

Conceptualizing the Importance of Libraries in Student Academic Performance: A Brief Review

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ABSTRACT This paper concentrates on the importance of libraries in student academic performance. Consideration is given to studies undertaken by other researchers. The aim of this paper is to examine by means of a systematic literature review the importance of libraries in the students' academic performance. It focuses on school library policy, functional library, library collections, public libraries, and librarians, the aims of a functional library as well as the importance of the school library. The school library is a source center catering to learning and teaching materials of different formats, that is, print and non-print materials. The paper recommends that schools should be provided with school libraries, which are well equipped with library resources that are relevant and at the level of that school in the school premises that it is operating.

INTRODUCTION

Ocholla (2009) and Hicks (2015) asserted that knowledge society and information cannot be mentioned without mentioning the library. While on the other hand, Africa is one of the largest continents in the world and the poorest economically, and this resulted in a lack of school libraries in African countries. The available libraries were to serve the colonists, the educated and the economically rich. However, according to the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (2006), a school library should provide information to enable students to advance in their studies and lifelong learning skills so that they will become responsible adults. According to Jones (1990) and Ghalib (2016), the library is a central and most important part of the area or system, which all other parts connect to. Gibbs (1990) and Owusu-Acheaw (2014) contended that learners should no longer depend on the textbook only but should also use library sources. The methods used for assessing learners include not only written examinations but also the portfolios of work, projects and assignments, which resulted in learning and teaching being resource based. There is now a shift from teach-

er-orientated education to learner-orientated education system, which mainly depends on the provision of libraries.

School Library Policy

According to Stadler (1991) and Department of Basic Education (2012), a school library policy is essential in giving direction and shaping the development of libraries. It is also necessary that such a policy be developed by different stakeholders such as the organizations involved in education, teachers, parents as well as the communities. However, in South Africa the apartheid legislation and practice have crippled the support services for the education system.

The implementation of the OBE curriculum, which is learner-centered and resource based entirely depends on libraries, which most of the South African schools, especially the rural areas, do not have. The school libraries are the heart, as they provide knowledge. De Vries (2002) and Le Roux (2002) maintained that information provision of various types of educational sources is of major importance in as far as OBE is concerned. Moreover, lack of a national school library policy in South Africa is also a blow to the school library profession, because it has a negative impact on both the provision of school library service rendering and the school curriculum. De Vries (2002) and Mojapelo (2015) are also of the opinion that there is a need for curriculum and training, and identified needs

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such as national school library policy and standards, legislation funding, provisioning and advisory structures.

Nassembeni (1994) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2016) are of the opinion that the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) is of importance to the library profession part and yet biased in as far as resource provision to school libraries is concerned. The NEPI was in favor of library cooperation between the school and the public library so as to improve the provision of resources. Le Roux (2002) and Lor (2015) pointed out that the report of the President's Education Initiative (PEI) Research Project, confirms that lack of learning materials in the previously disadvantaged schools have a negative impact on the academic performance of learners in these schools.

The Importance of the School Library

According to Jange and Surpur (2008), teachers are the ones that orientate themselves on the role of the library and thereafter encourage and motivate the students to develop the reading culture as well as motivating and enabling the librarian to perceive their role in developing school library services. Jange and Surpur (2008) asserted that the importance of school libraries particularly in the Indian context concerning the school curriculum has some challenges to support the school curriculum and to develop the collaboration among school libraries. Moreover, Jange and Surpur (2008) regarded the library as the soul, core and pivot on which the academic activities in the school should revolve. As a result of the current information age in which education has shifted from the teacher-centered to learner-centered, it demands more than only a school to develop a learner or student who is well groomed and trained on how to think logically, critically and creatively. Foo (1999) and Isebe (2015) are of the opinion that attention should be given to school libraries in such a way that they are well resourced, sufficiently staffed, and there be change for development, growth and expansion because libraries are important in supporting the new type of education which is learner-oriented. Ranganathan (1962) and Isebe (2015) stated that the modern understanding of education is that it should be equipped with adequate resources so that the school's activities will be based on the school library.

