THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES ON THE READING HABITS OF CHILDREN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

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ABSTRACT
The importance of good reading habits cannot be over-emphasised. Reading enable individuals to acquire knowledge, information, skills, values and attitudes necessary for personal, family, community and national awareness and development. It is difficult for any nation to achieve economic development with poor reading habit among citizens. Good reading habits allow individuals to critically analyse and understand issues in the nation. Thus, a good reading culture unlocks the key to economic prosperity since knowledge is power. This study investigated the impact of school libraries on the reading habits of children. It compared two primary schools in Lusaka; one run by government and another privately owned. The objectives of the study were to assess the age at which pupils in private and government schools are introduced to the use of the library; the reading preferences of the pupils; the academic performance of the library users and the role of the school library in inculcating the reading habits. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires and interview guides. 64 pupils from grade 1 to 4 and 8 teachers participated in the study bringing the total to 72 participants. The major findings are presented and include the age at which children are introduced to library use; types of reading materials children prefer; performance of library users and the role school libraries play in inculcating a reading culture in pupils. The paper concludes by recommending that government should employ qualified librarians to run the school libraries; harmonising library services with the school curriculum and the head teachers must ensure that there is collaboration between the class teachers and the librarian in implementation of reading programs in the school.

Keywords: Reading culture, Literacy and learning, Reading skills, Teaching and learning, Education, Zambia, school libraries.

1. Introduction

Libraries have continued to play an important role in the development of society as they are repositories of information and channels of information transfer. Information is a vital asset for any and every organization to function effectively. The uniform organization of knowledge regardless of where one maybe in the world, and the peaceful atmosphere that obtains in the library makes it a welcome place for study, research and leisure reading. A library is a treasure of valuable books and other information resources for a targeted group of people to use and gain from it. It is a very important aspect in an individual's learning process as it enhances the quality of learning by provision of resources. The Australian Library and

Information Association (ALIA) (2010) states that 'the ability to read is a major factor in determining whether a child will succeed or fail in our education system, and later on in the workplace as one needs to decipher meaning of the agreed forms of communication'. A library does not only help to inculcate a culture of reading but also awakens a thirst for knowledge, which makes one open to new ideas throughout one's life and raises one's literacy levels for personal development and benefit of society as a whole.

The importance of reading at an early age cannot be overemphasized. Children by their nature are susceptible to words. It is important therefore, that reading is cultivated at an early age in order for someone to develop it. The need to catch them young by introducing them to books (reading) early in life, as habit die hard, is therefore imperative. Children missing the opportunity of getting in touch with books at this stage, find it difficult to acquire reading habits in their later years' (Makotsi 2005:78). Dave (1977) asserts that reading is an intellectual action which is possible only if a man has formed a habit of reading and practicing it since childhood. The stakeholders in this laudable task of teaching reading to children are school librarians, parents and teachers (Naik, 1996). Thus, it imperative that the reading activities are encouraged in schools in order for the current generation to be able to articulate issues and contribute to national development as they get integrated in society.

1.1 Background Information

This research was a comparative study of two primary schools in Lusaka; Daina Kaimba primary School, which is a government school and Thorn Hill Day and boarding School, which is a private school. Primary schools are institutions of learning established to provide formal education beyond home and prior to secondary education. A number of components come together to make up these institutions. These components include the pupils, staff and the curriculum. The staff component comprises the administrative staff, that is, the Head teacher and the Assistants, academic staff and non-academic staff. The curriculum on the other hand spells out the various subjects to be taught at different levels as well as the contents of the subjects. Certainly, the activities of these components must help the children develop different skills such as reading (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). Primary Schools cater for the children between the ages of six to thirteen.

Daina Kaimba is a government School which came into operation in 2000. It has a capacity of 900 pupils from grades one to grade seven. The School has a library but very small which is more like a store room; and it is run by one teacher of English. It lends out books to pupils according to grades.

