



Current Situation & Use of Primary School Libraries: A snapshot across 5 Provinces of Cambodia

World Vision

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Acknowledgement and disclaimer

This study report would not be made possible without tremendous supports from World Vision’s partners and stakeholders. We would like to show our gratitude to Provincial and District Education Officials, school directors, teachers and librarians at the 24 schools who took part in and supported the study. Furthermore, we would also like to acknowledge the role of the survey enumerators for their quality work and commitment.

Findings in this report are based on a survey conducted in February 2016. Library standards may have increased or decreased since time of data collection. The presented findings are intended to provide a snapshot of current situation.

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1. Rationale for the study

In 2011, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in collaboration with several NGOs developed and adopted “Standards for Primary School Library” in order to ensure greater quality and effectiveness of library facilities for learning and teaching at the primary school level. Five years after its adoption, and after significant investment from government and civil society, it is timely to assess progress by observing the current situation and use of primary school libraries, and to investigate how the implementation of the MoEYS standard might improve reading skills and learning outcomes of primary school goers. Studies in other countries have shown strong connection between well-managed and resourced libraries, and increased reading frequency and learning outcomes of students.

There is growing evidence nationally that many Cambodian students are not equipped with adequate reading skills, are not motivated to read, or cannot read. A 2012 national Early Grade Reading Assessment done showed that one third of grade 2 students could not read a single word. This has stirred concerns and action by MoEYS and Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). So in September 2015, Cambodia’s Prime Minister announced March 11 as National Reading Day, to “promote the habit of reading” among Cambodians.

World Vision has a comprehensive approach to improve learning outcomes, and especially reading skills, in 650 primary schools in 9 provinces. Across a sample of 24 schools, this brief study is intended to provide a snapshot of library facilities and usage in selected schools in 11 districts across five provinces where World Vision has been working with citizens, schools, government, and partner NGOs to improve basic education.

2. A note on methodology

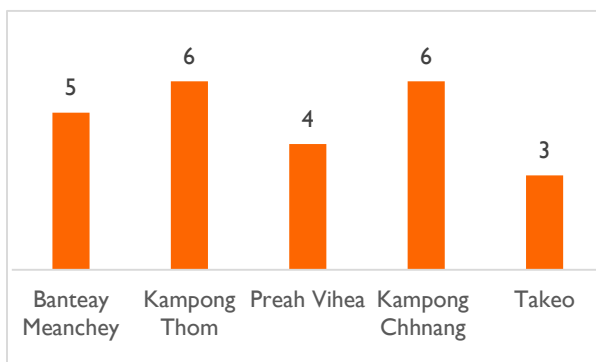
The study is intended to show whether libraries in target areas:

1. Are open and accessible on school’s working days;
2. Have a minimum number of appropriate level books and other learning resources for students of various grades;
3. Have the right number of librarians who have received training on library management.

The number of libraries visited varies as it is proportional to the number of total primary schools that are within World Vision project target areas in each province. The provinces for this study were selected to represent a diversity of geographic contexts and correlation with other World Vision findings on child literacy.

This brief study is the first phase of a larger, more comprehensive study planned by World Vision. The larger study will cover all of World Vision’s target provinces, and additional schools in the provinces included in this study, using similar methodology.

The 24 public primary schools were randomly selected using a two-stage sampling strategy—stratified and systematic random sampling. Of 24 schools initially selected, 5 did not have library on site;



Graph 1. Primary school libraries visited

therefore, a nearby school with a library was chosen for replacement.¹ The schools were located in Banteay Meanchey (5), Kampong Thom (6), Preah Vihea (4), Kampong Chhnang (6) and Takeo (3). Two were cluster schools which had notably better practices than the other schools.

Observation and interviews were the primary methods used to determine the conditions and management of libraries. Observation took place inside the library and school compound; and a short interview was conducted with the librarian or school director.

Data collection was completed by four World Vision staff who used a Khmer-language questionnaire and observation checklist of 10 library standards extracted from Primary School Library Standards (MoEYS 2011), including library personnel, usage and resources (e.g. number and variety of books).