Hart (2004) and Nkondo (2015) are of the opinion that the educational change in South Africa has a negative impact on the public libraries because there is pressure on the public libraries as a result of curriculum 2005, which is dependent on the resources for success. Moreover, these libraries are playing a vital role in supporting the learning program of learners. According to Hart (2004) and Nkondo (2015), a new model of library services relevant to the needs of learners in South Africa is necessary, unlike the adopted libraries of the Western tradition or countries. While on the other hand, Fullan (1991) and Mchunu and Imenda (2015) emphasized that in the past the education system of the entire world was concerned about producing people who can think logically and be able to solve problems, that is the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) approach reflects the international style. According to Lombo (2002), the methods used for assessing learners include not only written examinations but also the portfolios of work, projects and assignments, which resulted in learning and teaching being resource based. There is now a shift from teacher-orientated education to learner-orientated education system, which mainly depends on the provision of libraries.

According to Durrance (1991) and Ojijambo and Kasalu (2015), public libraries were prominent during the 19th century. Furthermore, Durrance (1991: 279) and Obasi (2015) identified four main aspects that need in-depth research so as to be able to match the information needs of the 21st century, namely:

- ♦ Access to information
- ♦ Information needs
- ♦ Library funding
- ♦ Public library's role in education

Issak (2000) indicated that the African countries have inherited a model of public librarianship that does not reflect the real situation. On the other hand, Sturges and Neill (1998) and Mutshewa (2015) reflected that there was a decreased usage of the public libraries, which was attributed to the lack of relevance to the potential users. They added that the demographics of African countries should shift away from the direct supportive role of the Western mode to playing a more active role in formal education.

The Aims of a Functional Library

Egesimba et al. (2011) stressed that the library is not just a library but a functional library

service plays an important role in the child's learning starting from as early as pre-school to secondary school level. According to Egesimba et al. (2011) a school library is said to be functional if it has enough library collection. As a result a school library can be seen as the library that is found in the school premises both the primary and secondary schools housing both the learning and teaching support materials to support the school curriculum. The school library should also be able to provide information materials in different formats. Ogunmilade (1995), Udofia (1997) and Saunders (2015) indicated that the aims of a functional library should be the following:

- ♦ Develop the reading skills
- ♦ Instill the love for reading in the learners
- ♦ Provide access to needed information
- ♦ Develop the intellect of the reader
- ♦ Encourage reading
- ♦ Develop a habitual adult reader

Literature (Ebozoje 1990; Kolade 1998; Dike 2004, Agbo 2015; Williams et al. 2015) agrees that the school library has the following functions:

- ♦ The school library plays an important role in supporting the school programs by providing the library collection readily available to learners, teachers, as well as the community members.
- ♦ It also provides learners with preferred information sources according to their age, sex and level.
- ♦ Contributes in the selection of relevant library materials that will support the school curriculum.
- ♦ Making the school library collection accessible for use by students within the schools premises and also at home.
- ♦ Providing the students with the study area, which is conducive to learning. This paper aims to examine by means of systematic literature review the importance of libraries in students' academic performance.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Library Collection of a Functional Library

Egesimba (2011) asserted that a functional school library should contain a library collection that is made up by both print and non-print materials, such as for example textbooks, fictions, newspapers, film projectors, radio, television,

maps, charts, tape recorders and reference items. Egesimba (2011) reiterated that the school library collection is made up by both the print and non-print material, with the books forming the largest part of the school library collection, while non-print material is made up of photographs, sliders, audio tapes, film strips, motion films, video tapes and computer diskettes. Moreover, all schools, both primary and secondary, should have functional libraries with adequate materials including beginners' books, books in the curriculum, and encyclopedias. Fayose (1998) and Sigh and Khan (2015) stated that the advancement of technology in the information field has resulted in the introduction of e-resources, which are made available for learners. Furthermore, development and science and technology paved way for print media to be made available in electronic format to support the school curriculum.