Thorn Hill School is a privately owned institution and it has been in operation since 1999. The school has a capacity of 340 pupils with an average number of 20 per class. The school library offers reading activities through hourly visits to the library twice in a week. The children as early as grade one have access to borrow books.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Reading is one of the most important aspects of an individual' personal and intellectual development as it aids in the easy understanding and analysis of issues. In fact, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2004) consider reading skills as a tool for personal empowerment and a means for social and human development. Today in order for one to make any form of transaction or better their lives, they must be

literate. In each sphere of life, be at the bank, in the hospital, in church or indeed in school, one needs to know how to read and decipher meaning out of what they read in order not to be misled or for them to make an intelligent decision. According to Griffiths (1996), a reading culture helps and leads to the development of the nation at large. Developed countries are what they are because of a reading culture among their citizens. Reading stimulates creativity and innovativeness and innovation results from the combination of ideas and concepts. Meaning that the more we read the more ideas and concepts come to mind and development takes place. However, with poor reading culture, development cannot take place.

Children with poor reading skills obtain poor grades at school, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behaviour problems, seem to dislike school, and often fail to develop their full potential. According to Rubin (2002), children with poor reading habits have a higher chance of anti-social behaviour. Delinquency; school violence, bullying, hacking computers, and even examination malpractices have a correlation with poor reading habits. This does not mean that those with poor reading habits display such behaviour; however, poor reading habits are associated with such behavioural patterns while good reading habits help develop a steady and constructive mind.

However, reading in most instances is not considered a relevant activity as it does not form part of children's social interaction. It also seen by many as a solitary pursuit and is not as attractive as interactive activity on the Internet. There is also an overriding desire amongst young people to spend more time with their friends than to remain at home reading (Magara and Batambuze, 2005).

In spite of the Zambian government introducing a number of programs to encourage reading such as read on course (ROC), new breakthrough to literacy (NBTL), a grant for textbooks and supplementary readers in primary schools and also encouraged primary schools to open up libraries, many primary school pupils have very bad reading habits (Ministry of Education Statistic Report (MOESR), 2008). The report showed that most of the primary school pupils leave primary school without the necessary reading skills. This has been a major source of concern as the situation may result to poor reading culture of a nation in future. It was therefore, imperative to investigate the impact of school libraries between a government school and a private school as reading is not an inborn characteristic but an ability which is learnt and most often this is done in a classroom and library setting.

1.3 Objectives

The main objective of the study was to compare the impact of school libraries on reading habits of children between a government and a private school. The specific objectives of the study included an assessment of the age at which children use the library, an examination of what children prefer to read, an assessment of the academic performance of children who use the library as well as establishing the role of the school library in inculcating reading habits among pupils.

2. Literature Review

The role of school libraries in supporting pupils learning has been highlighted by numerous studies. Hart (2005) observed that school libraries are essential information provision mechanisms in the education system because they play a significant role in meeting not only the needs of pupils but also teachers including developing cross curricular skills such as communication, numeric, study, problem-solving, personal and social, and use of information

technology. Hart further argues that a school library enables pupils to develop a sense of self-esteem, confidence, independence, and responsibility in regard to their own learning.

Affirming the importance of school libraries in supporting pupils in the learning process, Osunrinde & Atayese (2008) and Greaney (1996) content that access to a supply of relevant and enlivening textbooks and supplementary reading material enables pupils to develop not only the ability to read but also the reading habit, which ultimately results in overall good performance of pupils in both their end of term as well as final examinations. Emphasising the importance of school libraries in developing reading culture, Osunrinde (2004) amplifies that effective learning cannot take place in a vacuum unless pupils are embedded in the culture of good reading habits and sustenance of journal reading orientation. Greaney (1996) is also of the view that school libraries are essential to the educational experience because they form the base for a positive attitude by young people including pupils towards information skills development, lifelong learning and enhancement of their opportunities. In the same vein, Lorenze (1995) on the other hand, emphasises that school libraries are an integral part of primary and secondary school for providing instructional materials to enrich curriculum to supplement class-instruction in order to enhance unlimited opportunities of pupils beyond mere observational tool.