3. Preliminary findings

Presented below are the national library standards in comparison with current reality of the 24 libraries visited.

3.1 Survey Standard 1: Library resource personnel

Survey Standard 1.1: Standard specified for deployment of librarians²

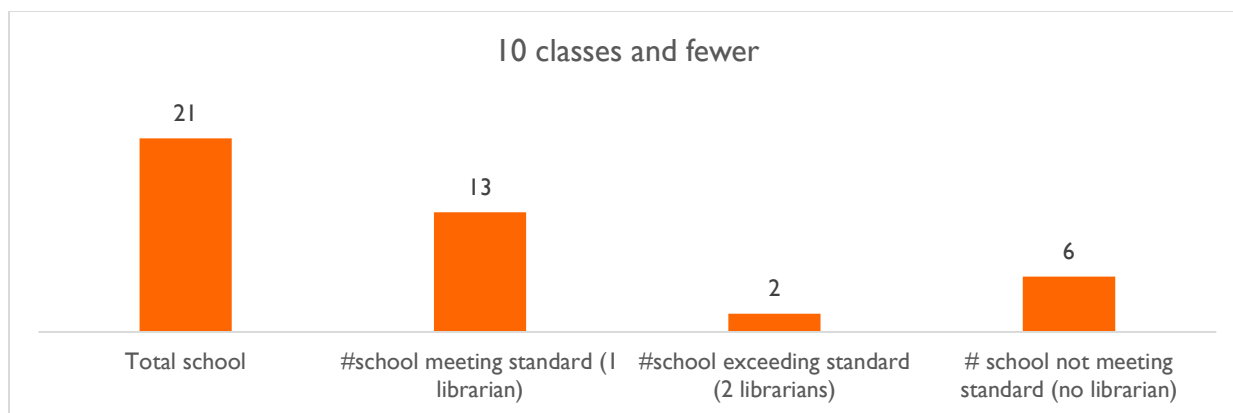
- 1 librarian for school with 10 classes and fewer
- 2 librarians for school with 11- 40 classes
- 3 librarians for school with more than 40 classes

Of the 24 schools included in this study, 21 schools ranged from 6 to 10 classes; the remaining 3 schools had between 12 and 16 classes.

Of the 21 schools (with 10 or fewer classes), two schools had two librarians each, exceeding the standard of one librarian. 13 had only one librarian, meeting the standard. Six schools had no dedicated librarian, failing to meet the standard (see *Graph 2*). In these six schools, the school director assumed the role of a librarian on top of his/her regular administration work.

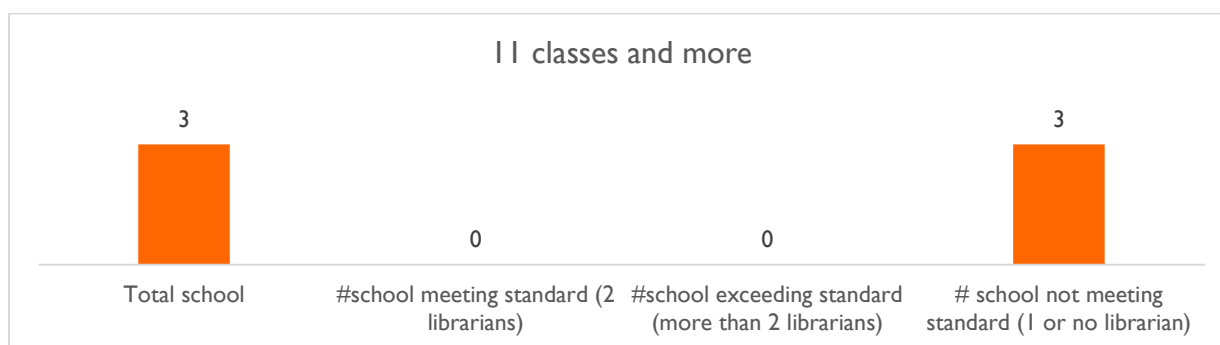
¹ It could be argued that the absence of a library should be reported (because it represents a service failure); however, the focus of this study was the standards of existing libraries, not assessment of the presence of libraries.

