

Influence of School Libraries on Reading Skills in Private Primary Schools

Lorine Ogochukwu Abere

*Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria.
abere.lorine@dou.edu.ng*

Abstract

This paper explores the critical role of school libraries in fostering reading skills development in private primary schools. As literacy forms the cornerstone of educational success, this paper argues that well-resourced and accessible school libraries are fundamental in nurturing students' reading abilities. By synthesising existing research and case studies, the paper examines how school libraries contributed to improved reading proficiency through access to diverse reading materials, structured reading programs, and a conducive learning environment. It further discusses the positive impact of library-led initiatives, such as reading clubs and storytelling sessions, on students' engagement and motivation to read. The paper advocates for increased investment in school libraries by private primary schools, emphasising that libraries are not merely supplementary resources but essential components of an effective educational strategy. Ultimately, this paper calls for policymakers, educators, and school administrators to recognise and enhance the pivotal role of school libraries in promoting literacy and lifelong learning.

Keywords: *School libraries, Reading skills development; Private primary schools*

Introduction

Reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built as it offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary, and language skills which makes way for a better understanding of experience and an exciting voyage of self-discovery. Thus a child who forms the habit of reading is always different from the peer at school because he becomes more knowledgeable than them and understands better than his colleagues what they are being taught in class (Onyeke & Niyi, 2020). According to Plessis (2023), reading skills refer to cognitive abilities that enable an individual to decipher, read, understand, and analyse written language. Reading skill is an essential ability that children must develop, as they need to learn how to read before they can use reading to acquire knowledge. Therefore, reading is often seen as more than just a talent; but considered an art form in its own regard. Before constructing a dwelling, it is necessary to provide a solid base, hence, preliminary and auxiliary abilities exist that children must acquire before proficiently grasping the skill of reading. Although it is crucial to become proficient in reading, a significant number of children fail to develop this ability. Plessis (2023) reporting Lyon's (n.d) study states that around 20 to 30 percent of children of school age experience challenges in acquiring reading skills just as approximately 15 million American adolescents lack access to the educational and recreational benefits of books and other forms of written material. Although these estimations are concerning, they are relatively cautious.

School libraries are libraries in primary and secondary schools whose collections are mainly for the children and young adults. Thus, school libraries are expected to strive to collect and make accessible relevant and appropriate materials for literacy development. In order to achieve this goal, school libraries provide access to

reading resources within the physical location of the school as well as through taking a proactive role of reaching out to underserved community children with literacy materials through mobile library service (Oraekwe & Emenari, 2021). Vuzo (2022) reveals that an effective school library encourages reading habits and makes teaching more interesting and learning easier through the provision of books and a conducive environment for learning. How much a child reads today predicts the amount of reading that will be done in the future. Hence reading culture forms the key to continuous success in school as well as personal enrichment of the teachers and students.

According to LeNoir Foundation (2023) school libraries play a crucial role in improving knowledge and the overall quality of education for many children in school since inculcating the habit of library use in the children is more effective when adopted at a younger age. The development of library use habit at a younger age foster in the children a love for learning, and create an inclusive environment for personal and intellectual growth. Consequently, school libraries serve as vibrant hubs of knowledge that contribute to education in several significant ways through the offering of various educational resources such as books, magazines, academic journals, research papers, and multimedia materials.

Statement of the Problem

The existence and quality of school libraries have a crucial impact on the advancement of reading abilities among primary school students. Inadequate availability of varied and suitable reading materials might impede the development of literacy skills and a passion for reading in children and young adults. In addition, the absence of professionally qualified librarians to provide guidance and inspiration to students might further reduce the potential advantages derivable by children and young adults from school libraries. Ultimately, the creation of age-appropriate library programmes has the potential to ignite a passion for reading in primary school students, resulting in more visits to the library and enhancing their reading abilities.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of the study are to;

1. examine how the limited access to diverse and appropriate reading material influences the development of reading skills of pupils in private primary school;
2. evaluate the role of a skilled librarian in the development of reading skills of pupils in private primary school;
3. determine how school library programmes foster the love for reading among pupils in private primary schools.

Literature Review

Oraekwe and Emenari (2021) found out that the role of the school library in the literacy development of school children is to teach literacy skills and promote independent and life- lifelong learning. The school library achieves all these through book talks, creative writing activities, organising library week, and book exhibitions. Their study also found that challenges that hinder the literacy development of school children in these schools were poor funding, insufficient library materials, and lack of current materials, poor library awareness, and use of unskilled school librarians. The study recommended improved funding, provision of current reading materials in adequate quantities, library awareness

campaign, and recruitment of professionally qualified school librarians in school libraries. Furthermore, the study recommends that attractive picture books and children's literature with bold characters should be procured for these school libraries.

