

**LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRE
(LRC)
EVALUATION MISSION
Executive Summary - Final Report**

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General Characteristics

The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) programme was one strategy of the MECE Project (Improvement of Quality and Equity of Education in public education) which was financed by the Chilean government and the World Bank.

The aim of the LRC component was to build up libraries to support educational, social and cultural activities at school and in the community, and contribute to the information needs of young people and teachers for curricular assignments.

LRC Programme Mission

The LRC programme's mission was to back up the curriculum implementation and to make room for effective learning in the educational process.

General Purpose of the LRC Programme

The object of the programme was to create or update a library in every school throughout the country, and to promote their progressive transformation to more interactive Learning Resource Centres with the potential to offer educational and cultural services beyond the school community.

The LRC's objective is to support curriculum development in all secondary schools, facilitating changes in teaching practices; encouraging new and more complex learning styles and methods; and stimulating the development of a positive and professional working environment (LRC/MINEDUC Objectives).

Evaluation of the LRC Programme

This report contains specific and practical recommendations, with directions and policies, for the running of school libraries, thus reinforcing the strategic role of the teaching-learning process.

The evaluation was based on 9 study cases taken out from a total of 1,445 secondary schools existing in Chile. Most schools visited were in urban areas and all served the lowest three socio-economic groups. The sample included only three non-municipal schools.

Methodology of the Evaluation Mission

The methodology adopted included the following elements:

- Reading, deep analysis and study of the Libraries/CRA Report on policies to implement Learning Resource Centres produced by MINEDUC.
- Review of the different materials published by the programme.
- Team work with the MINEDUC.
- Meetings with the different actors involved - MINEDUC officials, owners, researchers, training providers and representatives of the library profession.
- Visits to 9 schools to interview CRA co-ordinators, headteachers, teachers and students
- A survey of headteachers, co-ordinators, teachers and students at each school visited.

Main Findings

The evaluation disclosed both the strengths and the weaknesses of the LRC Programme, which can be summarised as follows:

Strengths

- Use of the LRC is very closely linked to the curriculum; the theoretical connection is firmly established.
- A basic LRC has been established in most secondary schools and provides high quality resources in a range of media; this is a most significant advance.
- The Basic Collection meets the basic information needs of students. Students appreciate that the LRC has social and personal benefits as well as educational ones; it is a place where they feel comfortable and safe. The students' opinions about the LRC were extremely positive, and although some of them saw it simply as a place to escape bad weather or a more pleasant alternative to the classroom, others pointed out special features they valued, such as the staff or resources.

Weaknesses

- There is no foreseeable financing to update resources or equipment after the initial collection has been provided, so they will soon become outdated.
- There is no sufficient integration between the LRC and Enlaces programmes.
- Lack of financing for the acquisition of current material in municipal schools in low-income neighbourhoods affects budgets.
- There are no sufficient trained co-ordinators, largely because duly trained people often leave their position. 40% of co-ordinators have no adequate training.
- Personnel expected to work without training or a minimum knowledge of librarianship.
- Many teachers make poor use of the facilities and have negative views of the LRC. To change attitudes and teaching methods proves to be difficult in many cases.
- There is a lack of 'library culture' in Chile and this means that many students do not value or respect books.
- An inadequate infrastructure.
- Inadequate use of the LRC (a place of punishment or detention).
- Insufficient and unfriendly services for the users.

Conclusions and recommendations

Central Level MINEDUC

- It is important to ensure that LRC provision matches the ethos of the school, its staff and students and its way of working. For example, some schools may have links with the local community to draw on; others may have an archive collection to consider; and yet others may have an active students' union which can play a key role.
- The training of human resources must be given top priority. A strategic alliance with universities should be established for the development of a training program to provide additional skills in pedagogical techniques and classroom management for co-ordinators trained in librarianship, and also those who initially trained as teachers with librarianship skills.
- Refocus attention on LRCs to make sure they are duly valued by owners and headteachers as when the LRC programme was first launched.