Further, Kakoma (1991) observed that school libraries are instrumental in supporting pupils' learning in academic circles if used appropriately. Agreeing with Kakoma, the Illinois School Library Media Association (2003) claims that test scores tend to be higher where school libraries are fully staffed, better funded, have well-built collections with current and relevant materials and where pupils use the school library to learn and practice the information literacy skills needed to excel on tests and as lifelong learners. Pupils also tend to have higher performance where access to school libraries is more flexibly scheduled and where school librarians (i) spend more time helping pupils to search for their information needs within local collection and on online resources, and (ii) critically evaluate the materials they locate, and use technology means to synthesize their findings into new knowledge, (Brown, 1990) and collaborate with classroom teachers, (Illinois School Library Media Association, 2003).

In addition, Haycook (2003) observed that a school library enables pupils to acquire technical knowledge and skills which they would not have acquired in class to access and disseminate information that support the school curricula. Haycook further points out those pupils normally have higher achievement, improved literacy, and greater success at secondary leaving examinations and at the post-secondary level. It is for these reasons that Hart (2005) assert that the principle role of a library within an education institution is to provide a place where students and staff gain access to a variety of resources. Thus, for Hart, the major goal of the library ought to hinge on the provision and continual sustenance of equitable access to these resources.

According to the Illinois School Library Media Association (2003), school libraries are supposed to provide quality services, current, reliable and relevant information which support the school curriculum. This, therefore, means that a good school library should provide a store of materials covering a wide range including books, films, recorded sound, periodicals and digital media on which both teacher and pupil may freely draw for many purposes such as reference, study and recreate reading. They are also supposed to provide teachers and pupils with up-to-date resources, a range of access services such as use of technologies to acquire and disseminate information, monitor collections and develop directions and priority areas to effectively manage the curriculum.

Additionally, Osunrinde (2004) points out that it is imperative to make libraries in schools more facilitating and a reference point for all learning activities that could enhance their attention. The selection of reading materials to suit each type of reader's purpose is paramount in the overall interest of future endeavours of such learners. In other words, a school library collection should be good and qualitative material that reflects the needs, interest and problems of the pupils which eventually stimulates and engages pupils in constant reading, thereby improving their reading habits. Osunrinde also observed the need for sensitization activities on the importance for pupils to make use of library facilities and services at schools so as to illuminate their mind-sets with valuable knowledge and skills.

3. Research methodology

A field survey was employed in conducting the study which targeted one government primary school (Daina Kaimba School) and one private school (Thorn Hill School). These schools were purposively selected due to the fact that they were easily accessible. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires and interviews. A total of 72 respondents comprising of 8 teachers (4 from each school), 64 pupils from grades 1 to 4 participated in the study. 16 pupils from each grade were selected. The grades one to four were selected because according the Ministry of Education (2007), by the time the children start their upper primary; they should be able to read properly without any difficulties. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select both the primary and grade teachers because it was necessary to ensure that the school principals and the grade teachers responsible for teaching pupils the usage of the library were not left out in the sample as they had vital information to help with the investigation. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the pupils from grades one to four. This was done through the help of class registers. Quantitative data was analysed using a well-tested package program known as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate tables and frequencies. Data obtained from key informants was qualitatively analysed (according to themes) and incorporated in the narratives contained in this paper.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Background information

The study investigated pupils' background information including their age and gender. Out of the 64 pupils, 32.8% were between 5 and 6 years, 45.3% were between 7 and 8 years, 21.9% were aged 9 years and above. The findings are presented in table 1 below. It can therefore, be concluded that the majority of the respondents that participated in the study were aged between 7 and years. This could be due to the fact that most children start school at the age of 7 and 8 years in government schools. In terms of gender, 47.6% of the respondents that participated in the study were males and 52.4% were females.

