



The Cultural Dimension of the Right to Education

IFLA Response to the Call for Contributions by the Special Rapporteur

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions welcomes the Special Rapporteur's initiative to explore the cultural dimension of the right to education in the 2020 report. We would like to thank the Rapporteur for inviting interested stakeholders to provide input. In this submission, IFLA would like to offer a brief overview of good practices and lessons learned from various efforts to ensure access to culture in educational contexts by libraries.

A [2009 General Comment N.21](#) by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights points out the intrinsic relationship between the right to culture and the right to education. Among the different dimensions of the *right to participate in cultural life*, the Comment points out that education and information are key to ensuring *access to culture* – the right to know and understand one's own culture and the culture of others. Furthermore, the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), in Article 17, underlines the need to promote materials which meet the cultural needs of the child, including from a diversity of sources.

Libraries have a long-standing role in ensuring access to culture – both in terms of availability of cultural objects and promotion of critical thinking and engagements with cultural materials (a more detailed explanation of libraries' role in ensuring access to culture and related rights can be found in a [2018 IFLA input to a consultation of the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights](#)). They pair this with a key role in supporting education throughout life, as highlighted in the [UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto](#), not least in partnership with teachers (see the [IFLA report](#) on how school libraries support teachers).

Within the scope of this consultation, lessons can be contributed from the experience of both school and public libraries in different countries cooperating with school systems to promote cultural diversity and cultural rights. These include both institutional frameworks and implementation of practical measures in the following areas: ensuring availability of materials in minority languages, establishing partnerships to implement education and outreach activities, and facilitating the creation of new cultural materials by bearers and practitioners of minority cultures to promote cultural diversity and deliver on their cultural rights.

Our responses therefore primarily answer questions 5 and 6, relating to examples of where countries have enabled the engagement of libraries as stakeholders in efforts to promote cultural rights through education.

Languages in Education

A [2017 study authored by experts from IREX and World Vision](#) points out that, despite dedicated efforts and investments, there is still a lack of school reading materials in non-dominant and non-national languages. With the move towards *Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education*, they suggest that cooperation with organisations and institutions (such as libraries) and communities can play an important role in meeting the demand for materials in local languages, sharing the example of a successful initiative in Ethiopia.

This role has been confirmed in a [2016 brief by the European Centre for Minority Issues](#), which pointed out that libraries play an essential role in ensuring the availability of materials for teaching and reading in minority languages. Periodic Reports on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages show how this can be implemented in practice: [a report from Hungary](#), for example, mentions that textbooks in minority languages acquired for libraries are at times used for education in these languages; and some libraries founded by national minority self-governments operate in schools providing education in minority languages.

Meanwhile, the [Armenian National Library](#) hosts a substantial collection of materials in national minority languages, ranging from Russian to Yezidi, including textbooks and publications on history, natural sciences, linguistics and others. A [public library in the Šiauliai region in Lithuania](#) has created a large audio and video collection that explores their regional culture and history and is used for educational activities. Students are an important target audience for this project, and educational institutions have the opportunity to invite library representatives to their own premises for educational activities, teaching students their history and culture through this unique collection.

The delivery of such projects is facilitated by cooperation initiatives that see libraries working with other actors. For example, the [Trøndelag county library in Norway](#) works with community leaders to produce materials in Southern Saami, one of the minority languages used in schools and government institutions in Norway and Sweden. One of the main objectives of the project is creating and/or translating school books in Saami.

Similarly, [a case study about the Christchurch City Libraries](#) describes a large collection of digital Māori resources hosted by the Library. These include a website and database dedicated to local history and Māori cultural heritage, again working with the community. This database is widely used by schools and tertiary education institutions. Similar work in [the Philippines](#) has seen a library lead efforts to develop more local language content to support education.

Drawing on such experiences, we recommend that school and public libraries in general be supported and equipped to ensure the availability of educational materials in different languages in schools and other educational institutions.

We furthermore recommend exploring further the potential of partnerships between libraries and other actors to create teaching and learning materials that can be used in schools, and to carry out and deliver educational activities in schools.

Institutional Frameworks and Assessment Strategies

To ensure effective implementation of such partnerships and initiatives, the inclusion of relevant clauses in institutional frameworks can be useful. In cooperation with relevant stakeholders, IFLA has published a series of guidelines that have been developed to inform relevant decision-makers and offer guidance to the library community. Two of these guidelines can be relevant for the provision of cultural services in schools”

[The IFLA and UNESCO School Library Guidelines](#) specify the cultural functions of a school library:

“Teachers and librarians work together in order to [...] prepare and carry out reading programmes and cultural events”; “The school librarian is expected to do the following: [...] promote reading programmes and cultural events”; “The fundamental qualities and skills expected from the school library staff can be defined as follows: [...] knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity”.

[The IFLA Guidelines for Library Service to Multicultural Communities](#) apply to, inter alia, school libraries. The guidelines contain advice on how to carry out a needs assessment of a multicultural community, organise cooperation and resource-sharing, and develop collection that meet the needs of multicultural communities.

We therefore invite relevant decision-makers to recognise the importance of the availability and accessibility (including affordability) of materials from diverse cultural experiences in education, and to ensure that legal frameworks make it possible to build cooperation between libraries and schools and other relevant actors. In doing this, we recommend making use of these guidelines to plan and implement library services that can deliver on the cultural dimensions of educational rights.