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Use of the School Library in Enhancing Learning in Public Primary Schools in Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The school library is a resource that when learners use effectively supports learning and enhances academic achievements. Learners in public primary schools are unable to read and understand (Uwezo Assessment Report, 2011) yet there is a school library to enhance learning. The focus of the study was to investigate whether there is a relationship between the use of the school library as a learning resource and learning in public primary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kakamega. Descriptive survey design was adopted. Schools were sampled by stratified sampling technique according to head teachers, teachers and learners in order to establish the relationship between the school library as a learning resource and academic achievement. It was marked by frequency of library use, support of pupils by their teachers and a functional school library having a direct relationship with learning and academic achievement. The research instruments to collect data were questionnaires for teachers and learners, attitude scale for teachers to establish teachers' attitudes on library use and interview schedules for head teachers. Content validity was ascertained by the supervisors. To ascertain reliability, the instruments were piloted in one school within the Kakamega Central Sub-County, which was not included in the study sample. Data was analyzed qualitatively. The key findings showed that learners that are exposed to the library in the schools are more motivated to learn and discover things compared to those who are not. Thus the exposed learners had higher scores in their performance reflected in their academic achievement. It is hoped that the findings will add to knowledge on the utilization of school libraries as resources to enhance learning and assist in development of the necessary library policies.

Keywords: Use, school library, enhance learning, academic achievement, public primary schools

1. Introduction

The library is the main learning resource centre in a school. In a library, various resources are assembled and systematically arranged for utilization (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). The library is therefore a vital part of the school's teaching and learning process recognized as a place of promoting teaching and learning. All schools must include a library for its long and distinguished history of developing and sustaining teaching and learning. (Murray, 1997). Paterson (Elaturoti, 2000) calls the school library, "a tree for children who climb high on the process of discovering life. The library use becomes expedient in this research on the role it has in academic achievement when learners can voluntarily read and enjoy it.

School libraries help to inculcate a culture of lifelong learning among learners (Wisconsin Library Association, 2006). Habit breeds practice. Kenya Library Association (KLA) helps ensure that the use of the library is a culture that is developed in the youths through a well-planned library education program and curriculum. To ensure that library use becomes a lifelong habit, the national curricula for primary and secondary schools should include library use education on mandatory basis (Elaturoti, 2001). The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to developing the imagination, critical thinking skills, and the ability to use information in different media (IFLA, 2000). When librarians and teachers work together in the usage of the library, learners achieve more academically.

Kenya Vision 2030 views a society that is literate highlighting education and training to be globally competitive for sustainable development (Government of Kenya, 2007). The 2030 vision objectives perception of the school libraries is that they are indispensable adjuncts to education (Eonal, 2009). The library is "the place where teachers and pupils come into contact with 'the world' (Correa, 1997). Learners as well as their mentors, their teachers, in adhering to the vision

2030 and the 2010 Kenya constitution, need to be in tandem with the globally changing trends by using the library through reading.

The school library use situation in Kenya is on the whole unimpressive (Kenya, 2000). There is lack of recognition of the importance of school libraries and few schools can be able to employ professional librarians. The environment in classroom libraries is not conducive to the learner-centered methods advocated by educational reformers (Dike, 2000). Learners can be empowered by their exposure to the library which plays an important role of raising individuals that are well versed in knowledge. The gap in the information rich and information poor in the learners occasioned the investigation on the relationship between the library use and academic achievement.

School libraries have been assumed as just book stores. The culture of reading is a problem in Kenya partly due to lack of efficient librarians to guide the learners and lack of exposure to books. The philosophy behind the importance of the library is to expose children to books and let them 'tear' the books, they will get used to reading.

The library use enhances information in learners and develops reading and writing skills. A general observation in Kenya is that both learners and teachers do not use the library properly (Dike, 2003). Reading enhances language development in learners which is crucial for academic achievement. Language cuts across the curriculum yet there is evidence that learners after primary schools have not mastered language to use in both written and spoken. It is unlikely for learners to achieve in the language itself and other subjects in the curriculum hence resulting to poor academic achievement. There is every indication that academic performance in public primary schools is not up to the expectation with literacy levels being at 68.6 percent (Kenya, 2009; Annual Learning Assessment Report, 2010).

It should be noted with concern that poor academic achievement by learners in public schools may be attributed to lack of exposure to books and illiteracy. Altering lack of exposure, illiteracy and reading may influence academic achievement (Uwezo Assessment Report, 2011). Access to reading materials is important as demonstrated by the study of Cleary (1939). The reasons for poor academic performance in public primary schools cannot be discerned without focused investigations. This paper interrogated the relationship between the library use as a resource and academic achievement among learners in public primary schools.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out in public primary schools on the use of the library. The study adopted descriptive survey design. This is because public primary schools had the evidence of poor academic achievement in national examinations. Moreover, these schools had the majority of learners compared to private schools. Selected public primary schools were taken because it would be a representation of a larger geographical area for other public primary schools in the region to make generalizations. The target population comprised 27 head teachers, 48 language teachers, 97 non-language teachers and 750 pupils.

