

The Indispensable Roles of the School Librarian in a School: A Brief Review

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KEYWORDS Information. Search Strategy. Specialist. Library Services. School Curriculum. Media Centre. Teacher

ABSTRACT One cannot discuss school libraries without touching the role of school librarians. For a library to be effective there need to be a professional librarian. The aim of the paper was to identify the roles played by school librarians in the school vicinity. The paper highlighted that the teacher librarian or school librarian should be well qualified as a teacher and a librarian so as to be able to play his/her role in teaching, and providing the library services. The researcher made some recommendations based on literature that every school library should be staffed by a professional school librarian who will be able to effectively perform his/her librarian duties maximally. School librarians should also be trained as a teacher as well as be trained as a librarian so that they are competent in their duties.

INTRODUCTION

According to Henri et al. (2002) and Baker (2016), the teacher-librarian has 3 main functions, namely: teaching literacy and information literacy; to consult and collaborate with the teaching staff and to act as an information manager by identifying gaps in the information; he also finds out the type of information that the learners and teachers need so as to provide them with their needed information. The school librarians are also responsible for developing the collection of reading, learning and information resources according to the school curriculum, as well as providing the access to those particular resources while on the other hand managing it.

The term teacher-librarian in this study is used to refer to a person who is qualified as a teacher and has undergone library training to qualify as a teacher-librarian. The teacher-librarian has sound knowledge on how to provide library services to the learners and the community as a whole. They have the responsibility of making sure that their school libraries house the library collections that is relevant to the information needs of the learners in that particular

school by participating in the selection of books taking into consideration that selected information resources will be able to supplement the school curriculum (Henri et al. 2002; Rosa 2016).

The Role of School Librarians

Fairer-Wessels and Machet (1993), Lund (1989), Mostert (1998) and Rosa (2016) are of the opinion that the community library with the aid of librarian is designed to meet the information needs of that particular community in which it serves and offer various and take the initiative service as compared to what the public libraries offer as they are designed to meet the information need of the Western communities, which are far different from the information needs of the African communities. Integral in these intentions are the expectations of the community's information needs or research that is to embark onto measure these information needs, the delivery of bodily space for progressive accomplishments, the community participating in as far as library issues are concerned as well as the participation of the librarians in community library matters.

Thomas and Perritt (2003) state that in many schools, school libraries are staffed by librarians, teacher-librarians, or school media specialists who hold a specific Library Science degree. In some jurisdictions school librarians are required to have specific certification and/or a teaching certificate (Morris 2004; Thomas and Perritt 2003). The school librarian has four main leadership roles namely: Teaching, Instruction-

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al partner, Information specialist, as well as Program administrator. This means that there is emphasis on qualifications for teacher librarians here in to be considered as a teacher librarian. This is an indication that there is a need for urgent attention in training the teacher librarians in schools. School libraries are only able to perform its role effectively if there is a qualified teacher librarian who will be able to assist in selecting library books that will help to develop the reading culture of learners.

Teacher Librarians as an Instructional Partner

School librarians can also teach the learners information search strategies so that they can effectively search and retrieve relevant information. In some school libraries in which catalogues are computerised, the librarian is also responsible for training the learners on how to use OPAC to search and locate information. Moreover, the school libraries can also assist learners by interpreting retrieved information and advise them on how to use the information to answer or to compile their assignments. They are also responsible for teaching learners library education so that the learners will make effective use of their school libraries. Furthermore apart from managing the school they also take part in activities concerned with school administration as well as development of school curriculum (Morris 2004; Thomas and Perritt 2003). Therefore, teacher librarians are expected to be competent professionals to be able to provide the library services to learners as well as training learners on how to effectively use the library and information sources.

The School Librarian as a Teacher

In the school library the school librarian plans, develops, coordinates and implements curricula in connection to information literacy and review. The school librarian may tell learners story during the story hour period; may also read to them, advise them in selecting books, help them with their school projects as well as their homework. School librarians may also make use of "Flexible Schedule". A Flexible Schedule means that rather than having students come to the library for instruction at a fixed time every week, the classroom teacher schedules library time when library skills or materials are needed

as part of the classroom learning experience (Morris 2004). As the instructional partner the school librarians collaborate with the subject teachers to develop self-determining learner by nurturing learner's research, information literacy, technology, as well as critical skills (Morris 2004). The teacher librarian is required to involve all learners as a result should be able to use different activities and programmes so as to make effective library service delivery.

The School Librarian as an Information Specialist

The school librarians create a resource foundation for the learners by making use of the school curriculum and learner's enthusiasm to recognise and attain library collections organizing it according to a specific classification system as well as sustaining the library resources so as to encourage independent reading and lifelong learning in learners. The school librarian also facilitates the use of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) for enabling ease of access of materials in the library's collection (Morris 2004). The school librarian's role as an information specialists embraces also the accomplishments in connection to technology as well as the incorporation of materials in various forms, such as for example "periodical databases, Websites; digital video segments; podcasts; blog and wiki content; digital images; virtual classrooms; etc. School librarians are also in charge of audio-visual apparatus and are sometimes responsible for school computers as well as computer networks. They also perform the circulating activities as well as cataloguing materials, facilitate interlibrary loans, shelve materials, perform inventory, etc. (Morris 2004). It is evidence enough that the collection should be arranged according to a certain system so that it will be possible to access the books in the library collection. This is also an indication that there is a need for urgent attention to train teacher librarians on how to arrange the collection according to the library requirements so as to facilitate ease of access to the library collection by both teachers and learners.

