3-18-2019

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Shonhe, Liah, "A Consolidation of Challenges Faced by School Libraries in Developing Countries" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 2467.
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A Consolidation of Challenges Faced by School Libraries in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Achieving quality education is a challenge for many developing countries. One of the problems leading to this challenge is the inability of governments to invest in the development and management of effective school libraries. The school library is a hub of knowledge for students and teachers. Thus, it plays a paramount role in the ability of students to achieve the desired level of literacy and numeracy. As a result, school libraries need to be fully equipped and have effective library services to support the teaching and learning process. This paper enumerates the problems that hinder effective school library services in developing countries. The main aim is to provide a picture of the status of school libraries in developing countries. Of which, if the situation is not addressed it will be difficult for developing countries to reach their desired level of development and be knowledge based economies. These challenges include; poor staffing practices, poor funding, lack of a library policy, poor ICT infrastructure, poor library facilities, and lack of awareness of the importance of school libraries. The findings in this paper are based on literature review and author's own experience/observations. Only current sources which are within the 10 year window of publication were selected.

Keywords: Barriers to development, Developing countries, Challenges, Education, School libraries, Status of school libraries.

Introduction

Libraries are well known for promoting the progression of knowledge. The International Federation of Library Associations (2018) aver that libraries are key entities for achieving sustainable development goals. Therefore, governments need to put effective and efficient structures in place that facilitates easy access to timely and quality information. Such structures entail archival institutions and information repositories such as academic, public, school and special libraries. Of key interest to this study is challenges faced by school libraries worldwide.

This study chooses to focus on school libraries as they are within the foundations of the education system. Based on the author's experience and observations while conducting school library projects in Botswana, It was noticed that most school libraries are neglected though they play an important role in the teaching and learning process. School libraries worldwide are being ignored and not adequately resourced as they should be. As a result, they are not playing an effective role in supporting and enabling quality education. Hence this paper seeks to outline the challenges and possible solutions that can help school libraries to be effective and achieve their mandate.

Premise

A school library is a resource centre located within a school where teachers and students have access to a variety of information resources. According to Library Research Service (2014, para 3) a school library is

> *"a dedicated facility located in and administered by the school that provides at least the following: an organized, circulating collection of printed and/or audio-visual and/or computer-based resources, or a combination thereof; paid staff; an established schedule during which services of the staff are available to students and faculty; instruction on using library materials to support classroom standards and improve student research and literacy skills."*

A school library is vital to the learning and teaching activities of any school as it acts as an information hub and an innovation centre. A School library is a place where sustaining literacy, self-education and lifelong learning is inculcated and nurtured to children, pupils and students. Mkumbo (2016) concurs that, using libraries enable people to get opportunities to learn and educate themselves in various aspects related to their daily life as well as building knowledge and understanding of the World, making informed decisions and consequently working productively in solving problems. Some of the roles and functions of a school library include;

- Promoting a culture of reading and enhancing information literacy skills;
- Providing a place for collaborative learning, creativity and for developing independent research;
- Supporting all educational programs and the school curriculum; and
- Provide teachers with access to professional development materials (Ashikuzzaman, 2013; Queensland Government, 2014; School Library Association, 2016).

Helgren and Lance (2010) asserts that school libraries have a huge impact on student achievement. Thus they cannot be ignored in the teaching and learning process. As a result, it is vital for nations to be aware of challenges that affect the proper functioning of a school library and find solutions to tackling these solutions.

Discussion

This section discusses the various challenges that enumerated from the literature.

Table 1: Literature analyses on challenges faced by School libraries

Country	Source	Findings
South Africa	Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015)	-No national policy for school libraries which compels school governing bodies and principals to have a library in their schools. -No computers for children to use. -Lack of adequate funding - There was limited understanding of information literacy and the role of the librarian in facilitating this.
	Shandu, Evans and Mostert (2014)	-Teachers are not using school libraries in Katlehong because they are unable to provide relevant information services due to a lack of space; out-dated and inadequate information collections; uncatalogued and poorly organised books; inaccessible opening hours; and a lack of funds and networked computers.
	Mojapelo (2018)	-Staffing of library facilities is not yet a priority in most public high schools -Majority (73%) of the schools in rural communities had no library facility -Majority (123 or 79%) indicated that their schools do not have a library policy -Lack of professionally qualified or trained full time teacher-librarians -School libraries are not marketed
Ghana	Agyekum and Filson (2012)	-Poor funding, untrained library staff and poor facilities -Absence of school library legislation -Lack of marketing library services and raising awareness on its role.
	Omenyo (2016)	-Outdated reading materials and inadequate library collection -Teachers and library staff were not involved in book acquisitions, thus books acquired does not meet required user