The instruments used for collecting data were interview schedule, observation schedule, questionnaires and attitude scale. The bio-data generated from the attitude scale was instrumental in establishing the teachers' attitudes towards use of the library in relation to various subjects each teacher taught in order to enhance learning. The data was analyzed qualitatively by first coding and classifying in categories and themes. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data presented in tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Relationship of Library Use as a Resource and Learning

All the teachers of language perceive that the library is an important learning resource in their subject area. In response to the use of the library as important in teaching languages, 62.5% of the teachers of language, who provided library lessons regularly, were from the well established primary schools.

Number of Library Lessons	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Three times	2	10.4
Twice	3	16.7
Once	10	62.5
None	2	10.4
Total	17	100

Table 1: Frequency of Library Lessons in Schools

Learners in schools that did not provide any practical library lesson in a week (10.4%) responded that their teachers used the library lessons to cover syllabus of examinable subjects. Thus the library lessons are not effectively used for the intended purpose. Learners are not given enough practice in library use year in and year out. The reading culture is at stake.

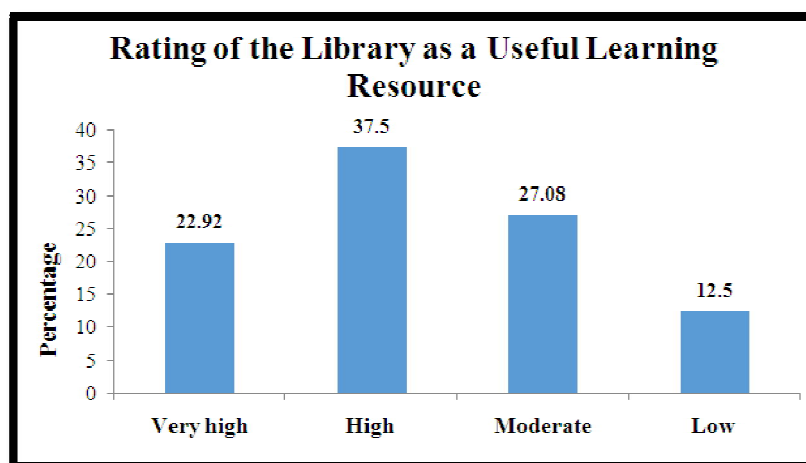


Figure 1

Most of the teachers of language rate library use to be a very useful learning resource. A large percentage (37.5%) of the teachers of language who consider the existence of a relationship between library use and academic achievement are significant. The language teachers consider the library as a resource that enhances what is taught in the classroom. Library use serves as a reference and resource centre to most of the pupils as it provides supplementary books that assist them better understand concepts, vocabulary development and acquisition of knowledge; hence boosting their academic achievements.

Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) in Kakamega had the highest frequency of pupils visiting the public library from schools in the central business area of the town that were in the vicinity of the library facility. The learners were also encouraged and supported by the school administration and parents to visit the public facility. Learners therefore have a positive perception on the use of the library hence the library use helps the pupils realize their academic achievements (Table 3, A₁₋₁₁).

Learners responded that reading books of different categories helped them in their studies. Reading story books from Kiswahili and English language helped them in building vocabulary, tenses and spelling and also in writing composition and insha. While text books and reference books from the library give the learners research skills enabling them to be well equipped with answers when writing their examinations. The learners are ready to tackle the questions and achieve in their academic performance.

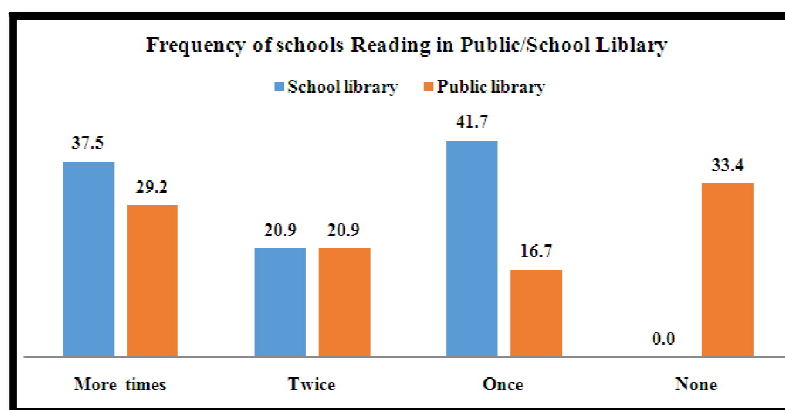


Figure 2

From Figure 2, schools that utilized the library materials in reading and as a media to enhance learning registered an above average mean score in academic achievement. From the observations, there was one library lesson in a week on the timetable. In these schools, library lessons were taken practically as plotted on the timetable.

