



---

## Designing Tomorrow's Libraries with Children's Views

**Dr. H. Inci Önal**

Associate Professor  
Department of Information Management  
Faculty of Letters  
Hacettepe University  
Ankara, Turkey

**Meeting:**

**103. Libraries for Children and Young Adults**

---

*WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 75TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL*  
23-27 August 2009, Milan, Italy  
<http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/index.htm>

---

### **Abstract**

*The main goal of this paper is to help create children's awareness, interest related to create and design libraries for children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How children see the design of libraries and the director's role is an essential starting point for understanding designing tomorrow's libraries from children's point of view. 350 children aged between 7–11 years in the different part of schools in Turkey have been asked to make paintings based on the use and design of children's and/or school libraries. Asking children what they think and paint recognises that they are well able to speak for themselves and have unrivalled insights into their own feelings and needs. The focus of this study is accordingly on research with children rather than research about children. The research aim has been to get a general picture of children's experiences or thoughts and the factors influencing them. On the one hand, the paintings indicate that the basic profiles of libraries. On the other hand, they indicate not only current library services, but also expected future services.*

### **Introduction**

Libraries of the twenty-first century will provide a technologically rich environment, say librarians, educators, architects, engineers and users. The scene is familiar: A librarian stands at the front of a room. Children sit in the centre, their seats arranged in rows or semicircles. Although the details may vary, library design has seen few changes in the past two hundred years. What happens when you add computers and new media to this scene? Designing a technologically-rich library for the new century means more than simply plugging in the equipment. The libraries of tomorrow may take on shapes that will seem foreign to us today. Good facilities appear to be an important precondition for children's learning. But, according to government reports and users' expectations, libraries need much work.

Children's services librarianship—a term that encompasses all library services to children (ages zero to eighteen) in school and public library settings—has long been

considered the important cultural and educational services in the community. Designing a children's or school library is the aspect of architecture and building planning concerned with the proper planning and design of built environments to accommodate the social, physical, psychological, and behavioral needs of people (Jenkins 2000). The new developments in web-based technologies in society at large, offer opportunities for more dynamic models in libraries. Advancements in educational technologies have served to encourage or inhibit four characteristics in library services design: interactivity, scalability, media-richness, and granularity. Information technologies and Internet-based computing, the current hallmark of twenty first century library services, offers the technical capacity to address all four characteristics.

Generally, many facilities in the children's and school library services in Turkey are old, out-of-date, poorly maintained, uncomfortable, unsafe, and lack specific design elements that are likely to enhance teaching, learning, behaviour, and other desirable outcomes. Library construction spending is at an all – time high. Perhaps, there has been such an opportunity to positively affect children's point of view to ensure that they enhance design of libraries, while providing safe, healthy, and comfortable children and/or school library services. How can users contribute to the fulfilment of that goal?

For users, especially for children–students to contribute to the development of better libraries, it is important to understand how library facilities affect students and other building–designing occupants. It is also important that plans and programs address the needs of users. An architect and library committee members may study the effects of a specific type of building technology, analyze furniture plan, develop plan for moving, and so on, while a child may investigate how children as library directors modify their libraries to compensate for library designs that do not meet their serving needs.

### **Children's Participation: Involving Children in Library Design**

Recent articles by architects and librarians, written a decade apart, show a shift in thinking about libraries from collections–focused to user–focused facilities (Foote 2004). Children's participation in library design provides some of the potential benefits and focuses on the children's specific efforts as a director in creating a participative environment for them at a school and/or children's library. Children's participation gives children's role rehearsal experiences, uses their intense developmental need for social experiences with peers, offers opportunities to employ their fledgling hypothetical thinking abilities, and channels their enormous emotional and physical energies. It gives children not only the opportunity to use their energies in constructive ways but also a different perspective on what it means to be a part of a community – whether that community be their school, or their public library all over the country (Boone 2002; Campbell and Shlechter 1979; Miller 2002). In addition to the enormous benefits for the children involved, creating a dynamic program of child participation is beneficial to the library and the librarian.

