

The Conceptual Roles of the School Library

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ABSTRACT School libraries provide access to a wide range of sources. A library is more than just a storage place for books (repository for books). Libraries also have important roles that they play in developing literacy skills in learners. School libraries support the goal of the school to grow a community of enthusiastic readers by making accessible a wide range of different reading material that reflect both the learners' interest and their reading abilities. The aim of this paper is to examine the various roles of the school library. This paper provides an overview of the conceptual roles of school libraries. Based on the literature, the researchers recommend that more community libraries should be established to supplement poor school library services. The libraries should be well stocked with a wide range of library resources so that it will be able to play its role effectively.

INTRODUCTION

A school library is part and parcel of and operates within an academic system and school jurisdictional background, and contained by a public community. On the other hand school libraries are directly connected with the education system and can also consolidate basic information literacy instructions through supporting curriculum and instructional goals, consulting on individualized reading guidance programmes, providing library group activities, instructing learners in library skills, helping teachers appraise learners skills, conducting workshops and discussions to help parents support learners reading and learning, and collaborating with the public library on reading programmes and technology (Salter and Salter 1991; Chisenga 2012).

The School Libraries Form Part of Literacy Environment

The school library is a quiet and safe place in which learners can interact with the resource-rich environment and be immersed in reading activities which in turn build-up their vocabulary and comprehension of text. As a result learners who spend most of their time in the library,

their reading level improves (Celano and Neuman 2001; PIRLS 2006).

Wessels (2010) was of the opinion that school libraries can serve as a tool to open the door to the "magical world" while on the other hand contribute to literacy acquisition. School libraries support the goal of the school to grow a community of enthusiastic readers by making accessible a wide range of different reading material that reflect both the learners' interest and their reading abilities. Krashen (2004) asserted that access to classroom and school libraries encourages more reading to take place. Moreover access to books does not provide the learners with the opportunities to practice reading only but also develop the reading habits in learners. Krashen (1995, 2004) and South Africa Department of Education (2005) agreed together that those learners who attend schools with functional school libraries tend to achieve higher in the reading levels.

School Libraries Provide Equal Opportunities for Learning for all Learners

Research Foundation Paper (2008) indicated that school libraries provide equal opportunities for learning and achievement to all students. We are living in an information society in which information plays an important role in the lives of people. As a result, information literacy has become an important asset needed to succeed by all people in all age groups. More so for learners who must be trained to be information literate so that they will be able to access, organize,

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analyze, evaluate, use and share that information in all formats, that is, in print and electronic formats.

The libraries also offer library summer reading programme when schools are closed. This is an expensive way of keeping learners busy and engaged in purposeful activities throughout summer so that when the schools re-open learners do not forget what they have learnt before the schools closed, but instead of returning back to school having forgotten what they have learnt during the previous term, they go back to school with improved reading achievement (Celano and Nieman 2001).

School libraries help learners to become life-long readers by allowing them access to current, quality, high-interest, and extensive collections of books and other print materials in their school libraries, classrooms and public libraries (Research Foundation Paper 2008). Rooted in genuine learning responsibilities that fake actual-life encounters are formative valuations like for example rubrics, journal blogs, and reflection sheets that trail learners' advancement and encourage replication by means of self- and peer evaluation. As a result of web 2.0 tools in the library, learners are also provided the opportunity to interact for self-regulation and self-monitoring while on the process of learning to read (Gordon 2009). Learners are also allowed the opportunities like for example when collecting data making use of interviews and surveys. Since this enables the learner to interact with the data they are collecting on their own and not depend on other people's data (Gordon 1999).

School Libraries Support Reading Programs

Both the school library and the classroom library material support the school reading program. The school library cannot replace the classroom reading collection. The school library and the classroom collection supplement each other. The school library consists of "collection of resources that are organised according to a standard system with materials catalogued and classified for universal accessibility" (Frances and Webster 2002). The collection can be rich with all kinds of resources in different format, but if it is not accessible it becomes useless because no one will be able to use it. Therefore the classroom reading collection should be organised according to the grade level of the individual classroom.

The Research Foundation Paper (2008) indicated that the classroom collection that is on the correct level of the learners are more effective especially when increased by revolving collections and each learner's choice of reading material as suggested by the school library media specialist. The school library media specialists display their dedication to assist schools to meet the reading goals through the provision of proactive support in the form of in-class reading instruction. They also provide catalogued library materials in a way that will be easy to search and retrieve that information. While on the other hand learners are provided with the collection relevant for research, skill, building, leisure reading as well as the collection that support reading motivation.

