reading?

Certainly, there are several answers and solutions to this question. First and foremost, the development of a child's reading habits begins with the reading culture of their parents. However, it is not enough to rely solely on the factors and actions that encourage interest in books within the home and family environment. It is also necessary to strengthen students'



motivation and positive attitudes toward reading in places where they spend the majority of their time — schools and specialized boarding institutions. By the term "reader," we refer to individuals who, much like in the past, acquire most of their knowledge and understanding of the world through written words. Of course, not all information is obtained in this way. Even before the era of radio and television, a significant portion of human knowledge about the world was acquired through listening and observation. However, intelligent and curious individuals have never been satisfied with just that. They have always understood the necessity of reading and have engaged in it.

Today, there exists a growing sentiment that reading is no longer as important as it once was. Just as photography has taken over the role once fulfilled by painting and other visual arts, radio — and especially television — have begun to assume the functions that were previously carried out by printed publications. It must be acknowledged that television has a powerful impact, particularly in delivering news through visual means[1]. However, even in this rapidly advancing technological era, the need to preserve and develop interest and desire for reading books has not diminished. It is essential to strengthen the foundation of the future generation by fostering their interest in reading, nurturing a love for books, and helping them consciously use reading as a vital tool in pursuing their dreams and goals. In this process, one of the most influential institutions — the school — plays a fundamental role, particularly its most essential component: the school library, which serves as a crucial source and center of knowledge. Based on our observations, it is unfortunate to note that the demand and need for using school libraries are gradually declining. The primary reason for this trend is that nearly all students now possess easy-access search tools — namely, mobile phones.

Here, an important question arises: Can the information and knowledge obtained through such devices truly be as beneficial and beloved as that acquired through reading books? Perhaps not. Therefore, in order to enhance the perceived importance of school libraries among students, it is first necessary to introduce them to various literary works and explain the real benefits that reading can offer.

At this point, it is appropriate to provide a broader overview of the origins of school libraries and the purpose of their establishment within educational institutions. Information about the earliest school libraries varies across different sources and is explained based on diverse theories. However, according to specific historical sources, the earliest forms of school libraries date back to the civilizations of Ancient Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia, and Rome. As early as 2000–1000 BCE, students in these regions used libraries that stored clay tablets for educational purposes. In addition, manuscripts written on papyrus and clay tablets were also passed down from generation to generation as important sources of information. Particularly notable is the Library of Alexandria, established in the 3rd century BCE, which significantly contributed to the advancement of science and knowledge. Furthermore, during the Middle Ages, monastic libraries in Western countries collected scientific and religious texts to serve students and scholars.

In the Islamic world, scientific libraries were established at madrasahs during the 9th to 12th centuries. Notable examples include the famous "Bayt al-Hikma" (House of Wisdom) in ancient Baghdad, and the libraries of madrasahs in Samarkand and Bukhara. Bayt al-Hikma, which means "House of Wisdom," was established in the 9th century by Caliph Al-Ma'mun. It functioned not only as a library but also as a center for scientific research for scholars. This institution also served as a valuable space for young readers to gain essential knowledge in

Islamic studies, jurisprudence (fiqh), and other sciences. In addition, many works in Sanskrit, Greek, and Persian were translated into Arabic by prominent scholar-translators at this institution, and some of these translations have survived to the present day. Furthermore, between the 14th and 17th centuries, school libraries in Western countries achieved significant progress. This period coincides with the European Renaissance, and therefore, libraries from this era are often referred to as Renaissance libraries.

During this time, humanity's growing interest in science and the increasing demand for knowledge led to the establishment of libraries in many educational institutions. Initially, such libraries were located within universities and monasteries, but over time, this system gradually expanded into general education schools as well. Library services in schools have developed since the late 1800s, evolving from public and state library book wagons and informal classroom collections to the libraries we know today [2]. One of the significant developments in the formation of school libraries was the exchange of international experiences and the implementation of promising practices in library work, including the advancement of information services.

To support these goals, in 1876, the American Library Association (ALA) was established in the United States to promote global achievements in the field of librarianship. The ALA provides important standards, resources, and opportunities for professional development that directly support the growth of school libraries. These contributions are essential for enhancing the educational process of school students.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize the vital role of school libraries, especially today when students are encouraged to utilize not only school-provided knowledge but also to engage with independent learning resources. Highlighting this necessity, the American librarian and bibliographer Melvil Dewey (1851–1931), one of the founders of modern librarianship, wrote the following:

"At the end of the century, the broader concept of school activity is to teach children to think rightly, strongly, and quickly." "If they have started schooling, where will they get their education from?" [3] From his statements, it is clear that, in addition to the knowledge provided within the school system, and the theory of teacher and student, it is essential for the student to independently engage in research and show interest in new developments to enhance their intellectual thinking and potential. In this process, modern school libraries, equipped with valuable resources, serve as the primary support system, providing all the conditions necessary for any student to independently explore and significantly contribute to enhancing their potential.

The initial theoretical and scientific efforts to assess and improve school libraries, and their further integration into the educational process, trace back to the early stages of the 20th century. Notably, the 1920s marked the first attempt by library and educational communities to evaluate school libraries, resulting in the publication of the first evaluation criterion, "The Known Report" [4]. Later, based on this initial criterion, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) developed an assessment framework. The "Standards for the 21st Century Learner" [5] and other similar documents, developed in 2007, focus on the modern development of school libraries, aiming to enhance students' information literacy, integrate innovative technologies, and meet the individual learning needs of students.

In conclusion, by studying the history and significance of the development of school libraries, it can be said that these institutions, initially regarded as mere places for storing books, have evolved over time into an integral part of school education. They have become essential establishments for independent student learning. Today, school libraries are not only places for storing informational resources but have also become significant educational and methodological centers that contribute to the development of students' critical thinking, information literacy, and creative potential.

Thus, the ongoing improvement of school library activities, the adoption of more convenient and modern technologies, the enhancement of library staff qualifications in line with global standards, and the strengthening of the role of these institutions in the educational process remain crucial and urgent.

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