After reviewing the literature the following factors are commonly accepted by the librarians (Banduric 1993; Cooper and Matthews 2000; Edwards 1990; IFLA 2003; Koontz 2007; Sannwald 1997; Sannwald 2007):

- To have a good library building is a major determinant of use;
- The Library as a learning space has to be flexible, compact, accessible, extendible, varied, organized, comfortable, functioned, ergonomic, electronically equipped, colors perceived, controlled, secure and economical;

- Despite the provision of satisfactory library facilities, children's library use may fall dramatically if children lack motivation to use library;
- The library design standards dictate that libraries be easily accessible to children who must form the lifelong reading habit;
- Programs designed to maximize use of the library meet growing population needs with higher budget and staff allocations;
- The primary design participants are the librarians directly responsible for the library;
- Individuals with formal design training, as well as individuals without design training, direct responsibility for the library environment, and users may contribute to the design of the libraries;
- Checklists are utilized by many librarians as primary guidelines for library building programs, and are considered useful;
- Librarians are constantly faced with changing conditions, values, suggestions, and interrelationships. The most important thing is the ability to learn from past mistakes and to change methods in the future.

This paper provides not only a review of the existing research literature of this multidisciplinary field, but also suggests new library perspectives for understanding designing tomorrow's libraries from children's point of view.

### **Library Services to Children**

When designing children library services or planning school library programs in Turkey, there are a number of important factors to consider. A summary of these factors is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 shows potentials of integrating learning, knowledge and service components. We know that there were often strong connections between children's libraries and school libraries. Innovative formats produced by technological and societal influences have been expected in children's programming and services for a long time. To redesign processes and examine space requirements in an organization for children services, it is necessary to carefully analyze the existing situation and to identify integration potentials (Önal 1995; Önal 2005; Önal 2006; Önal 2009). At this point, this paper generally focus on the ongoing traditional children's library services both public and school libraries in Turkey.

Table 1. Comparative table: Children's and school library systems in Turkey

| <b>Components</b>          | <b>Children's Libraries</b>   | <b>School Libraries</b>  |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| <b>History</b>             | During the period of the Ottoman Empire, there were founded by Sultans, Statesmen and wealthy people by private endowments, which were charitable pious foundations called "waqfs"; Beautiful cabinets for books and a separate room for children | Goes back to the 1700s in elementary, secondary and higher levels (mosque schools, madrasa, enderun); Decorated in an artistic style               |
| <b>Establishment</b>       | Influenced by the reforms in the field of education and culture since 1925; Requirements for Public and Children's Libraries Bylaw since 1981   | Influenced by the reforms in the field of education and culture since 1857; Requirements for School Libraries Bylaw since 1959                     |
| <b>Governance</b>          | Administered by the General Directorate of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; Contact with public library service centres   | The Ministry of National Education; Administration units are separated but has horizontal and vertical connections with each other                 |
| <b>Number of libraries</b> | 1096 Public libraries with children's department; 46 Separate children's libraries  | 57 837 school libraries in the various types and at the various levels of education  |
| <b>Aims</b>                | To provide user – centred services  | To develop quality programs and services   |
| <b>Building</b>            | A standard project is applied; Very dull colored decoration; Not functional   | Some kind of space or room for the library in all schools; No special facilities   |
| <b>Furniture plans</b>     | Ergonomic requirements for furnishings  | Requirements for designing successful furniture plans  |
| <b>Finance</b>             | Financed by the General Directorate of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; Sponsorship from private organisations  | Financed by the Ministry of National Education; Sponsorship from private organisations; Donations by national and/or international organisations   |
| <b>Staff</b>               | Librarians, administrative staff, voluntary helpers   | Librarians, teachers and non – professional staff  |
| <b>Collection</b>          | Basic collection on children's literature   | Basic research and recreation  |
| <b>Types of media</b>      | Print formats, audiovisual materials, electronic resources and environments   | Print formats, audiovisual materials, electronic resources and environments  |
| <b>Users</b>               | Can charge membership fee   | Serves whole school free of charge   |
| <b>Services</b>            | Information services; Audio-visual services; Storytelling; Reading for pleasure; Media presentations in special programs  | Curriculum based information services; Homework assistance; Creative activities; Information literacy teaching units; Reading development programs |
| <b>Cooperation</b>         | Cooperation between the public library and media centre; Contact with local public libraries and branch libraries   | Sharing of resources between different organizations common feature  |