Table 1: Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 4 years	0	0
5 – 6 years	21	32.8
7 – 8 years	29	45.3
9 and above	14	21.9
Total	**64**	**100**

4.2   Assessing the age children start to use the library

A cross tabulation of the grades and the ages the pupils start using the library revealed that 47% of the pupils at Thorn Hill started using the library at the age of 5 years. 29.2% indicated that they started using the library between the ages of 6 and 7 years and 23.8% started using the library at the age of 9 years and above. While at Daina Kaimba 57% started using the library at the age of 9 and above.

The survey findings were consistent with the results from key informants. Regarding the age at which children start to use the library, respondents reported the age of five at Thorn Hill Primary School which is a private school. Respondents at Daina Kaimba Primary School which is a government school reported that children are introduced to the library at the age of 10 years and above. The following were the responses from the two schools:

"We, as Thorn Hill introduce our children to books and the library at large as early as five years when children are eager to learn what goes on in life...We have a school policy on reading which aims at helping and teaching a child to read by the age of five..."

"We start introducing pupils at Daina Kaimba to the library at the 10 years and above because we believe this is the time they can make meaningful use of the library..."

The introduction of pupils to the library at Thorn Hill could be attributed to the fact that the school is a private one and has got a nursery section from ages 3 to 5 years. For Daina Kaimba, the introduction of pupils to the library at 9 years and above could be because the enrolment age in government schools is between the ages of 7 and 10 years. Cheah (1998) and Panagran and Panda (1996) argue that the introduction of books at a very tender age is very important because it makes the child to develop a love for books. On the contrary, Douglas (1961) asserts that the child should be introduced to the library at the age of seven or eight because the child must first learn the social and cultural patterns of his /her environment.

4.3   Children reading preferences

In terms of reading preferences, 59.4% of the respondents indicated that they prefer reading story books, 36% prefer reading text books, 1.6% prefer reading magazines, 3% prefer reading comic materials, none of the students preferred reading novels and newspapers. Table 2 below depicts these findings.

Table 2: Materials respondents read most

Material		Frequency	Percentage
Story books		38	59.4
Text books		23	36
Magazines		1	1.6
Novels		0	0
Comics		2	3
Newspapers		0	0
Other (s)		0	0
Total		**64**	**100**

It can be concluded from these findings that the majority of the respondents from both schools preferred reading story books than text books. The findings from key informants confirmed the responses from the pupils as in the following narration:

"Pupils read more of story books than any other reading materials...so our library is stocked with supplementary reading books such as lady bird books for all grade levels...these books capture the pupils' interest because of the pictures they contain...pupils are seen consulting text books when examinations or tests are near."

These findings are supported by the MOESR (2008) observation that the majority of pupils read less and concentrates on reading prescribed textbooks to pass examinations, a situation that has created poor reading habits. It is important that pupils are encouraged to read different kinds of materials at all levels. The motivation for reading should be for a broader perspective than just examinations. It is important to note that reading can widen the vocabulary base of the pupils and enrich their information base. It can aid pupils to develop other skills such as information literacy skills, reading skills and lifelong learning. Reading further help develop an interest of ourselves and the world and it can be done for enjoyment and relaxation (Griffiths, 1996).

In this regard, teachers have a vital role to play to cultivate the culture of reading by having an interest in reading and taking up an initiative to help the children to read different materials. The teachers have a very big influence on the child's mind, hence the need of the teacher to help the pupils have an interest in reading.

4.4   Academic performance of children who use the library
The findings as indicated in table 3 below show that respondents at both schools improve in many areas of academic endeavours by using the library. A good number of respondents (81.3%) at Thorn Hill School indicated that reading helped them develop love for books as compared to 62.5% at Daina Kaimba School. However, a greater proportion of the respondents (93.8%) at Thorn Hill School reported that reading helped them to pass examinations and tests than did respondents at Daina Kaimba School (46.9%). A further 81.3% of the respondents at Thorn Hill School affirmed that their reading skills improved through use of the library as compared to 53.1% of the respondents at Daina Kaimba School. The study further revealed that 59.4% of the respondents at Thorn Hill School reported that reading helped them understand other subjects as compared to 43.8% of the respondents at Daina Kaimba School.