The School Librarian as Program Administrator

They work in collaboration with the school community to describe the policies of the school

library program as well as to director and instruct all pursuits associated to it. As the program administrator the teacher librarian is also responsible for making the most of the competence and effectiveness of the school library program by doing the following:

- Constantly developing the school library program making use of strategic planning.
- Ensures the arrangement of the school library program goals and objectives with the school and district long-range strategic plans.
- Engaging operational management values, including the administration of employees, sources, and facilities in developing and executing goals and objectives.
- Producing evidence in practice that display effectiveness and significance of the school library instructional program.
- Administering and assessing backing staff like for example educational assistants, computer education assistants, and volunteers as well as students assistance.
- Employ proof of exercise especially in relations of learning results, to back up program goals and planning.
- The accomplishment of resource-based studying in a setup for all learners.
- Offer reading resources and resource-based programs in applicable languages.
- Acquire and administer resource funds and be responsible to school administration.
- Organise the roles and everyday duties of the library resource centre staff and volunteers (American Association of School Librarians 2010; School Libraries Association of South Australia (SLASA) 2008).

METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review was adopted in this paper by making use of a combination of equally the contextual and conceptual review methods. A considerate and informed review of appropriate literature places the researcher in a framework of conflicting study.

RESULTS

The school librarian collaborate with all teachers in the school premises through the grade levels and subject fields. They also co-

operate with other staff member to work with all students during the course of the students' educational period. Apart from being instructional leaders in their schools who serve on curriculum, school improvement, and planning committees, they also frequently provide professional development to their co-workers in fields associated with instructional and technology resources.

Teacher librarians in cooperation with subject teachers can assist in nurturing essential skills for learners' achievement as well as cultivating information literacy, the skills to solve problems, communication as well as logical thinking (Ontario Library Association 2015). According to Reimer (2016), it is of paramount importance that teacher librarians play an important part in the application and accomplishment of the reading program and also to make sure that the investors have precise extents of the syllabus that offer applicable response concerning its implementation.

The availability of a quality school library staffed with a professional qualified teacher librarian benefits the learners attending in that type of school where there is an additional reading program (Hughes 2014).

DISCUSSION

One cannot discuss school libraries without touching the role of school librarians. For a library to be effective there need to be a professional librarian. It is therefore not surprising that Mnkeni and Nassimbeni (2007) assert that, "Teacher librarians and teacher librarianship training were acknowledged as important for the management and running of school libraries. The teacher librarians acknowledged that the training organised by the pilot project had helped them to operate their school libraries." Moreover, Evans (2014) and Freedom of Access to Information (2016) argue that most public schools do not have a delegated teacher-librarian who is dedicated to library purposes only, which is one of the barriers in the effective use of libraries that needs to be addressed. As a result, there is also a need for teacher librarians to undergo trainings of some sort to improve their competences in as far as library and information skills are concerned. It is logical therefore that teacher-librarians serve as librarians who render library services to the school com-

munity as a whole and apart from that, they have to teach other subject areas. School libraries are managed and maintained by the school librarians. They are also referred to as the school library media specialists or teacher-librarians (Wine 2016).

The economic status of South Africa is divided into two parts. With one part of South Africa being that biggest part of South Africa and is classified as the undeveloped world, and the other small part, which is classified as the developed world. With the industrialised world being information and resource- rich with the professional librarian assisting in the library while on the other hand the larger part of South Africa which is classified as the unindustrialised world, is information and resource- poor, and their libraries are not staffed with a professional librarian let alone the print material. As a result the standard of libraries in the small parts of South Africa is advanced as they are well equipped from print materials to electronic resources.

The librarians need to work very hard so as to provide users with information in a reachable layout. This would incorporate that the librarians have to combine the “indigenous knowledge expertise from developed countries, local conditions, and package that information in a format that will be meaningful to the local inhabitants in their quest for relevant information (Raju and Raju 2010; Johnston 2011). Raju and Raju (2010) and Baker (2016) further indicated that there is the inconsistency in as far as the South African Library and Information Services (LIS) situation is concerned, which disobey the Republic of South Africa Constitution. Disobedience of the rights preserved in the constitution of South Africa was also extra elevated by the commitment from the whole world to the millennium Development Goals. There is however, a need for change in the way library provision is concerned in the country as a whole. The division between the two classes that is the minority and the majority should be faced out and the lack of libraries in rural areas be addressed.

CONCLUSION

The term school librarian is normally used to refer to someone who possesses a teaching qualification as well as a library qualification. School librarians are also referred to as teacher-librarians

who teach learners the school curriculum, train learners in library education and also provide them with the information they need for school work. However, in South Africa the term school librarian is often used to refer to a teacher who has been assigned the responsibility of running school library resources, whether these are housed in a centralised library, a classroom or storeroom. The school libraries, librarians collaborate with class teachers to enrich curriculum content, they help create more authentic learning experience. Secondly the school librarian through the school library’s collections inform, educate, entertain and enrich students at all levels. Students learn to use and explore information in a meaningful way and their literacy skills grow rapidly. Through libraries, school librarians motivate learners also learn how to learn.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that every school library should be staffed by a professional school librarian who will be able to effectively perform his/her librarian duties maximally. School librarians should also be trained as a teacher as well as be trained as a librarian so that they are competent enough in their duties.

School librarians should be responsible for library tasks only and not be given other teaching subject responsibilities to allow them ample time to provide learners with library services.

LIMITATIONS

Most of the schools especially in the rural areas have no school libraries. Those schools that are fortunate enough to have a school library are not staffed with a professional school librarian who was professionally trained to do the task. School librarians are not given a formal period in the school time-table to practice library activities or to train learners on how to use the school library.

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Paper received for publication on September 2016
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016