

The Influence of School Library Resources on Students' Learning: A Concept Paper

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ABSTRACT Learners need information which is relevant, current and timely so as to succeed in their school work. The aim of this paper is to examine the influence of school library resources on students' learning. The paper further looks at the importance of libraries in students' academic performance. It is recommended that the collaboration between the teaching and library staff is a crucial factor in nurturing the learners' learning development and augmenting their learning achievement. Furthermore, collaboration between the school and the public library should be considered as an option to provide learners with access to adequate information that they need in order to succeed in their academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries play an important role in the provision of information needed by members of the community where they find themselves. According to Hilts (2016), school libraries provide information in different formats to supplement the textbook so that learners can be able to have adequate information to do their work. As a result of lack of well-stocked school libraries, there is lack of reference works such as ready references-dictionaries, encyclopaedias as well as the recent types of reference services such as e-mail, web forms, Instant messaging chat as well as video-conferencing (James 2002). Teachers are not able to refer learners to make use of other reference sources in the library in their relevant subjects. Learners too, cannot refer to relevant materials in order to supplement textbook information for the purpose of writing their assignments and projects (Chorum 2016).

What is a School Library?

Fuegi and Jennings (2004: 98) argue that,

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Libraries attached to all types of schools and colleges below the third [tertiary] level of education whose primary function is to serve the pupils and teachers of such a school. It may also serve the general public. This includes libraries and resource collections in all educational institutions below the third level which may be described as "Colleges", "Colleges of further education", "Vocational Institutes", etc. Please verify that the quotation is correct.

Mission of a School Library

A particular educational mission of a school library within a comprehensive background is as follows:

"The school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. School Libraries link to the wider library and information network in accord with the principles in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto" (IFLA-UNESCO 2006).

School Libraries Access to Information

Equal Education (EE) (2010) points out that libraries provide access to much needed information and resources that will enable learners to explore their world of learning. According to

IFLA (2000: 12), the importance of libraries, especially the school libraries, is to instil in learners the love for reading, and to develop adults who will become responsible information users. According to studies conducted by Todd and Kuhlthau (2005) on how school libraries can help students with their learning, ninety-nine percent of students respond that the school library help them in both their school work and other issues outside the school.

Moreover, Lance (1994) conducted a seminal study using the quantitative approach in Colorado. The study indicates that both the library collection and the staff size play an important role in students' achievement in standardized tests. Most have used the relationship between functional libraries and well provided library services, and the students' achievement to indicate the importance of good library service provision in high test scores. Studies conducted in Illinois indicate that students from schools that have functional school libraries and well-staffed libraries are likely to perform and achieve higher test scores. Lance et al. (2000: 29) stress that 9 out of 10 schools with a full librarian perform at average or above levels in standardized tests, compared with 5 in 10 schools that had no librarians at all.

Equal Education (EE) started a campaign for school libraries in 2009. The slogan of this campaign was 1 school, 1 library, 1 librarian. The campaign was aimed at addressing the lack of libraries in South African public schools. The campaign's demands for school libraries were in line with the outcomes of local and international research which indicate a clear link between the provision of school libraries and improved learner performance.

According to EE (2011), a national policy that stipulates that each school be provided with a library as well as library stocks was published on the 10th of June 2010. Moreover, the minimum norms and standards for all schools are still to be finalised, while the plan to ensure that all South African schools, whether in rural or urban areas, should have a library with a librarian has to be implemented. Contrary to popular perceptions, according to EE, education is not equal in South Africa. While libraries play a critical role in building literacy by developing a culture of reading and instilling a love for reading, only 8 percent of schools have functional libraries.