Influence of Limited Reading Material on Primary School Pupil's Reading Skills

Oluwatosin and Akporunor (2021) reported that it is the responsibility of every school library to promote and support the National Policy of Education by providing equitable school library resources. The results from their findings revealed that most of the sampled schools have library resources; however, most of the resources were obsolete. Their results showed that most of the respondents do not make use of the resources regularly and that the respondents are majorly interested in text related to their subject in school. It was discovered that none of the schools have a trained librarian working in their libraries. Findings from Onyeke and Niyi (2020) state that majority of the students believe their school library is fairly equipped to meet their educational needs. Also, most of the students affirm that the library motivates and directly affects how often they read. However, though the library serves as a motivating factor for reading, the students complained of having little or no time to utilise the library. The findings from their study further revealed that the students read majorly for tests and examinations and rarely read books that are not school-related. Textbooks constitute the main source of reading materials for the students. Social media, lack of interest, and insufficient materials were cited as the major impediments to reading.

Vuzo's (2022) findings revealed that school libraries are not used by teachers and students to enhance learning of extensive reading skills in English language. Most of the school libraries do not have authentic materials to encourage interest in reading but old books, past papers, and subject-specific books. The study recommended that school libraries should be improved, well equipped and made to be functional in order to encourage students to read extensively to improve their learning of the English language through exposure to various language inputs. English subject teachers will consequently integrate the use of the school library to teach extensive reading skills. School libraries promote equity in education by offering resources to individuals who may not have access to them at home, thereby creating a level playing ground for students from different socio-economic backgrounds and ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity to learn and succeed. The National Literacy Trust in the United Kingdom (2022) recommends considering the advantages and disadvantages of different techniques of categorizing and shelving when arranging books on shelves for easy student access.

The Role of a Skilled Librarian and its Impact on the Reading Development of Primary School Pupils

Merga (2020) explained that librarians in schools are expected to play an important role as literacy educators and have a positive impact on young people's literacy learning. However in the context of their diverse workload, relatively little is known about how this aspect of their role sits within its competing demands, and the exact scope of the literacy educator requirements. The Northeast Comprehensive Center also reviewed research conducted from 2011 through 2019 on a range of topics, including the evolving roles of school librarians; and the transformation of the

school library with growing digital demands of technology integration in teaching and learning.

The American Association of School Libraries emphasises on the role which the school librarian plays as a teacher as that which empowers learners to become critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. The school librarian supports students' success by guiding them to read for understanding, breadth, and pleasure; use information for defined and self-defined purposes; build on prior knowledge and construct new knowledge; embrace the world of information and all its formats; work with each other in successful collaborations for learning; constructively assess their work and the work of their peers and become their own best critics" (AASL 2018, 14 as cited in Cohen, Mickens & Shirali 2019). Therefore, school librarians are considered as having a closer working relationship with students and teachers who require educational resources.

Although the specific responsibilities of a school librarian may differ depending on their employer, they typically encompass work related to administration, maintenance of resources, provision of media services, and development of the library's collection. Employers seek specific skills and qualifications when recruiting school librarians. A school librarian will start by earning a B.Sc degree in Library Science or Library and Information Science. For instance, employers frequently favour candidates with a strong affinity for books and the capacity to motivate children by instilling in them a passion for reading. Other skills required of school librarians include; communication skills, organisational skills, cataloging skills, documentation skills, and computer skills (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). Thus, a competent and skilled school librarian is expected to demonstrate capability, capacity and competency in the, management and preservation of the collection and resources of a school's library, granting of access to library resources to students and staff, organisation of educational initiatives for pupils through library outreach programmes, organisation and tidying up of school library by arranging books on shelves, responding to inquiries from students and educators, discovering of educational materials and resources that meet students needs, and assisting educators in locating supplementary resources to enhance their instructional plans.

Moreover, the school librarian is to oversee the administration of library media materials, manage financial resources and oversee library initiatives, arrange a meeting with the school principal and administrators to engage in a discussion regarding objectives, assist in the maintenance or enhancement of the library's technological infrastructure, adhere to the guidelines set by the district when choosing and getting rid of library materials. Although all librarians assist anybody who enters a library, school librarians specifically support pupils and teachers. In contrast to other librarians, they are employed at an educational institution (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022).