In B. F. Skinner's behaviourism theory, learning is manifested by change of behaviour. The environment then shapes the behaviour. It is followed by how close in time two events must be for a bond to be formed (contiguity) and reinforcement. The library lessons should be increased to more than one to allow for a bond to be formed. The learners who are frequently exposed to the library media develop an inclination towards the habit of reading. In few schools (Figure 2), where the library was taken for more than three times in a week, library lessons were conducted 30 minutes before the beginning of morning and afternoon lessons. The implication is that the learners were given enough time to interact with their library books thereby inculcating a reading culture. The learners were eager to take their library lessons. The language teachers in these schools made the environment conducive for the learners by availing space and books for the learners. Eagerness to go for the lessons indicated that the learners were reinforced adequately in the use of the library. The school libraries were a stimulating environment for the learners thereby reflecting on the positive academic achievements of those learners.

The learners who did not utilize the library to enhance learning (Figure 2, 33.4%) registered an average and below average academic achievement (Table 3 B₁₋₁₃). Lack of awareness on the use of the public library within Kakamega town is evidenced by the Kenya National Library Services in Kakamega town (Figure 2). Winzer and Lorige (1999) advanced that learning is the acquisition of new behaviour through conditioning. Schools that did not expose their learners to library use because books were either kept under key and lock or the library lessons were not used for the purpose for which they were meant for are conditioned to doing nothing. Learners were free to use the lesson to do anything including misusing the lesson in making noise or sleeping if unsupervised. Learning could not take place where the learners were not exposed to the library media. Such conditioning registers that the minds of these learners was not engaged with enough tasks. The tasks are stored information that would be used to trigger their short term or long term memory activities. Having little or no data bank of information for learners adversely affects their academic achievement.

Public primary schools that do not place library materials at the pupils' disposal have not embraced the idea of using the library to enhance learning. Stocking the library seems to be solely a government's initiative through periodical Free Primary Education (FPE) imbursement of funds for purchasing books. Teachers are supposed to be curriculum implementers. What lingers in the mind of a curriculum developer are the books that are safely stashed away from the consumers. Why can't the books be given to the pupils to 'tear' them in the process of reading them? From the study, books have been kept in cupboards and bookstores for safekeeping and preservation. Some teachers are afraid to issue the library books because the pupils may tear them or fear responsibility of being charged for the loss of the books. Curriculum is dynamic. Soon the books that are placed under safe keeping may be rendered obsolete by the education system.

The basic assumption of the study is that the library supports learning and enhances academic achievements. Pupils with a poor reading culture are not different from the poor who can not afford to buy supplementary text books and therefore lowering the literacy levels especially in public primary schools. Twaweza Report (2016), held a survey in East Africa noting that 8% of class 8 pupils in public primary schools in Kenya cannot do class 2 work. It was noted in the study that in the course of safekeeping the books are forgotten and end up being damaged by pests like rodents, termites and cockroaches hence the books become useless pushing away the idea of the library use being a reality. It therefore defeats the logic of book harvesting in schools for the purpose of using those books for enhancing learning.

Another important thing to note is that the reading culture should be inculcated in people when they are at an early stage of their human development. Cognitive Theories (Child, 1981) consider how human memory works. The memory develops as learners come across information which they can relate to. Library use is a matter of practice. The frequency of a learner in reading material puts the information into short term and long term memory. What learners practiced to do will be remembered and used later in life when the information is required. General literature has it that Kenyans have a poor reading culture. It is common knowledge that they prefer using their phones on social media platforms indicating a level of impatience and a preference to reaching the end without going through the process of the means. Public schools carry the majority of the pupil population (UNICEF, 2009) that needs to be nurtured into embracing a reading culture which can be arrived at through the use of the library. The future proficiency in the language among writers, orators and leaders among others depend on their command of the language. It is appalling how some media personalities and prominent politicians make grammatical mistakes in their public addresses. The problem should be traced back into the formative years of their reading habits. The memory can not relate to something they did not practice.

Constructivism promotes a student's free exploration within a given framework or structure. The teacher acts as a facilitator who guides pupils on the use of the library materials. The library should be able to provide a forum where learners can read on their own and acquire knowledge and skills. Lack of trained librarians makes the learners lack support and guidance of a more skilled member to introduce them to a culture of reading. (Driver et al.1994).