Library Cooperation between the School Library, the Public Library and Other Support Services

Literature (Van der Walt 1981; Brooke-Norris 198P; Niven 1987; Fasola 2015) reflected that the role of public libraries in supporting school pupils is being a burden on the public libraries because the collection of the public library does not include the school curriculum work. On the other hand, Stiwel and Bell (2003) assert that the learners in South Africa use the library so as to meet their curricular information need stated that, as a result of lack of school libraries to cater for their information needs, library cooperation between the school library and the public library can be used as an alternative. Library cooperation between the school library and the public library was suggested by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) in 1992. Public libraries and school libraries have roles that complement each other (Le Roux 2001; Abgullahi and Abubakar 2015).

Library service provision plays an important role in the school guidance program. As a result, the school library should be the place where different materials are housed for use by learners, while on the other hand, teacher librarians should collaborate with school counselors for the sake of learners. Lor (1998) and Haycoch (2006) emphasized that most of the schools in South Africa lack functional libraries as well as a professional librarian, and as a result the public

libraries can be used alternatively to provide learners with sources of information.

Frequency of Library Use

According to Aicheson (2006), community libraries are different from public libraries, and they are as diverse as their aims and functions. Moreover, the library and information services (LIS) Transformation Charter of 2009 referred to the government funded public libraries as the community library. On the other hand, Hart (2010) is of the opinion that a community library can be regarded as a public library that serves a small area as compared to the area serviced by the public library.

Hart (2010) indicated that the Charter's vision is that libraries should be accessible to all, but only ten percent of the people in South Africa use the public libraries with the majority of school learners using the public library. Most of the people in South Africa regard the library collection as relevant to and meant for the educated, the rich and students. During the LIASA conference in the past years, the librarians showed that they are concerned and in favor of building community services, which are relevant to developing countries and that would cater for people from all walks of life.

Michie and Holton (2005) reflected that most of the school administrators do not see the impact of school libraries on the learners' academic performance. After the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) the school libraries were regarded as a serious part of education. This Act aimed at equalizing education for all learners. This Act helped close the gap between the disadvantaged and the advantaged in as far as access to education is concerned. Moreover, it also helped shed light on the government on the critical need for school libraries and related them to better learner academic performance. The government decided that the set of standards be recognized so as to ensure equal library services to all learners irrespective of their background. Moreover, Michie and Holton (2005) indicated that school libraries had an opportunity to apply for funding.

Librarians

Arko-Cobbah (2004) indicated that, as a result of the changes in the South African educa-

tion system to the OBE, education has become student-centered and libraries play a vital role in student-centered learning. Lecturers are responsible for teaching the subject content while on the other hand the librarian is responsible for making the students to be information literate, so that they will be able to locate information in the library and also in the information sources. However, the librarians have a little more difficult challenge when faced with students from the disadvantaged areas. Arko-Cobbah (2004) and Rabourn et al. (2015) argued that at the higher institutions of learning different types of students are found who are from different backgrounds and pursuing different qualifications, which make the work of librarians even more difficult. As a result the librarian is faced with the following challenges of lifelong learning, learning to learn, the need to accommodate different learning styles, customization as well as alternative learning routes of the students. It is therefore important that the librarians should concentrate on student from the disadvantaged areas so that they will be able to succeed with the student-centered learning approach (Zorana 2003; Foasberg 2015).

The American Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published standards regarding information literacy, competencies and the performance indicators. Cahoy (2002) and Morin (2013) reflected that the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) document is based on the Association of Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) standard so as to consolidate the idea of information literacy in education. Furthermore, Carr and Rockman (2003) indicated that academic librarians were compelled to work in collaboration with their colleagues so as to enable learners to achieve better in higher education. High school libraries lay the foundation on how to make effective use of the libraries, information and resources whereas the learner will be expected to use the library fruitfully at college level.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper was explored by means of a systematic literature review by making use of a combination of both contextual and conceptual review methods. A considerate and informed review of appropriate literature places the researcher in a context of contrasting study.