Table 3: Academic performance of children who use the library

Areas of Improvement	Thorn Hill School	Percentage		Daina Kaimba School
Improved reading skills	26	81.3	53.1	17
Helped understand other subjects better	19	59.4	43.8	14
Made me pass tests and exams	30	93.8	46.9	15
Helped me develop love for books	26	81.3	62.5	20

The findings above are consistent with those from key informants from both schools. This is what they had to say:

"We have observed that the academic performance of pupils who use the library is much better than those who do not."

The findings also have revealed that pupils from private schools perform better than those from public institutions. The findings are similar to the observations of the MOESR (2008) that the report that the academic performance of pupils in private schools is better than the pupils in public schools. Pupils in private schools develop good reading habits and perform better under the same curriculum and the education system as compared to those in public schools. According to Clark (2010), libraries help pupils do better in class. In addition, Panagrah and Panda (1996) points out that pupils with access to supplementary materials as provided for in a library can help them achieve academic performance and acquire the foundation for independent, purposeful and lifelong learning.

4.5 The Role of the school library in inculcating reading habits

In order to find out whether the pupils knew the role of the school library it was imperative to request them to indicate whom they ask for help when they find difficulties reading a book; and if the library had reading activities for them. The results revealed that 42.4% indicated teacher. 28.6% indicated parents. 11% indicated friends. 12.7% indicated teacher librarian and 2.4% indicated no one. It is clear from these findings that the important role of the library in inculcating reading habits is not recognised by most pupils. However, results from the key informants from both schools show that a school library helps learners improve their reading ability to a larger extent. This could be true for the private school which has a school policy on reading and on the usage of the library for pupils. This supported by Mulauzi and Munsanje-Mwale (2013) who argue that a library is the foundation for promoting and creating a good reading culture especially among learners. It makes available and accessible the reading materials to learners. In addition, it provides free and equitable access to information. In fact, a school library is considered to be the heart or hub of any school (Hart, 2005). This is so because it not only assists pupils to learn effectively but also teachers to teach effectively. In other words, Hart contends that school libraries enable pupils to develop good reading habits including their ability to learn without necessarily being aided by a teacher; breaks down the rigid divisions which the school time-table often creates between different subjects; and gives social training. With regard to the school teachers, school libraries aid them in finding the cardinal information needed to facilitate teaching in various

subjects. For the school administration, information can be utilized for internal decision making and control of anti-social behaviours by pupils (Hart, 2005).

5. Conclusions

The research revealed that pupils start to use the library at an early age (i.e. 3 to five years) in private schools while in government or public schools, pupils are introduced to the library late (i.e. at 9 years and above). On reading preferences of pupils, the study revealed that pupils enjoyed reading story books than textbooks in both schools. In determining the academic performance of pupils who use the library, findings from the field revealed that the pupils who visit the library perform much better than those that do not use the library. It was clear that the library improved the reading habits of pupils. The library helps to improve the reading ability of pupils in schools. Findings have also revealed that the critical role of the library in inculcating reading habits is not recognised by most pupils. However, results from the key informants from both schools show that a school library helps learners improve their reading ability to a larger extent.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations to improve school library services and facilities are made:
1. The government should ensure that all schools have purpose built library buildings.
2. School Administrators should stock their libraries with not only interesting but also adequate library books and other facilities such as furniture.
3. The government should employ and adequately remunerate qualified library staff.
4. The Ministry of Education should harmonize library services with the school curriculum.
5. School Administrators should ensure that there is collaboration between teachers and librarians in the implementation of reading schemes and programs in the school.

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