² *Primary School Library* (2011): Standard 1.1.2 Library deployment, p. 3



Graph 2. Number of librarians at schools with 10 classes and fewer.

Each of the three schools with 11 or more classes had only one dedicated librarian, rather than the mandated two librarians (see Graph 3).



Graph 3. Number of librarians at schools with 11 classes and more.

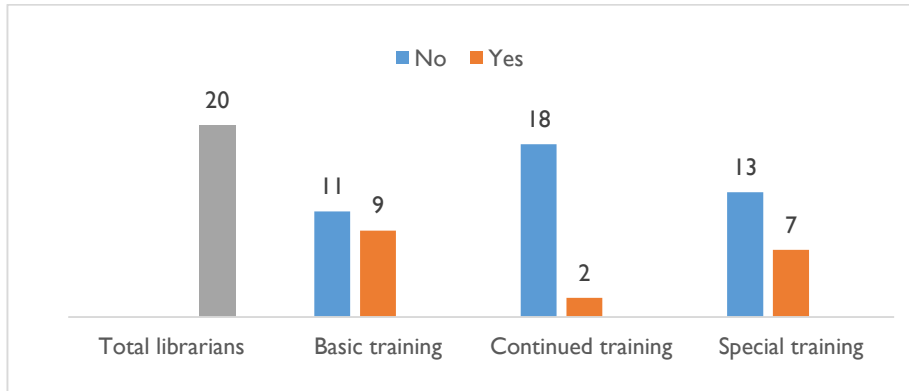
Survey Standard 1.2: Required training for a librarian³

- Basic training (9 days) on general characteristics of library, establishment of library, document management, library services, co-leading activities with children, and administration.
- Continued training (6 days) on book or non-book documents, document classification, enhancement of library services, motivating students to access library, sustainability of library.
- Special training for librarian with continued training based on current update of library. Length is flexible.

Of the schools visited, 18 had one librarian (75%), and two had 2 librarians for a total of 20 librarians across the 24 schools. Among the 20, only a small number reported receiving any training on library management skills (See Graph 4). Even among those who reported receiving training, in some cases the training was much shorter than required, for example ‘basic training’ was 1 or 2 days instead of the required 9. Those who did not receive ‘basic training’ were unlikely to receive ‘continued training’ – only two librarians who received ‘basic training’ also received ‘continued training’. Seven of the librarians

³ Primary School Library (2011): Standard 1.1.3 Training, p. 4

received 'special training' from NGO partners (including World Vision, Room to Read, Sipar, and SVA) on use of educational resources (tablets, TRAC kits, etc.).



Graph 4. Librarians reported having received training, by type of training

3.2 Survey Standard 2: Library facilities

Survey Standard 2.1: A library must be in one of these forms⁴

- dedicated building
- dedicated classroom
- corner of head office
- corner of classroom
- mobile library

Of the 24 libraries visited, 20 (or 83%) were situated in a dedicated room, two as corner of head office and two as mobile library. While the library standards for cluster schools appear to be the same as for normal schools, two cluster schools have organized additional reading space for students, be it at corner of classroom or in an open space with roof (referred to locally as a 'natural' library).



Image 1. Additional reading space in cluster school

The national policy does not define which type of library is more preferred, and does not directly link the type of library to the number of total classes or

⁴ Primary School Library (2011): Standard 2.2.1 Library type, p. 5

Survey Standard 2.2: Requirements for library resources⁵

Any library type shall have on its shelves at least one textbook on each subject for each grade, additional reading materials (general knowledge, science and technical skills, arts & literature) and/or CD, VCD, DVD, tape.