It has also been contended that some school librarians are often enthusiastic to collaborate with classroom teacher in areas such as literacy learning and related reading engagement, there is concern that the teaching community more broadly does not understand what school librarians have to offer in this capacity, they can be seen as an unaffordable luxury (Merga, 2019 as cited in Merga 2020). Odunewu and Odeyemi (2019) established that librarians are experts at finding and organising

information and at interpreting information needs. Libraries provide quiet areas for studying as well as common areas to facilitate group study and collaboration. Libraries provide public facilities for access to other electronic resources and the Internet. Modern libraries are increasingly being redefined as places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources.

Libraries extend services beyond the physical walls of a building, by providing materials accessible by electronic means, and by assisting librarians in navigating and analyzing very large amounts of information with a variety of digital tools. ICT is expected to provide quick and unhindered access to information-gathering, information-processing, information-storing, and data presentation. Public sensitization by the librarians on library establishment in schools, library usage, packages, and accessibility should be carried out, as it will further strengthen people's interest and desire for reading. Most primary and post-primary schools in Nigeria are void of functional libraries. This notion makes it a necessity for libraries and librarians to be given more support and importance, to aid their cause towards the promotion of reading culture in Nigeria.

The Use of School Library Programs in Fostering the Love for Reading Among Primary School Pupils.

The period of primary school is crucial for cultivating a passion for reading. During this developmental phase, children exhibit a strong sense of curiosity and imagination, displaying a keen enthusiasm to investigate various domains and concepts. School libraries, with their extensive collections and captivating programs, have the potential to significantly contribute to the development of a strong interest in reading. The researcher aims to examine how well-designed school library programs might inspire and motivate primary school students to become avid readers, fostering a lifelong passion for literature.

Ogbonna and Eze (2015) assert that a crucial school program for cultivating children's love for reading is to ensure they have access to a diverse range of books. Multiple research studies have demonstrated that pupils cultivate a fondness for reading when they are provided with ample access to reading resources. Reading advice is a crucial program in school libraries that promotes the cultivation of independent reading skills in children. Reluctant readers might be encouraged to read by providing them with reading guidance. Assisting readers in selecting captivating reading materials will enhance their inclination to read extensively.

Displays and exhibitions are other programs used in the promotion of free voluntary reading. School libraries use these mediums to advertise to students what the library has in stock. Displays and exhibitions are effective resources in a school library's collection to serve as valuable resources that promote and encourage pupils to engage in independent reading. These graphic presentations serve as captivating adverts, arousing curiosity and displaying the library's varied collection. Other school library programs such as pleasurable experiences, shared reading, and dramatising stories are reading programs that motivate and sustain free voluntary reading. In the studies of Ogbonna and Eze (2015) it has been revealed that generally, the school library influences the free voluntary reading of students through access and exposure to books and other reading programs. Sarvesh (2023) stated that schools have a crucial impact on fostering academic brilliance and a deep passion for reading.

Fostering a love for literature among students extends beyond the prescribed academic syllabus; it involves developing a lifelong practice that surpasses the confines of the classroom. The study examines techniques that schools might use to cultivate an authentic passion for reading in their students. Regular book groups, author visits, and reading challenges are organized to foster an engaged and captivating atmosphere that ignites a passion for reading. Furthermore, implementing peer reading programs enables older students to serve as mentors for younger pupils, promoting a strong bond and a mutual passion for reading. Hosting reading-focused activities, such as book fairs, literary festivals, and storytelling sessions, can invigorate and enhance the enthusiasm for reading.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has revealed the significant importance of having easily available and varied reading materials, knowledgeable librarians, and comprehensive school library programmes in fostering a passion for reading among elementary school students. Insufficient access to suitable resources impedes the progress of reading proficiency. Nevertheless, a proficient librarian can serve as a guide, suggesting captivating and age-appropriate books. At the same time, efficient school library programmes can establish a hospitable atmosphere that nurtures a lasting passion for reading. By prioritizing these components, teachers and librarians may enable children who read to engage in a fulfilling adventure of literacy and exploration.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed based on the discoveries of this study:

1. Funds should be set aside by private primary schools for the creation and upkeep of school libraries. Schools ought to guarantee a varied selection of current, age-appropriate books that suit a range of reading levels and interests.
2. Employing competent librarians who are passionate about advancing literacy and have experience in library science should be a top priority for schools. Current librarians should have access to professional development opportunities so they can stay current on topics like digital literacy and encourage a love of reading.
3. School libraries need to create and execute engaging programmes that go beyond simple book borrowing. These activities, which can include book clubs, author visits, storytelling sessions, reading challenges, and book fairs, are all intended to create an engaging atmosphere that promotes curiosity and a love of reading.

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