1. What Is a Library?

What is a library?
A library is a room or building where books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, cassettes, and videos are kept together.

These items are known as the library’s stock. In the stock, all kinds of information can be found.

A library may be large or small. Some people think libraries have to be large to work well, but this is not so. Many secondary schools have fewer than 200 books and most primary schools have even fewer. To make the best use of books, you need to organise them carefully, and the best way to do that is by setting up a library.

Why does a school need a library?
A school needs a library because libraries support the school’s work of literacy and education.

A school library is useful in literacy work from the earliest stage because it encourages good reading habits that can be formed when children are young. All teachers should aim to stimulate children’s curiosity about books and to encourage students to start loving the written word. One of the best ways to do this is to set up a school library with a wide variety of information and fiction books. The vocabulary range of these books should suit all skill levels, so that even reluctant students will be able to read what they want, when they want, for their studies.

A library should also have stock that is fun to read. When students discover that football yearbooks, novels, and magazines are also in the library, they may start to spend some of their leisure time reading. The more students read, the faster their English will improve. This will help them in their studies and when they leave school.
The school library supports the students’ studies. Every library collection will have information that can improve students’ understanding of the subjects they learn at school, and increase their knowledge of the world. A school library may also have books by local writers that will encourage students’ interest and pride in the local area.

As well as providing access to information, a school library allows students to develop the skills of searching for information on their own. This will help to develop a problem-solving and active approach to learning. Students who regularly look up information in books will improve both their schoolwork and their reading skills.

Libraries are also very useful for teachers. All staff, whether mathematics, woodwork, home economics, science, or geography teachers, can improve their teaching by using stock from the library. Libraries are a source of information for every teacher, not just for English teachers. This is especially so if the school library has stock that can:

- Give students knowledge (both general knowledge and specific information from set textbooks)
- Provide explanations (e.g. about how coal is made or for particular sports rules)
- Satisfy students’ curiosity and interest in life
- Offer art, craft, music, dance, and cultural information

Using the books and other stock in the library will help teachers prepare their lessons better. It may also encourage teachers to give students project work that asks them to go to the library and find out information for their schoolwork.

This will encourage students to study, learn, and achieve better results, as well as give them the confidence to start looking for information on their own.

An HIV-positive female student doing grade six successfully wrote a poem which she read during morning assembly relating the hardships she faces.
She added how difficult life is living with her diabetic grandmother. She narrated that she was inspired by the stories she has been reading from the books in the library. She encouraged other learners that knowledge is power and she is determined to continue reading to have a bright future and help her grandmother. This really touched everyone’s heart at school.

- Sindie Nkambuk, Librarian, Mhlabubovu Primary School, Swaziland

**LIBRARY TIP**

If people ask why a library is important, explain that information can change lives for the better.

If the world were the size of a village, it would be easy to share ideas with all the villagers. But because there are so many people in the world, living far apart and using different languages, the best way to find new information is through books, pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers.

Imagine, for example, that some agricultural teachers in West Africa have found a way to grow bananas more quickly. How will people in Pakistan or the Pacific find out about this? One way is by listening to radio programmes such as the BBC World Service’s Focus on Africa, but because you hear the information only once, it is difficult to remember all the details. If you have a library, however, all you need to do is find the right book or magazine; then you can read the new information as often as you like.

**Different types of school library**

There are two different types of school library: centralised and classroom. Both should be organised so that students and teachers find them easy to use.

**Centralised library**

A centralised library is located in a room or building that all the students and teachers can access when it is open.
A centralised library is best for secondary schools and can also be used for primary schools, if you have the space.

Figure 1.1. A student selects a book in Botswana.

**Classroom libraries**

Instead of keeping all the books in one room, you might decide to divide your stock into classroom libraries. This method is especially suitable for primary schools. You can rotate the books every month or every term so that the students have a different selection of books. The ALP libraries in Lesotho have found classroom libraries to be very successful and the idea has spread from there.

**The advantages**

- A classroom library is a good way to manage books if you are having trouble with security or if you do not have a library room.

- You don’t need to have a librarian whose time is dedicated solely to the library (though you should still have a librarian, as someone will need to manage the system).

- The students have immediate access to books when they have finished their assignments.
• The teachers can more easily select books to read to the class or get information.
• The books can be pre-sorted according to reading levels to suit the age of the students.
• Since each classroom has a small collection, they do not need to be carefully organised, as it is easy to look through them all.
• The classroom teacher knows all of the students and can more easily find books that go missing.
• If the classroom door has a lock on it, this provides security for the books; if not, a locked cupboard in the classroom is necessary.
• Teachers can trade books between classrooms to refresh their stock.

The disadvantages
• The main problem with classroom libraries is that students and teachers have access to only a limited collection at a time. For example, a student may want a book on a particular topic, but it is in a different classroom.
• The classroom teacher has to be willing to supervise the books.
• Security may still be a problem if the teacher is unwilling to lock up whenever he or she plans to be out of the room, even if it is only for a minute.

The classroom library system
If you decide to use classroom libraries, you should still create an accession register (see chapter 6) and a title catalogue using cards (see chapter 8). Instead of organising the books as described in chapters 7 and 9, first divide the books into fiction and non-fiction. Then divide them by reading level, and create sets for each classroom with a mix of non-fiction and fiction appropriate to the level of the students in that room. Divide the title cards up in the same way and fasten with a rubber band or clip, then label each set (Set A, Set B, and so forth). Use another exercise book to record which classroom is assigned which set. When you
rotate the books, check if any are missing and then write down which classroom the set has been moved to.

Figure 1.2. A classroom library in Lesotho.

Once the books are in each classroom, most schools allow the students to take books to read at their desks without a formal check-out system. Some teachers have the students make a long strip of cardboard with their name on it. When the student takes a book, she or he puts the strip in the spot where the book was, and then it is easy to know where to return the book. Some classrooms have library monitors that count the books at the end of the day to make sure the books were returned. Usually schools that use the classroom library method do not have a big problem with missing books; it is normal to have the occasional lost book.

You will have to decide if you are going to allow students to take books home (see chapter 11). If you do lend books, you should use the lending register method and have one exercise book in each classroom to record books that students take home.
Before we had a library, I was only one teacher in a classroom of many children. Now each book is a teacher, and each child has many teachers.

- Grade 1 Teacher, Linotsing Primary School, Lesotho

Why does a community need a library?

Libraries provide a source of information and of pleasure. Making books and other materials available to adults and to youth who are not in school will promote literacy in the community.

Some schools open their school library to the community; others do not. If you choose to invite community members to a school library, you can specify certain hours when they can come to use the library. You can also host specific activities for community members. For example, primary schoolteachers in Malawi often form literacy clubs at their schools for parents and other adults in the community.

A community library is open to everyone in the community. You may decide to lend books only to those who pay a small yearly fee, but everyone should be able to read the books in the library without paying a fee.

I would like to acknowledge New Xade residents for utilising the books you donated. Students from primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions take advantage of the books and are using them. The books help the students to carry out their research, doing assignments and reading further, since there are now more relevant and interesting books. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge the out of school youth and public officers who are using the books.

- Ketelelo Moapare, age 18, Yaiquisii Community Learning Centre, New Xade, Botswana