- A Library that has a dedicated classroom/building shall have at least 300 titles (excluding textbook), including additional reading resources for children and adults, and a total of at least 600 books
- A Library that is in the corner of head office shall have at least 150 titles (excluding textbook), including additional reading resources for children and adults, and a total of at least 200 books
- A Library that is in the corner of classroom/mobile library shall have at least 50 titles (excluding textbook), including additional reading resources for children and adults, and a total of at least 50 books

On average just 30%-45% of libraries (n=6-9) in a dedicated room were found to have organized and placed on shelves at least one textbook on each subject for each grade. In other libraries, it was reported by some librarians and/or school directors that all textbooks were distributed to students, leaving none for display in the library; for other schools, textbooks were either stored in the head office or in a closed box that was inaccessible to students.

The two libraries that were in a corner of the head office had at least one textbook on each subject available, while none of the two mobile libraries had any textbooks displayed.

Without a proper documentation system (described below), it was a challenge for librarians to accurately report on the number of titles and books available in the library. Where the system was not in place, the data was not available. There were 18 librarians, but only 17 of them had a record of the resources in their library.

Thirteen of the 17 libraries with documentation were dedicated classroom/building. Of these 13, only four had the standard of at least 300 titles. The rest had between 20- 275 titles. The number of available titles in the two libraries that were in a corner of head office were between 27- 50; the two mobile libraries had between 48- 100 titles.



Image 2. Storage of textbooks



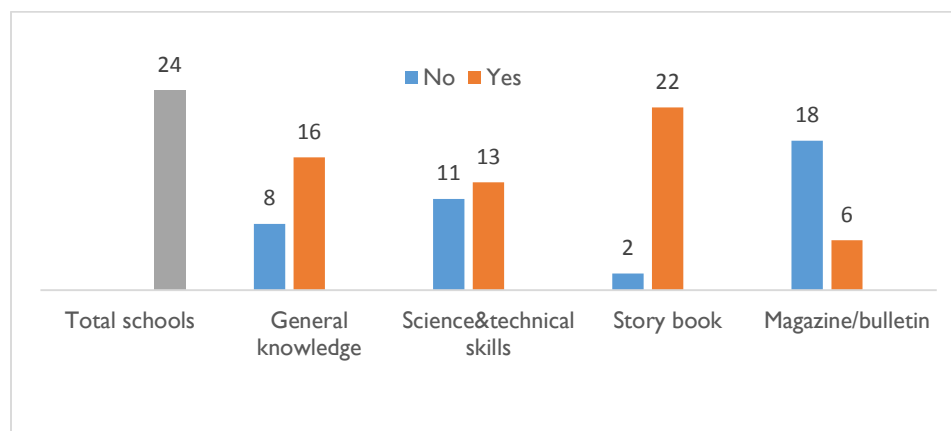
Image 3. Few books in one of library as dedicated classroom

⁵ *Primary School Library* (2011): Standard 2.3.2 Requirement for library resource by type of library, pp. 6&7

In terms of books available, 10 of the libraries in a dedicated classroom/building complied with the minimum standards of at least 600 books. In fact, half of them had more than 1,000 books in the library.

Of the two libraries located in the corner of a school's head office, just one had data on the number of books available and it was fewer than the standard (110 books instead of 200 books). The mobile libraries had no record of books, as compared to the standard of at least 50 books.

In terms of additional reading resources, almost all libraries had a greater number of story books for children, than books on general knowledge and science/technical skills. Educational bulletins/magazines were the least available resource in the library; where available, magazines were out-of-date and torn.



Graph 5. Additional reading resources by number of schools

3.3 Survey Standard 3: Library technical work

Survey Standard 3.1: Inventory list⁶

- Librarian must keep a catalogue or inventory of books

Of the 24 libraries visited, 17 maintained a book catalogue of a simple table form that listed the title, date and number of new books, including textbooks.