3.2. Functional and Non-Functional Libraries

Functional and non-functional library use indicators including the standard deviations, progression, mean scores and literacy levels. Parents are major stakeholders in the learning of their children. If they do not participate in the burden of stocking the school library, leaving it to the government and well wishers, their children may have a lopsided support of their academic wellbeing. The retrogressing Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination results from the year 2012 -2016 gives the picture (Table 3 A₁₋₁₁ and B₁₋₁₃).

	Variance	Standard Deviation
Functional Library	445.9376	21.11723
Non Functional Library	639.8959	25.29616

Table 2: Significance of Functional and Non-Functional Libraries

A very big variance and standard deviation means that there was a very big variation in the means of the schools, expected in non-functional libraries (see Table 2) We have a wide range between learners with very high marks and those with very low marks hence the big variance and standard deviation. The assumption is that learners are naturally bright since they have very high marks. Learners who are not bright don't have access to books to boost their academic achievements and therefore they perform poorly. If the results are not as stated it might mean that introduction to the library might be a positive influence to the learners. The library might not be that important to the modern pupil.

Generally, it was expected that the functional libraries perform better than the non-functional libraries. However, the limitations of learners using the library are discerned from the investigations. Learners must pay for library book losses. Learners only go to the library when they are forced to. Learners do not bother to go to the public library when they do not have library fee for borrowing books. The learners do not bother to go to the library when they do not have time. The learners only go to the library when it is time for examinations. Reading to the learners is rather coerced by necessity, the necessity to do examinations. Reading is not done for enjoyment or out of self will.

Schools	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1.A ₁	311.58	324.83	300.34	328.24	322.08
2.A ₂	268.45	280.93	285.05	302.94	318.54
3.A ₃	270.02	274.33	276.28	300.95	300.30
4.A ₄	289.36	298.10	290.86	300.16	290.90
5.A ₅	283.96	286.52	3005.72	292.16	270.99
6.A ₆	281.18	292.89	274.55	291.86	298.30
7.B ₁	261.2	260.67	256.17	290.58	280.20
8.A ₇	279.43	277.03	262.3	288.76	277.80
9.A ₈	296.8	284.73	282.48	283.43	281.44
10.A ₉	285.94	272.7	273.59	271.7	259.09
11.A ₁₀	226.51	265.63	255.25	267.27	275.35
12.B ₂	293.93	255.86	269.3	258.84	223.17
13.B ₂	259.27	258.97	250.45	258.14	275.42
14.A ₁	239.11	246.76	246.56	248.67	251.08
15.B ₄	261.19	272.74	251.06	245.28	243.53
16.B ₅	249.44	234.61	255.68	231.94	252.51
17.B ₆	-	208.89	229.91	225.16	246.64
18.B ₇	258.51	244.53	225.87	222.87	234.90
19.B ₈	228.61	235.45	217.75	229.03	240.45
20.B ₉	243.1	258.63	234	218.53	272.23
21.C ₁	-	-	202.43	218.42	228.06
22.B ₁₀	227.44	213.85	218.6	217.48	203.74
23.B ₁₁	224.92	224.53	218.86	216.72	227.38
24.B ₁₂	215.53	249	231.48	204.96	263.96
25.C ₂	176.32	171.9	181	184.79	176.20
26.C ₃	-	-	148.5	150.7	202.08
27.B ₁₃	260.01	225.55	258.48	239.76	332.43

Table 3: Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) Examination Results for Public Primary Schools
Source: Kakamega SCDEKEY: A- Functional Libraries B- Non-Functional Libraries C- Not Sampled

4. Conclusion

From the ensuing discussion, there is strong association between library use and learning. The public primary schools within the periphery of the town and the private primary schools have evidence of well developed libraries (Table 3 A₁₋₁₁). That is, assorted books on the shelves, a reading space and access to the public library facility.

The Kenya Certificate for Primary Education (KCPE) examination results record that learning levels are evidenced by the high or low academic achievements. Even the schools with established libraries do not use the library the way they should. This underscores the primary importance of not only the establishment of libraries in primary schools but also the use of the same.

With the limited resources in the rural primary schools (Table 3 B₁₋₁₃), a lot needs to be done if library service is to have a firm practical root at the primary school level. The development of primary school libraries in Kakamega Central Sub County, and indeed the whole Kakamega County certainly should be of concern to librarians and educationists.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, library use should be enhanced in public primary schools. The library limitations can be remedied through friendlier policies to minimize fear of loss and damage of books among teachers and learners.

Training for teachers in library management, resource integration within the curriculum and selection of reading material should be done. Schools that cannot afford to employ librarians, the practising teachers should be trained as teacher librarians for them to encourage learners to utilise library books.

Further research can be carried out on what can trigger the reading culture in schools. There is poor reading culture in Kenya generally especially among the youth who form the greater percentage of the population.

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