School Libraries Play an Important Role in Teaching

Professional school librarians or media specialists are essential instructional partners or consultant who support and expand the school curriculum. These specialists work hand in hand with the teachers in order to change what is possible in the classroom as well as supporting the learning with a wide range of reading materials, computer resources etc. (Research Foundation Paper 2008). The school library through its school librarian plays an important role in up-and-coming literacy across various curriculum contexts within the scope of the school curriculum. The school librarian facilitates reading comprehension by making learners aware of their comprehension when they are involved in guided inquiry.

Teacher librarians in a school are there to support learners at the coming together of reading and information. As students understand the phases of, thoughtful reading approaches are intertwined into the material of teaching, for example, when students vigorous previous understanding, use mind mapping to take notes or enquires the author they are improving reading understanding (Gordon 2008). In the school library the teachers employ evidence based practices in their teaching which enables them to use tools like action research that demonstrate the utilization of evidence as part of action inquiry (Todd 2001; Gordon 2006).

School Libraries Inspire Literacy

Literacy can be defined as a life-long procedure that originates in early infancy and carry on during the course of a lifespan. Literacy is the capability to read and write with a slight level of expertise (Reitz 2004; Kupetz 1993). Learning to read and write starts as early as in the infancy stage. The child learns more skills that are utilised in reading before he starts schooling. Emergent literacy is “learning about print” (Lapp et al. 2005). Emergent literacy skills develops in children who come from the families in which the family member engage in reading and writing activities as well as when they read story books to them (Machet 2000). Pre-literacy experience also takes place in families in which reading, writing and story-telling is a daily thing (Machet and Olen 1997).

The school library has an unswerving connection with education system and as such can be utilised to strengthen elementary reading ability instruction by offering backups on curriculum and teaching goals. The school library can offer personalised reading supervision programs, as responsible for offering library group activities, teaching library skills to learners, assisting teachers in evaluating learner skills, as well as co-operating with the public library concerning reading programmes. The school library is designed to support classroom activities and can also be utilised in instructing library skills, providing reading material beyond the textbook, strengthening teachers’ programmes, as well as providing unintentional reading materials for learners (Salter and Salter 1991).

A library is more than just a storage place for books (repository for books). Libraries also have important roles that they play in developing literacy skills in learners. Teacher librarians can also employ the literacy strategies like for example the dial a story which is accessed telephonically can encourage learners to listen, they can also audiotape their own stories. Supplying learners with crayons and markers at the end of the story-time can also inspire them to draw or write concerning their literacy understanding (Dowd 1997). Since literacy is a continuous process that starts in infancy, the public library provide the pre-reading experiences that advantage children. They are trained to concentrate on something, to distinguish substances and develop sensory consciousness, strengthening elementary thoughts,

and also provide the chance for corporeal confidence so serious to young children’s responsive and academic development. The librarian is responsible for selecting relevant books that are at the level of children such as books of rhymes, “point and say” books as well as touch and smell books. They also provide modelling reading aloud strategies (Kupetz 1993).

When learners are provided with the opportunity to use the school libraries to access and read stories and be able to explore information that matters to them, different forms of literacy and numeracy develop in learners. Research has revealed that school libraries have the power to stimulate literacy in learners of different ages (Research Foundation Paper 2008).

School Libraries Support Reading as a Key to Understanding

School libraries provide access to a wide range of sources. School libraries making use of the school library’s resources provide access to reading materials and also motivate reading and integrate literacy with their instructions. The importance of access to reading materials is reflected by the study of Lu and Gordon (2008). Lu and Gordon (2008) further reflected that school librarians encourage reading for pleasure and for personal growth by providing learners the opportunity of choosing and approving the use of alternative media such as newspapers, magazines and websites, which is a critical component in reading commitment.

The libraries encourage learners to read books on their own and to listen to books read aloud through the summer reading programs. Furthermore most of the programs prove events that enhance the learners’ reading understanding. These types of activities are similar to the excises offered in fundamental school reading programs as well as in kindergartens. In most school libraries, learners are compelled to read a book and also compose a short paragraph of an abstract concerning the main idea in the book. The learners are also required to make art projects, like for example diorama, painting or sculpture that illustrates the book that the learner has read. These literacy-related activities improve the learner’s reading ability by giving the greater meaning to the written word as well as spreading out the learner’s thoughtfulness of the story (Celano and Nieman 2001).