The Importance of Library in Learners' Performance

The introduction of the OBE system in South Africa helped to clearly indicate lack of libraries especially in rural areas. With this kind of education system, learners are required to make use of the library to do their projects, research works, assignments, presentations etc. According to Morris (2004: 32) and Chorum et al. (2016), the school library provides different learning opportunities for both small and large groups, learners and individuals whose interests are on intellectual content and information literacy. Moreover, the school library is a special place for students to do independent work. Apart from being a place for learners to do their school work independently, school libraries also host special events such as author visits, book clubs, tutoring and testing.

Learner performance is concerned with skills development, acquisition of knowledge, analysis of ideas and results, and the integration of concepts and resources. School libraries enable teachers to strictly enforce scholarly work and increase performance for all learners. The school library or the library media program should form the focal point of the school. According to Smith (2002), "academic achievement is the heart of the philosophy and the accompanying programmes of the school." The library has five elements of power which can effectively increase the learners' achievement and love of learning. These elements are as follows:

- Access to library – this is concerned with the fact that the library media centre should serve as the physical and philosophical centre of the school.
- Data-driven – this has to do with the fact that services and materials should reflect the needs of the learning community and the instructional priorities of the school.
- Integration of technology – technology should be integrated within the instructional program of the school and parameters for use must be established.
- The connection between teaching and learning – the teaching learning process must be emphasized through the model of a teaching library, and librarians should behave and be treated as teachers.
- Advocacy – this is concerned with the commitment to information literacy which must permeate the culture of the school (Smith 2002).

According to LIASA, UNESCO and IFLA (2000), the school library is effective if it has the following characteristics:

- ♦ Supports the school curriculum as well as the learning program.
- ♦ Provides the resources and information that will meet the learners' and educators' needs.
- ♦ Plays an important part of the education system.
- ♦ Measures progress, checking actual performance by comparing it with standard plans on a regular basis.

According to Karlsson (1996) and Karson (2003), the change from the old system of education to the new system, that is, the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) encourages creativity, critical thinking and life-long learning. This calls for functional libraries to provide resources that support learning. Outcomes-based Education has to do with skills, knowledge and attitudes. OBE goes hand in hand with resources. In other words, for OBE to be successful, there is a need for enough resources. Karlsson (1996) argues that learners should be exposed to adequate resources so that they will be able to perform well in OBE. Fuller and Hyneman (1989) think that most South African secondary schools are under-performing academically because of lack of libraries. Moreover, over 60 studies in developing countries show that learning resources such as textbooks and library services influence the learners' academic performance.

Barnes (1992) indicates that teachers' perceptions of the importance of information in teaching and learning is of vital importance. While Brown (1998: 13), on the other hand, is of the opinion that it is necessary that teachers change their perceptions on how students should learn. Maepa and Mhinga (2003) agree that the majority of South African teachers and curriculum planners did not have the opportunity to use a library when they were still at school.

According to Kim (2011), Japan's national curriculum standards were reviewed in order to find out how school libraries function in the Japanese situation. Current studies investigate the school library usage in Japanese schools. Kim (2011) states that school libraries in Japan are highly considered in supporting the school curriculum. They are also regarded as instructional resource, reading and information literacy centres. Moreover, Japan's School Library Act states that all schools should have a library building

that will be able to support the school curriculum as well as to develop learners into responsible adults. This was made to materialize through the implementation of the law that provides for the relationship between the school library and the school curriculum. In Japan, four levels of planners are responsible for developing the school curriculum, namely, the national administration, the local board, the individual school and the individual teacher. This means that the school library will be able to consider the school curriculum on all levels – ranging from the national administration to the individual teacher.