RESULTS

Neuman (2002) indicated that the twenty first century libraries contain both the virtual as well as the physical library. Moreover, the libraries have changed from being a passive repository building to being a place where information literacy takes place, with the manual card catalogue having changed into the computerized catalogue known as the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Moreover, as a result of online databases, reference sources that were not to be borrowed and taken out of the library can now be accessed anywhere. Library cooperation between the school library and the public library was suggested by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) in 1992. Public libraries and school libraries have roles that complement each other (Le Roux 2001; Bon and Broekhof 2014). The effective use of both these libraries will allow easy access to information for students, which will in turn contribute to improved performances.

DISCUSSION

According to Smalley (2004) and Association of College and Research Libraries (2015), college students who achieve higher credits are those students who attend their high school where they had a functional school library, a library program and a professional teacher librarian. Academic librarians are aware of the issue that some students are information literate as compared to those from disadvantaged schools. Information literacy plays an important role in this information society in which one is living in preparing one for better academic success and career world. It is therefore important that learners have information skills while still in elementary and secondary schools so as to make effective use of available information resources. It is not surprising that according to Smalley (2004) and Association of College and Research Libraries (2015), studies conducted during the last decade indicated that schools with school library programs, a professional librarian, where librarians work in collaboration with teachers or faculty, where there is sufficient staff and adequate collections have an impact on the student academic achievement.

This is in consistence with literature that Australia and New Zealand are still the only plac-

es where joint use of school libraries and public libraries exist in a mutual awareness, understanding and partnership. Moreover, mutual support based on advocacy to achieve effective cooperation between the school libraries and public libraries should be at the following levels of local, state and national. Furthermore, Hart (2010) conducted a study, which aimed to establish the feasibility of library cooperation or joint use of libraries between the school and the public libraries as a result of lack of school libraries. Hart (2010) found that lack of cooperation between the public library, school, as well as other career guidance service providers crippled the support for learners.

It is justifiable that according to Le Roux (1999) and Mojapelo (2015), the school library professionals are worried about the lack of school library policy. As a result, Knuth (1995) and Mojapelo (2015) are of the opinion that a well-formulated policy can have a positive contribution towards the library development, while on the other hand a not well-formulated policy may hinder the progress of library development. Knuth (1995) and Kimani (2015) further stated that the education policymakers in South Africa do not consider the importance of school libraries in teaching and learning. In addition, Overduin and De Wit (1986) and Equal Education (2011) indicated that the education policy concerning school libraries in Black secondary schools is not well defined.

Therefore it is logical that Neuman (2002) pointed out that public school libraries in the United States have changed very much in the 21st century. School libraries are no longer frightening territories filled with unknown articles. The libraries were quiet places with librarians always seeing to it that no noise is made in the library. Now the libraries in the USA have taken another form of being an active, engaging and being an open place with librarians participating in encouraging and supporting the learners to make effective use of the library. It is also understandable that Neuman (2002) indicated that the 21st century libraries contain both the virtual as well as the physical library. Moreover, the libraries have changed from being a passive repository building to being a place where information literacy takes place, with the manual card catalogue having changed into the computerized catalogue known as the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Moreover, as a result of on-

line databases, reference sources that were not to be borrowed and taken out of the library can now be accessed anywhere.

CONCLUSION

Moreover, school library provision plays an important role in as far as literacy and other developments in education are concerned. On the other hand, development in transforming the library system is crippled by the Department of Education and Training (DET), as a result of unequal allocation of resources in South African education. In addition, the transformation of the national curriculum, which is dependent on library resources, calls for the change of school libraries, unlike during the apartheid regime with Bantu Education, which was dependent on the teacher as the one who provides knowledge to learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools should be provided with school libraries that are well equipped with library resources that are relevant and at the level of that school in the school premises that it is operating. For example if the library is meant to serve the primary school learners, let the library resources be simple to read, interesting with the print size suitable for their age group.

The students should be trained on how to use the library and information sources effectively. As a result it is important that each and every school regardless of whether is a primary school or a secondary school should be staffed with a well-qualified teacher librarian or school librarian who will be able to offer the library education to students as well as providing them with user guidance and advice in the use of library material.

LIMITATIONS

Only schools in developed countries have school libraries and have knowledge of how libraries work, while on the other hand, most of schools in the developing countries do not have any form of school libraries and as a result do not understand how libraries operate.

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