How children see the design of libraries and the director's role is an essential starting point for understanding designing tomorrow's libraries from children's point of view. 350 children aged between 7–11 years in the different part of schools in Turkey have been asked to make paintings based on the use and design of children's and/or school libraries. Asking children what they think and paint recognises that they are well able to speak for themselves and have unrivalled insights into their own feelings and needs. The focus of this study is accordingly on research with children rather than research about children. The research aim has been to get a general picture of children's experiences or thoughts and the factors influencing them. On the one hand, the paintings indicate that the basic profiles of libraries. On the other hand, they indicate not only current library services, but also expected future services.

The purpose of this study is to explore the children's awareness, interest, and actual practices as they relate to library design and children's / school library services. This study is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors in meaning that contribute to children's understanding and interpreting of images in a library?
2. What are the main characteristics of a library design perceived by 7 to 11 year old children, and how does this affect their appreciation of a library design?
3. What are the recommendations for future actions?

This study uses survey research methods to answer these research questions. It is different from most other studies in this field because it acquires data from both children who use school libraries (245 students) and children who use children's libraries (105 children) that affect both of these library types as designers and library directors. Focus will be on Adana, Ankara, Bayburt, Corum, Diyarbakir, Edirne, Istanbul, Izmir, Samsun, and Tunceli, in Turkey. A total of 33 libraries (8 public library children's departments, 3 children's libraries, 22 school libraries) were found to make up the study population.

### **Designing Tomorrow's Libraries with Children's Views**

Every school has a school library and every public library has also children's library services in Turkey. This emphasized that the strengths are services, resources, location and equipment. Turkish school and children's library services are near to users (Önal 2009; Önal 2006; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür Bakanlığı 1981; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekaleti 1959; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1976; Türkiye...2001; Türkiye...2006; Türkiye...2008).

We can implement to better children's services with their-children's help. This study attempts to identify and describe ideal learning environments based on new and existing children's experiences to provide design guidance. Table 2 provides very interesting results about children's experiments and suggestions for managing children's services. The children's propositions provide a starting point for thinking about the potential future of library design in school and children's libraries. The design and physical arrangement for the library must accommodate a diverse range of services as suggested by the children (see Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of children's who made suggestions for Managing Children's Services Programs (\*The items list the responses that were mentioned more than once)

| <b>Evaluation Areas</b>                         | <b>Children's<br/>Library Users<br/>%</b> | <b>School Library<br/>Users<br/>%</b> |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Purpose in Visiting the Library*</b>         |   |                                       |
| • To read books                                 | 77  | 81                                    |
| • To do assignments                             | 76  | 44                                    |
| • To borrow books                               | 56  | 64                                    |
| • To use Internet                               | 31  | 42                                    |
| • To meet friends                               | 28  | 31                                    |
| • To attend different activities                | 30  | 35                                    |
| <b>Library Use</b>                              |   |                                       |
| • Very helpful                                  | 17  | 10                                    |
| • Sometimes helpful                             | 53  | 57                                    |
| • Rarely helpful                                | 22  | 24                                    |
| • Non use                                       | 8   | 9                                     |
| <b>Planned Actions When I was the Director*</b> |   |                                       |
| • Selecting materials                           | 59  | 41                                    |
| • Designing spaces                              | 56  | 44                                    |
| • Planning new facilities                       | 45  | 40                                    |
| • Managing services                             | 41  | 32                                    |
| • Others  | 33  | 27                                    |
| • Nothing                                       | 5   | --                                    |
| <b>Design Criteria for Ideal Library*</b>       |   |                                       |
| • Aesthetics and appearance                     | 77  | 75                                    |
| • Comfortable, flexible furniture               | 61  | 73                                    |
| • Sufficient technology and Internet access     | 41  | 83                                    |
| • Library size and shape                        | 42  | 44                                    |
| • Lighting and climate control                  | 35  | 42                                    |
| • Indoor air quality                            | 34  | 37                                    |
| • Traffic flow                                  | 27  | 41                                    |
| • Safety and security                           | 12  | 41                                    |
| • Building functionality                        | 13  | 39                                    |
| • Places for social interaction                 | 22  | 30                                    |
| <b>Total (N)</b>                                | <b>100<br/>(N=245)</b>                    | <b>100<br/>(N=105)</b>                |