		needs. Most of the library materials were acquired through donations.
Malawi	Malanga (2017)	-Lack of trained librarians -Lack of school library policy and standards -Lack of adequate financial resources -Poor ICT Infrastructure -Lack of information literacy skills among students
Botswana	Serema and Totolo (2017)	-Poor communication networks -High costs of maintaining ICT infrastructure -Limited access to ICT hardware and software -Lack of funding to provide ICT infrastructure -Digital and information divide -Neglect of ICT resources -Lack of computer /information illiteracy -Poor policy guidelines
Sri Lanka	Wickramanayake (2016)	-Majority of school libraries in Sri Lanka are run by less qualified school librarians with no professional librarianship qualification. -Scarcity of appropriate library buildings, inadequate funding, and lack of reading materials and other physical resources -Unavailability of dedicated time slots within the school timetable for library and information skills sessions had significantly decreased the library usage by students. -School librarians had negative attitudes towards their job
India	Singh (2009)	- Non availability of regular funds for acquiring reading materials -Inadequate space for keeping books -Less trained staff
Pakistan	Ramzan (2009), Tabassum, Batool, Ameen and Hassan (2018), Batool and Webber (2017)	-Lack of staff, budget, place and poor infrastructure issues -Lack of library facilities -Lack of automated library management system -In Pakistan, primary schools lack school libraries and offer limited services to children
Kenya	Mutungi (2012)	-No government policies on school libraries -Lack of financial support -Inability to embrace contemporary trends in technology

Nigeria	Lawal-Solarin (2016), Gbadamosi (2011), Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2011)	- Lack of up-to-date facilities -Inadequate staffing and funding -Unavailability of a library within the school -Inadequate government support -Inadequate infrastructure and equipment - Low level of information technology development
Tanzania	Benard and Dulle (2014)	-Restricted reading hours -Lack of sitting facilities -Lack of information professional/ librarian for processing materials
Namibia	Nengomasha, Uutoni and Yule (2012) Lizazi-Mbanga (2013)	-More than 80% of school libraries were not adequately resourced in terms of reading materials, equipment, staffing and hence the impact on academic performance was negligible. -School libraries are the lowest of priorities in educational spending,
Vietnam	Hossain (2016)	-Lack of qualified library staff -Poor cooperation between school and public libraries -Lack of budget and social value -Absence of reading promotion activities
Bangladesh	Hossain (2018)	-The importance of school libraries is overlooked by policy-makers -School libraries, where they exist, are usually used as free time space; these are not embedded in teaching and learning system. -School librarians are not allowed to contribute to the curriculum. -Lack of collaboration between teachers and librarians -Lack of book selection policy

In addition to the findings in the Table above, the researcher also observed that in various Botswana government senior secondary schools; the school library building is usually smaller, has uncatalogued books, lack computers and internet connection, insufficient budget, has outdated and insufficient books. The school libraries are usually managed by one teacher librarian who play a double role as a subject teacher and a librarian. This has resulted in the library work suffering as the teachers are more focused on the teaching role more than the librarianship role. As a result, the teachers and students do not fully benefit from the school library services as it is under staffed and the opening times are limited and controlled by the availability of a teacher librarian (inaccessible opening hours). These observations correspond

with what has been revealed in literature. For example; according to a report by Boelens (2012) published on behalf of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL); it was also revealed that school libraries in developing countries are facing the following problems;

- Books and information in the students' mother tongue are unavailable

- There is no central accommodation which provides access to books, information, audio-visual materials, other media, and reliable Internet access

- Lack of electricity

- People who run school libraries are often teachers, parents, volunteers and sometimes the children themselves, who have received various levels of (or virtually no) training in library and information science

- Some school library collections are inadequate with insufficient books for all the students in the school; books are often outdated, old and dirty

- Some schools do not have a room or special space for the school library

Conclusion

The findings in Table 1 above, depicts that school libraries face similar challenges across developing countries. Major themes derived from the literature analyses in Table 1 are as follows:

a) **Lack of a library policy:** This is a major downfall in most countries. A library policy is supposed to offer guidelines for actions and decisions to be taken within the library. Thus, without written guidelines it would be difficult to have effective school library programs. The policy should act as the roadmap to school library management practices.

b) **Poor staffing practices:** Almost all the studies reviewed lamented that there is poor staffing. It is either there is no qualified librarian or there is only one qualified librarian. Lack of professional staff in the library leads to further challenges such as irrelevant library collection, uncatalogued and poorly organised books. Malanga, (2017) aver that poor staffing leads to lack of information literacy among students. Unprofessional staff also result in inadequate marketing of library services and raising awareness on its role. While qualified librarians can contribute greatly to information literacy work in schools (Agyekum & Filson, 2012).