School Libraries Support Voluntary Reading

Pretorius (2000) stated that the grade 4 South African learners were found to have scored the lowest in numeracy, literacy as well as life skills among 12 African countries according to the studies by the Department of Education and the UNESCO- UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement Project. In 2005 matric results released by the Department of Education nearly a third failed the examination. As a result the educational institutions and libraries encounter some huge encounters in attempting to develop a reading culture in learners. Machet and Pretorius (2003) reflected that there cannot be literacy without learning or learning without literacy. For learners to be successful in their studies, they must be able to read fluently.

Voluntary reading has much to do with becoming a long- life reading. For learners to participate in voluntary reading activities, the learners must be able to read fluently without any difficulty. Voluntary reading is concerned with reading because you are willing to read, voluntary reading in turn develops into the foundation of reading culture. Reading flourishes when a sense of pleasure is knowledgeable when reading and when the reader contracts adequate pleasure from reading (Elley 1992). The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study revealed that the most important goal for reading instruction which is highly considered in most of the countries is the development of voluntary reading culture in children (Elley 1992).

METHODOLOGY

The method used for this paper was investigated through a systematic literature review by utilizing a combination of both the contextual and conceptual review methods. A thoughtful and knowledgeable review of suitable literature positions the researcher in a framework of contrasting study.

DISCUSSION

The objective of one of the roles of the library is to provide the learners with the environment which is conducive to learning. Learners need a safe and quiet place to study. When most of the learners come to school, they come with-

out any pre-literacy skills and poor vocabulary and the school library material can create the opportunities to train and improve their literacy skills. Therefore school libraries that are well stocked with reading materials and professional school librarians play an important role by promoting information literacy as well as reading for information and inspiration. For that reason Chorum et al. (2016) opined that school libraries are so significant in as far as the accomplishment of the school's academic purpose. Moreover school libraries are also indispensable means in the academic, social as well as cultural development of a child.

Kumar (2010) was of the opinion that to be able to participate in reading activities, the learners must be given the opportunity to read willingly. Learners are from different family background. Some learners are from the home in which there is no reading material let alone a piece of newspaper. While on the other hand other children are from the homes that are print- rich and have the opportunity to read leisurely at home because their home is conducive to reading. As a result, for learners that are from the homes that are print-poor, the school library is the only hope where they can get the opportunity to read. Therefore, school libraries become relevant to the 21st century learning environment that provide for equal learning and achievement opportunities to the learners as a whole irrespective of their socio-economics status or the educational level of their communities.

In order to teach learners to read, the reading program is necessary and should be designed. That is why according to Baker (2016) the teacher librarian in the school should display the ability to spearhead and be able to effectively implement the school library programs in order for the library to play its roles. Moreover the school librarians should cooperate with subject teachers as well as the school community to support the school curriculum. Both the classroom teachers as well as the reading teachers need the books that are well selected and are at the level of the learners. The reading material should be interesting and attractive to learners to stimulate the interest of learners to enjoy reading. Teacher librarian together with the literacy teacher should collaborate in initiating reading programs. The availability of school libraries in schools empowers the programs that promote reading to take place throughout the year which

is a critical way for maintaining the reading habits. Moreover, learners who do not read throughout the year, end up losing some of the months in the reading test scores. In as far as the low-achievers and struggling readers are concerned, the school librarian plays an important role by providing free choice of reading materials as well as advisory beyond the scope of the school curriculum. That is in congruent with literature that slow-achievers and struggling readers need reading experience that are relevant to their own lives that will provide both emotional and psychological benefits (Lu and Gordon 2008). As a result this is an indication that there is a need to provide resources and structures that help students to develop cognitively, mentally, expressively as well as socially through their reading experiences (Lu and Gordon 2007; Kumar 2010).