An ideal library design is an effective combination of many related functions. The library building with children’s views gives children a wide range of choices and services, and accommodates many different needs. These include:

- 1. Many children consider libraries to be welcoming institutions. The most effective location for children’s services is at the heart of the school and public libraries.



- 2. The library has an intimate and welcoming atmosphere both inside and outside.



3. Comfortable, quiet, easily supervised, and adequately heated, cooled, and lighted single and group study areas for long – term use.



4. Computers and books distributed throughout the library, at the entrance, in the book stacks, near reading places, and at user service points.





5. A variety of computer configurations: Ergonomically designed electronic workstations, stand up E panels in the stacks, embedded terminals, and wireless mobile lap top stations.



6. A tea – juice – milk service area for casual meetings and book discussions is open during library hours.



7. A centralized reference desk staffed to monitor and service all topical areas.



8. A quiet place in the library to read a book or study reference materials.



9. Clear space is vital to the proper functioning of a facility. But, in here, it is required to avoid designing anything that encourages young children to run, jump, or climb.



10. The planning of furniture includes form, shape and color, in relation to use, as well as durability and flexibility. The ease of cleaning furniture, traffic flow, and ways of storing tables and chairs are also important.



11. A place for children where they can listen to stories, look at puppet shows, play games, and conduct research on the Internet.



12. Comfortable area to do homework / group projects



13. Libraries for children cover multipurpose rooms, community meeting rooms, conference rooms, and supporting services.



14. Study space in which noise is tolerated and welcomed; and computer workstations with Internet access.



15. Space to display art; and separate magazine, CD, video, and DVD collections.



16. 21<sup>st</sup> Century library design: Comfortable places, meeting and study rooms, teen friendly areas, technology, sustainable environment.



## **Findings**

This research is an attempt to help librarians understand some of the changes that will affect libraries in the coming years, and to prompt librarians to think seriously about how to deal with these changes. From a designer's point of view, in here children and students as a director, this is highly optimistic because design features that may work in the early phases of a library service lifecycle may turn out optimistic as in the later phases. The gaps identified by children provide us with an agenda for empirical and conceptual research.

The results of this research lead to the following findings:

1. Children are interested in being a director and providing the other child attracting library environments.
2. Designing a library and its environments affect behaviour. Designed libraries and environments can support satisfaction, happiness, and effectiveness.
3. Not only librarians, but also teachers are interested in promoting reading and positive attitudes towards reading.
4. Initiating plans and actions involving cooperation between children's libraries and school libraries have proved to be crucial.
5. Awareness of the influence of the designing libraries with children's views is necessary in order to provide environments which support desired behaviours and attitudes.
6. To create programs designed to maximize use of the library, children need librarians who will consciously target services toward the new populations and/or who are children.

From a methodological point of view, what we urgently need is design guidelines grounded in empirical research, in particular research that looks into the development of user expectations over longer stretches of time. It is hoped that by putting children's suggestions into practice, libraries will be able to develop their services with children's experiences and suggestions to cope with today's changing world. Children's and school librarians should be encouraged to be involved in these suggestions as often as possible.