c) **Lack of adequate Funding:** poor funding lead to inadequate resources and poor staffing. The issue of school library budget and funding need to be addressed within the school library policy and the National school library policy within the Ministry of Education. Mojapelo (2018) affirm that lack of funding is a major stumbling block in school library development. This thwarts all efforts for the development and maitenance of functional school libraries.

d) **Poor ICT infrastructure:** In today's era, it is vital to have robust technological infrastructures within the education system. Unfortunately the situation in most school in developing countries is disheartening. As a result, opportunity for students to use ICT s for information access is limited. Lack of ICTs in school libraries results in continuous provision of outdated information resources.

e) **Poor library facilities:** In some cases, schools do not even have a school library. But in cases where the library is available, the facilities are outdated and not in good condition. There is need to build libraries which are purpose build in order to provide adequate reading, ICT and discussion spaces required by students.

f) **Lack of awareness:** libraries are not marketed and therefore users are not aware of their significance in education. Due to lack of marketing, school principals and headmasters do not appreciate the essential role of school libraries in the teaching/learning process

It is very clear in literature that school libraries are facing various challenges which can impact on students' academic achievement. The quality of school libraries in many developing countries is disreputably poor. Batool and Webber (2017) agree that school libraries are playing a limited role in developing reading habits and making children independent learners. Lizazi-Mbanga (2013) states that the school library is the heart of the school and the two organs are inseparable. This means that as long as school libraries are still facing these numerous challenges, basic education in developing countries will continue to be hindered.

Recommendations from the Literature

1. **Creation of a Public Relations Unit:** Agyekum and Filson (2012) suggest that, school libraries should create public relations unit to perform the following functions:
   - ✓ Sourcing funds to support the meagre government grants for school libraries
   - ✓ To create awareness and educate users on the recognition of the importance of the school libraries.

2. **Establishment of a school library fund:** There is need to introduce library levy which can be collected and managed by the school management committees, Parent Teacher Associations in collaboration with school authorities. The school library fund can help reduce dependence on government for library funds (Agyekum & Filson, 2012).

3. **Allocation of a library period:** Shandu, Evans and Mostert (2014) opines that, schools should allocate a specific library period to each class. This will allow for library orientation.

4. **Fast-track rural development:** developing countries should hasten the development of rural areas. This will enable teachers and learners, particularly those in historically disadvantaged rural communities, to access library materials in other amenities (Shandu, Evans, & Mostert, 2014). Rural development may also attract qualified librarians to relocate to rural school libraries.

5. **Establishment of a school libraries department:** according to Malanga (2017), governments should introduce a special department under the Ministry of Education to oversee the establishment, development and management of school libraries across the country.

6. **Collaboration between school and public libraries:** there is need to have strategies in place for collaboration efforts between public and school libraries. Hence, librarians should establish partnerships between public and school libraries in sharing knowledge in management practices and sharing of information resources (Malanga, 2017)

7. **Employees to take responsibility:** Latif, Ahmed, Satti, Satti and Haq (2018) suggest that the school management should think of the school library as an instrument in the school development plan, therefore, employees should take account of it in the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF)/ Performance Evaluation Framework or any job performance monitoring tools.

Recommendations by the Researcher

- Developing countries need to work on all the suggestions that have been noted in literature for the past 9 years. If policy makers do not take note of the recommendations made in various studies, then the school library situation will not change.

- As a way of motivating staff, there is need to have incentives for trained staff who are working in rural areas. This may help to raise the level of job satisfaction.

- Provision of age-appropriate reading-materials and dedicated librarians will help to improve the quality of education in developing countries.

- School libraries should also consider partnering with the private sector and put strategies in place for fundraising. This will reduce over-dependence on government budget.

- Developing countries should consider embracing technology and fast track-rural network connection. This will ensure that school libraries provide access to the internet and up-to-date information to students.

- School library associations should be more active in setting standards, monitoring compliance to international standards and soliciting donations for school libraries. Each region in the country should have its own school library association.

Suggested Future Research Areas

- Comprehensive research need to be conducted on the challenges that inhibit effective service delivery in school libraries.

- Majority of the studies enumerated in Table 1 were conducted in public schools, hence there is need to conduct a study which will establish the status of private school libraries in developing countries.

- Extent to which the school libraries contributes to academic achievement in developing countries. This is another area worth research in correlation to the sustainable development goals.

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