The libraries provide children with the opportunity to devote substantial quantity of period with books which is the principal stage on the way to reading achievement. Moreover libraries also inspire parents and teachers to play superior roles in their children's in the development of the reading ability which is yet an additional influence that lead to reading achievement. It was also found by Celano and Neuman (2001) and Okiy (2014) that children who participate in the library summer reading programs read expressively well than those children who attend a camp program, and therefore the time that youngsters devote in the library considerably enriches their literacy attainment as equated to time spent in other entertaining activities. Moreover parents and teachers believe that consistent utilization of the libraries improve the children's reading ability. This is also in consistence with literature that the libraries play an important role in achieving literacy by performing the following functions: by providing the relevant facilities, resources and opportunities to progress the literacy skills of learners who are still learning to reading; libraries form part of that education system prevailing in that area; they also outspread the old-fashioned library roles to users by enhancing emergent literacy skills; they employ new strategies of providing afresh literate people; by understanding the collection; by taking the initiative in education activities; distribution of information as well as supporting the use of collection and finally by co-operating with other organizations in literacy programming like for example the National

Literacy Strategy (Lyman 1977). Supported again by literature that simply frequenting the library inspires kids to devote extra period in a literacy-enhanced environment, thus setting up the occasions for them to look through and borrow out books and other materials. As a result these events frequently yield what children acquire by means of the books and spread it into a better-off literacy experience (Celano and Neuman 2001; Owolabi 2010).

According to Okiy (2014) the school library is the core of the school that see to it that all the school programs are made available. The role of the library as playing the role of teaching, the library with its librarian is able to provide teachers with a diversity of library collection for teachers to use when preparing a lesson. Textbook information is not adequate for producing quality lessons. Teachers need information sources that they will use to refer to when teaching. Teacher librarians collaborate with teachers, administrators as well as the support staff in assisting on how to teach learners on how to use the library. This is in consistence with literature that AASL 2007 and Baker (2016) support the instructional role played by the school librarians as a guide and facilitator which also stress "reading, inquiry, information literacy, critical thinking and knowledge construction."

When teacher librarians read stories for learners during the story hours or reading period, they offer the learners appreciated reading ability understandings. The teacher librarian also enables learners gain an upper-hand in as far as developing emergent reading skills is concerned by training learners in reading books, telling stories, dramatizing a story based on a book that was read, reciting rhymes, and singing coral verses from a book.

CONCLUSION

Within the school library, the learners must interact with information sources in various formats and at their level. The school library should be able to provide the learners with the environment which is safe and conducive to learning. School libraries and literacy go hand in hand in the same way as schools and literacy. They both have the responsibility to provide the learners with the access to read. As a result, school libraries play an important role in the learners' literacy environment by providing support to facilitate use of their resources to develop in learners reading for pleasure, school libraries

are more valuable especially to those learners who are from the families where there are no books or other reading materials, let alone access to public libraries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aligned with the discussions raised in the presentation the following recommendations are made. It is suggested that there should be libraries in the communities where learners will go to read after school hours, to enable learners to become used to libraries so that they will go to the library on their own to do their school work. This will also encourage them to do their school work during the day instead of do homework only at night.

More community libraries should be established to supplement poor school library services. The library collection should complement the school curriculum. Library cooperation should be seriously considered so that schools without books will have the opportunity to use books from other libraries in their area. Sharing library resources will also help to alleviate lack of library resources.

The libraries should be well stocked with a wide range of library resources so that it will be able to play its role effectively. Without sufficient library stock it is going to be difficult to identify the good work of the library. The different roles of the school library positively influence the reading abilities of learners but where the relevant, current and timely reading material is readily available. While the library plays its role of supporting learning, the learners too should be responsible of effectively using the information sources in their learning.

It is also strongly suggested that a professional school librarian or teacher librarian or librarian should be employed to work in the library. The library that is fully fledged with all kinds of reading materials and facilities but without the professional librarian the library cannot effectively play its role.

Future research is required to establish useful interventions that school libraries may use to render its services to learners.

FOR FUTURE STUDY

As a result of the availability of school libraries, school librarians, provide guidance to

learners which in turn develop the ability to search and retrieve information and be able to organise, analyse and use it to create new ideas through a combination of reflection strategies, social networking as well as the employment of web 2.0 tools. Moreover school librarians are competent in as far as technology and pedagogical knowledge is concerned, that is why they are able to guide the 21st century learners. School library instruction develops in learners the ethical behavior that promotes logical property rights as well as intellectual freedom. In a resource-centered school, inquiry through school library provides an environment that is conducive to learning.

LIMITATIONS

In this paper only academic roles of the school library to the learners were provided. No roles were indicated for teachers, and the school community as a whole. The library also plays an important role in as far as recreation is concerned and more other roles that are worthy to mention.

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