## **Conclusion**

The educational specifications and recreational activities guide the design and construction project developed by the architect and a committee. This committee should represent the library's stakeholder groups: the director, staff, children / students, and parents. Designing a school library or children's library is a new experience not only for many architects, administrators and librarians, but also children / students. How well everyone in the design process understands the library program and how it functions within the school will affect the success of the design. The design of library services for children and students must be based on a set of beliefs: beliefs about students, the school itself, the educational process, integration of technology, and the role of information in today's instructional process. An examination of these beliefs about children's/school library design is a prerequisite for program planning which is realized user needs. In spite of a high effort of re-designing such information systems, a designed library service areas-building for children will improve an organization's performance.

Exemplary planning and designing models are the story of human needs and physical possibility. Planning and designing forecasting must tell a similar story of human needs fulfilled within the possibilities set by physical law. To understand the impact of children's point of view, we must consider what it makes possible, what needs it fulfils, and how necessity and possibility together have shaped our world before.

## References

- Banduric, Pamela T. 1993. Environmental design and the promotion of reading in the children's public library. (A thesis for the degree of Master of Arts, Michigan State University).
- Boone, M. D. 2002. "Library design – the architect's view". *Library Hi Tech* 20 (3): 388 – 392.
- Campbell, D.E. and Shlechter, T.M. 1979. "Library design influences on user behaviour and Satisfaction". *Library Quarterly* 49 (1): 26 – 41.
- Cooper, M. and Matthews, A. 2000. *Color smart: How to use color to enhance your business and personal life*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.
- Edwards, H. 1990. *University library building planning*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press.
- Foote, Steven M. 2004. "Changes in library design: An architect's perspective". *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4 (1): 41 – 59.
- IFLA. Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section. 2003. **Guidelines for Children's Libraries Services**. URL: <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s10/pubs/ChildrensGuidelines.pdf> [viewed April 1, 2009].
- Jenkins, Christine A. 2000. The history of youth services librarianship: A review of the research literature. *Libraries and Culture* 35 (1): 103 – 140.
- Koontz, Christie M. 2007. "A History of location of U.S. public libraries within community place and space: Evolving implications for the library's mission of equitable service". *Public Library Quarterly* 26 (1 / 2): 75 – 100.
- Miller, W. 2002. "The library as a place. Tradition and evolution". *Library Issues* 22 (3):1–4.
- Önal, H.Inci. 2009. "IFLA / UNESCO School Library Manifesto for creating one world: Germany, Iran and Turkey in comparative perspective". *Libri* 59 (1): 45 – 54.
- Önal, H.Inci. 2006. "Türkiye'de Basımcılık ve Yayıncılığın Bilgi Hizmetlerine Etkisi: Tarihsel Araştırma [The effect of printing and publishing on information services in Turkey: A historical survey]. *Bilgi Dünyası* [Information World] 2006 7 (1): 1 – 22.
- Önal, H.Inci. 2005. "New developments on the Turkish school library scene". *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 37 (3): 141–152.
- Önal, H.Inci. 1995. "School library development in Turkey". *Türk Kutuphaneciliği* 9(3): 255– 257.
- Sannwald, W. W. 2007. "Designing libraries for customers". *Library Administration and Management* 21 (3): 131 – 138.
- Sannwald, W. W. 1997. *Checklist of library building design consideration*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür Bakanlığı. 1981. Halk kütüphaneleri görev ve çalışma yönetmeliği [Public libraries bylaw]. T.C. *Resmi Gazete* 21.9.1981. Sayı: 17465.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekaleti. 1959. *Okul kutuphaneleri yönetmeliği* [School libraries bylaw]. Ankara: Maarif Basimevi.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı. 2008. *2009 Yılı butce raporu* [Budget report for the year 2008]. Ankara:Devlet Kitapları Mudurluğu Basimevi.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı. 2006. *Okul kutuphaneleri standart yönergesi* [Standards for school libraries] URL: <http://yayim.meb.gov.tr/y%F6netmelik.doc> [viewed March 10, 2009].
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı. 2001. Okul kutuphaneleri yönetmeliği [School libraries bylaw]. *Resmi Gazete*, No. 24501.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı.1976. Okul Kutuphaneleri Yönetmeliği [School libraries bylaw]. *Resmi Gazete*, No.15689.