According to Barton (2006), there are changes in the public school library program as a result of the study by Keith Curry Lance, PhD, recent Director of Library Research Service of the Colorado State Library and the University of Denver during the early 1990's. Todd et al. (2004) write that a number of studies were conducted to find out if there is a positive impact between a good or quality library media program and learners' academic achievement. According to school libraries work (2006), a number of studies indicate that there is a link between a good/quality school library program and learner academic performance. Todd et al. (2004) agree with Scholastic's (2006) view that a number of studies conducted state-wide about school libraries indicate that the school library services do help students to achieve better academically.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilized for this paper was explored by means of a logical literature review making use of a mixture of both the contextual and conceptual review methods. A considerate and well-informed review of appropriate literature places the researcher in a structure of complementary study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the American Association of School Librarians (2007) and Afolabi (2016), school libraries make available, reasonable, substantial and knowledgeable approach to the materials and instruments needed for students in a sincere, motivating and protected atmosphere. School librarians cooperate with teachers, administrators and support staff to offer training, learning approaches, and practice in

utilizing indispensable learning abilities required in the 21st century.

The American Association of School Librarians (2014) and Soria et al. (2016) claim that research in educational performance and school librarianship has a powerful basis of above 25 correlational investigations in which teacher librarians' accomplishments and school library programs have been surveyed in association with student learning and teacher corroboration. The findings of these investigations propose that harmonizing research should be undertaken to find out a fundamental association among the valuable functions of teacher librarians and the formation of aggravated, involved and quick-thinking students.

According to Pribesh et al. (2011), research advocates that effective school library programs and professionally qualified teacher librarians offer learners reading and learning seats which is not reasonable. Professionally qualified teacher librarians from elementary schools to universities or academic libraries should be supported by policy makers and decision makers concerning school libraries and libraries in general. This should be amplified by proof that is both scientific and able to be generalized in order to confirm sufficient library collections and a reasonable approach to school library activities and curriculums that will assist learners attain educational accomplishment.

Research substantiates that access to library collection is the most important objective of school libraries because access to books is a crucial influence that improves learner's academic achievement. Access to books also develops and instills the love for, and reading of, books in learners. In addition, it has a definite consequence on academic attainments. It also counteracts the influence of poverty. The results of these studies reveal that learners from poor backgrounds achieve badly in their academic work because they are from families without books, while on the other hand, their parents cannot read, and as such cannot teach their children or read to them. Unfortunately, only one survey indicates that learners from poor families who attend schools in which a large number of learners are from poor family backgrounds are the ones who have prejudiced access to schools that are stocked. Anything that has to do with improved academic performance is influenced by the learners' accessibility to library resources.

The more learners are exposed to books, the more they read them extensively (Frances 2013).

The vast majority of learners believe that the school library plays an important role in their educational achievement. If learners are provided with a fully-fledged school library and a chance to frequent the library, it results in increased library attendance (Bleidt 2011). An investigation of 44 surveys uncovered that the availability and access to print library collections develop learners' educational achievement. It contributes in assisting learners to learn the fundamentals of reading and learning to learn, it triggers learners to read more for an extensive time, and yields upgraded attitudes with regard to reading and learning between learners (Lindsay 2010). Learners' positive academic performance is attributed to improved availability and accessibility to library collection (Lindsay 2010; Krashen 2011).

Conclusions from investigations of student discernments suggest that the school library is beyond being simply a location to borrow out books. Library services should also render materials for research, a silent space for reading and writing, the location for students to work cooperatively with qualified library staff that should be made available to encourage student learning (Bleidt 2011).

There is an unquestionable and statistical association among progressive educational achievements and professional qualified school librarian or teacher librarian recruitment tendencies. The Colorado study reveals that school libraries with at least a professional teacher or school librarian have an influence on the academic performance of learners and students as compared to school libraries without a professionally qualified school or teacher librarian (Williams 2013).

We are living in a society where we all need information to succeed. A woman making fat cakes under the tree needs information on how to make *bestselling* of her fat cakes; fashion designers need information on how to design and sew top leading clothes. Teachers need information to succeed in their teaching, while learners need information to succeed in their studies. All companies, government departments, schools and individuals who are successful have information at their disposal. Literature (Hendrikz et al. 1998), indicate that due to the lack of school libraries, the public libraries are

working under pressure. This was attributed to the budget cut-back that was failing the libraries.