Survey Standard 3.2: Library services⁷

- Working hour: Open during school's working hour
- Usage record: Tool to measure usage, usage list, and usage report
- Book loan: only books with stamp can be borrowed, only books with at least 3 titles can be borrowed
- Library activities: story reading, storytelling, art activities, study game and research for class

⁶ Primary School Library (2011): Standard 3.1.1 Documentation process of new stock of documents, p. 7

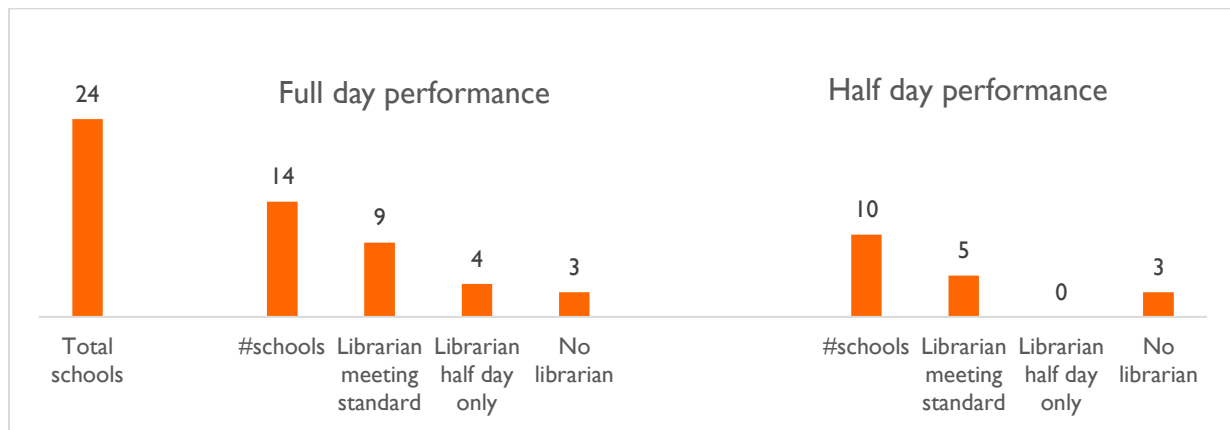
⁷ Primary School Library (2011): Standard 3.1.2 Library services, pp. 9&10

Working Hours: The Standard defines that a library shall be open during school time. Depending on study shifts, then, the libraries should be open for full or half day. However, it is necessary to also determine whether or not a librarian was present during opening hours, because without the presence of a librarian, an ‘open’ library is of little benefit to students.

The study found that 14 schools operated on a full-time basis and 10 on a half-day basis. However, of 14 full-time schools, nine had a librarian working both shifts while four schools had a librarian on one shift only. Of 10 half-day schools, five had a librarian on half-day basis. Six schools without a dedicated librarian relied on the school director to open the library at irregular times.

A good practice observed was a weekly access calendar most libraries had set up, allocating one day of the week for each grade. Opening time varied widely, however, and could be as short as 15 minutes during session breaks for general reading, or as long as 40 minutes (i.e. one full class period).

There was a big discrepancy among libraries in regard to official hours; thus it is recommended that future study explores the links between hours of operation and frequency of library activities.