- Provide more explicit details in curriculum documentation and textbooks so that teachers can see how use of the LRC will result in specific learning achievements.
- At present, it is essential that students learn how to handle information adequately; therefore and according to the impact that LRC's have on the curriculum, it is necessary to implement this programme with students since primary school.
- It is important that teachers develop their information management skills so that they may in turn impart them to their students.
- The collection in all schools needs to be expanded; most groups of teachers and students complained about shortages of key texts. Procedures are needed to ensure that the collection is up to date, in good conditions and relevant for the needs of the school and the students. LRC's will require new stock each year to maintain students' and teachers' interest and to keep up to date with developments in knowledge. The stock needs to be weeded regularly as well as new items added.
- The potential for benchmarking between LRCs in similar schools (based on size, ownership, urban/rural, socio-economic group or SIMCE scores, for example) could be investigated as this may help schools to share good practice and identify areas of strength and weakness.
- Work with universities to provide a curriculum support to develop LRCs, encouraging research to demonstrate links between LRC use and other learning outcomes.

Team Work LRC/Mineduc

- Develop standards for the library media programme (goals, budget, planning), the collection (range, selection procedures, organisation, accessibility, etc.) and facilities (accommodation and access). Rather than having one standard which all schools are expected to achieve, most models are progressive.
- Establish local and regional networking groups for co-ordinators. These could meet to discuss common problems, share ideas, attend training events, etc., and also keep in touch by email or phone. One or two pilot groups could be established in the short term before the scheme is rolled out across the country if it is successful.
- Develop training by means of seminars, training courses, lectures, to spread the LRC concept.
- Initial teacher training courses should include modules on the use of the LRC, plus an optional module on its management for those wishing to specialise in this area.

- Develop training programmes for library assistants (including community volunteers) to provide them with the skills to assist co-ordinators effectively.
- Support action research by teachers, librarians and LRC co-ordinators, for example, by offering bursaries or research grants.
- Conduct research into the possible links between LRC use and SIMCE and other learning outcomes. This will demonstrate the importance of the LRC to headteachers and owners.
- Use the primary school pilots to research the impact of the LRC (schools where LRCs are being introduced could be compared to a control group).
- Develop guidelines on what information skills teachers should expect to be demonstrated at each grade.

Owners

- Produce a plan of action (to be implemented by the municipal education departments (MEDs)) for the updating and expansion of LRCs. This should allow both the school and the community access to information; contribute significantly to the teaching-learning process; and facilitate self-learning.
- Continue to highlight the importance of the LRC in dialogue with headteachers and owners, in particular, to emphasise the importance and value of a professional, trained co-ordinator.

Headteachers

- Assess the development plan for the LRC, which should have clear aims and objectives and be in direct relationship to the school's aims, thus demonstrating the contribution the LRC is making.
- Investigate the possibility of centralised cataloguing to allow schools to import records rather than each school cataloguing its own stock. (Schools could contribute towards the costs of this service.)

Co-ordinators

- It is crucial that the LRC co-ordinator and teachers work together as a team to plan, deliver and assess learning activities.
- Create and maintain a centralised catalogue of all resources available in the school (i.e. in the LRC and elsewhere). A realistic timescale should be set out to allow progress on this activity to be tracked.

- Provide information for teachers and students on ‘what the LRC has to offer’ (e.g. a handout or a talk).
- Support the introduction of open shelves to encourage browsing.

Teachers

- Work with the LRC co-ordinators (as fellow professionals) and find out how they can best support teaching practice.
- Adopt rigorous and methodical approaches to planning which incorporate LRC activities.
- Use the LRC to encourage students to become independent learners.

Students

- Contribute to the running and development of the LRC (e.g. choosing resources, helping the co-ordinator at busy times, participating in cultural events).
- Use the LRC in a way which allows all students to share this space (e.g. work quietly).
- Take care of books borrowed and return them on time so other students may use them.

Viability and sustainability of LRCs

Making LRCs viable in the long term without MINEDUC funding is a difficult question, especially for those schools located in the poorer areas.

Although there are divers alternative sources of financing, is likely that none of them proves adequate by itself. In most cases, headteachers and co-ordinators are not aware of which financing sources are available, and therefore, schools may need advice to help them develop sustainable plans for their LRCs.

It is necessary that future support includes funding earmarked by school owners and allocated by headteachers; funds provided by parents, students (students union), the Book and Reading Council, organizations and local companies.

The following actions will be basic to assure the proper sustainability of LRCs:

- To share resources with institutions, university and public libraries; encouraging greater use of IT (e.g. networked PCs with Internet access, e-books, e-learning), and involvement in the 2010 Project of Digital Chile.
- To establish strategic alliances with the public libraries programme, e.g. to encourage municipal librarians to offer professional support to LRC co-ordinators for a better management and development of school libraries.
- To plan and carry out, together with the public libraries programme, any activities such as workshops, lectures, seminars to foment educational and cultural projects which may contribute to reading and the arts.