The context in which school libraries operate was non-existent in the African continent until now, with the consequent implications for student learning (Maepa and Mhinga 2003). In particular, the following trends suggest the need for a closer look at the potential role of school libraries in relation to student achievement in the previously advantaged areas in South African schools; lack of functional school libraries in the rural areas; lack of adequate stock of library materials that are in the level of the learners; lack of qualified teacher librarians employed in school libraries who are responsible for library work only without being given other subjects to teach; an explosion in information production and the development of increasingly sophisticated information communication technologies (ICT) and; changes in the educational system, including a greater focus on the learning outcomes. This correlates with literature that teachers and curriculum planners should share a common understanding of resource-based curriculum with the librarians in order to acknowledge the importance of the library in supporting the school curriculum (Maepa and Mhinga 2003; Soria et al. 2016).

Learners learn more, get better grades, and score high in standardized test scores than their peers in schools without good libraries. The department of education should appreciate that a modern school should have a rich library that functions as a learning centre, supported by a curriculum and methods of teaching that enable pupils to develop learning strategies and adapt to a knowledge-based society. Moreover, the education authority should also be able to develop school libraries according to the academic criteria that specifies appropriate information resources for both teachers and pupils. But this is not the case because libraries are not well funded; instead funds that are supposed to be directed to the development of the library are redirected to do other things. Hart (2000) holds the view that the pressure put on public libraries leads to low morale on the part of librarians. Maepa and Mhinga (2003: 270) and Todd et al. (2011) support Hart's (2000) view and argue that Curriculum 2005 is dependent on sources for its success. Yet both the school and public libraries have deteriorated some few years ago. As a result, the introduction of OBE in the South Af-

rican education system can be regarded as an irony because of the poor state of the libraries.

Moreover, information explosion is a consequence of the mass production of information. This is where the library comes into play because it plays an important role in separating important information from less important information (chaff). It is the duty of the library to select relevant materials that are suitable for the level of learners that will enable them to perform well academically. Current relevant and timely information, plays an important role in learners' academic performance. The library plays an important role in providing the information needed by both the teachers to succeed in their teaching and the learners to succeed in their learning. On the contrary, lack of access to a range of desired books, the quality of books stocked for reading and borrowing, and online resources and information that meet local needs, are prevailing situations in Nigerian libraries and are key factors capable of hindering their utilization (Ajegbomogun and Salaam 2010). Current books, periodicals, magazines, fictions and non-fictions that can support teaching and attract users to the school libraries are not available or they are inadequate.

Those who have originated and financed libraries, or contributed collections to them, have accomplished so in the understanding that they have been supplementing tanks of knowledge for which there is no replacement. The importance of libraries has frequently been assessed with regard to the dimension of their collection (Hoare 2006; Chorum et al. 2016).

CONCLUSION

The way in which school libraries are furnished has an effect on learners' academic achievement. If the school library is not well equipped, it will not be able to satisfy the demands of various subjects/ learning areas that learners have registered for. As a result of lack of relevant library sources, the academic performance of learners is affected, and their results become very poor. The lack of libraries results in the lack of motivation to read beyond the textbooks, which in turn impacts negatively on learners' performance, leading to poor results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the challenges regarding the provision of library collection to learners to do

their academic work, the following are recommended. A qualified professional teacher librarian/ school librarian/information specialist should be employed so that he/she will add value to the functioning of the library. There is a need for collaboration between professional teacher librarians or school librarians and support staff in the school so as to create an environment that is conducive to learning. This should be coupled by satisfactory library resources, library facilities and effective library services. This collaboration between the teaching and the library staff is a crucial factor in nurturing the learners' learning development and augmenting the learners' learning achievement. Furthermore, the collaboration between the school library and the public library should be considered as an option for providing learners with access to adequate information that they need to succeed in their academic performance.

The Department of Basic Education should consider introducing in-service training to teacher librarians who are not qualified teachers so that they will be able to manage and provide service to learners.

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