Graph 6. Availability and working shift of librarian by school's opening hours

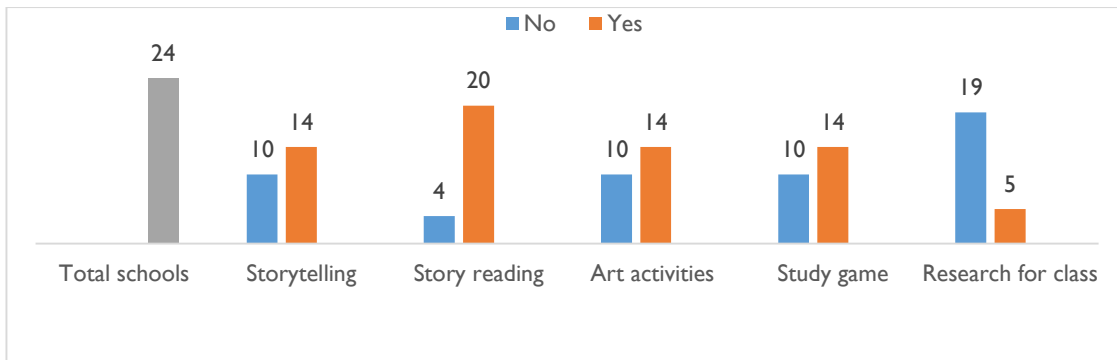
Usage records: 71% of libraries (n=17) had a usage record, meaning the librarian has established a simple way to record the number of children accessing the library on a daily basis. For example, librarians used small rocks or straws with different colors to represent male and female students who entered the library. Thus 17 librarians were able to report on the number of instances their library was accessed by male and female students in January, 2016. On average, these records indicate that more female than male students accessed the library on a daily basis. Access records (for both genders) showed a wide range of numbers of visit, from 30 times to 2,246 times in one month across 17 libraries.



Image 4. Access record

Book loans: These 17 libraries also kept borrowing records, which showed that the borrowing rate was much lower than the library access rate in past month (January). Again, female students appeared to borrow more books than male students. On average, the number of books loaned out from each library varied between 2 and 1,006 books. Usually it is students who borrow books; there was a much lower instance of parents or other community members borrowing books directly from the library. A few libraries did not allow borrowing for fear of books being lost or damaged.

Library activities: Librarians and school directors responsible for about half of the visited libraries said they had never conducted storytelling or art activities. Many libraries allowed students to read books independently during general opening hours or during specified library times. Students conducting research for class was a rare activity (possibly because this is an activity more suitable for higher grades than for primary grades). Five librarians reported using the library space for additional activities such as reading tests and coaching for slow learners.



Graph 7. Libraries reported practicing various activities



Image 5. Additional activity in library: reading test



Image 6. Most common activity in library: story reading

4. Conclusion & recommendations

This short study has provided several important observations about the current state of library facilities and library usage in public primary schools in Cambodia. While further research is required to verify the extent to which these findings characterise schools more generally, the sample size and geographic spread of the 24 schools in this study suggests the trends are consistent and reflects a need for further efforts to improve library services for the purpose of improving child literacy.

The study found that only one school met all of the 10 survey standards; and just 58% of sampled schools met half of the survey standards while the remainder met less than half of the specific standards. Specifically, World Vision found:

- An insufficient number of librarians in half of the surveyed schools.
- Inadequate training for most librarians.
- Insufficient opening hours in all libraries and limited usage in all libraries.
- Inadequate documentation of books/resources in about one-third of libraries.
- Only five libraries met the standard of having a record of their resources and also met the minimum number of titles.
- In all libraries, there was minimal active engagement with students who do use the libraries.
- Generally, cluster schools were more likely to meet library standards than other schools.

It should be further noted that schools observed are in the target area of World Vision and in some case also receive support from other NGOs. As such, it is assumed that they have received *more support* than schools without any NGO involvement. Therefore, this study concludes that conditions in the 24 schools cited is “above average”.

The establishment of the library standards in 2011 was a positive step, and has doubtless resulted in many more functional libraries across Cambodia; however, a thorough assessment of the quality of library facilities, management, and usage should now be conducted.

As result of this study, World Vision recommends that the Royal Government of Cambodia:

1. Increase financial and technical support to sub-national administrations to further assess and manage libraries through a clear action plan to first ensure that all schools have library facilities, and then ensure compliance with the government’s library standards, especially reaching the mandated number trained librarians and increasing the number of textbooks and reading materials for students.
2. Improve skills training for librarians – first ensuring that all existing librarians have the minimum amount of prescribed training; and then focused training on techniques and strategies to conduct creative and engaging library activities.
3. Require librarians to build upon and improve practices of recording student access the library and maintaining borrowing records.
4. Support schools to increase efforts to encourage borrowing of books: such efforts might include increasing frequency of access times, group reading exercises, reading aloud, and storytelling (rather than just encouraging independent reading).