The Role of Teachers in Fostering Students’ Independent Learning Through School Library Use: Case Studies of Selected High Schools in Zanzibar

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Abstract

This paper based on my MA dissertation which examines the role of teachers in fostering students’ independent learning through school library use by looking at the availability of school library materials; the patterns of school library use by students and teachers; the cooperation between teachers and library staff in the formation of habits of library use among students and the different ways used by high school teachers in fostering high school students to become independent learners. The study was conducted in Zanzibar Urban West Region and it involved three public and two private high schools. By using survey method, the total number of ninety five respondents was given questionnaire. Interviews were conducted on thirty five respondents including students, teachers, library staff, heads of schools and the Director of the public library. Also, observation method was used in all schools. The major findings revealed that school libraries were confronted with limited library stock which contains outdated and few current materials, lack of library education and library habit among students and teachers, inefficient and untrained library staff, lack of integration of information, curricula and classroom learning and lack of cooperation between teaching and library staff.

Introduction

The lack of reading habits is a common problem among school and college students (Kawatra, 1994). The reading habit provides opportunity for independent learning, seeking information, and developing curious minds and research skills. A school library should be considered as the training ground for the growth and development of the habits of library use in each student (Kumar 1987). For this to occur, it is vital that they are given the skills to learn how to find information, how to select what is relevant, and how to use it in a better way for their own particular needs, and take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers and school librarians have the responsibility to do everything they can for the cultivation of the habit of the use of library and reading among students (IFLA, 2000: School Library Manifesto).

The lack of adequate provision for secondary school libraries is a serious issue for secondary education in Africa (Alemna, 1990). Many African secondary schools are confronted with critical challenges including lack of understanding by both teachers and students on the role and function of a school library. In many schools the
concept of a school library no longer exists because for many teachers and students a library is seen as simply the place where the school textbooks are stored (World Bank Report, 2008). The same problems were noted by ZLS (2006) “most of schools in Zanzibar have neither class nor school libraries. Even the few schools that have libraries suffer from serious shortage of relevant up-to-date books, journals and magazines. Furthermore, students are not encouraged to use libraries to support their ongoing learning. At most in schools with some form of library, students are expected to visit the library unsupervised. They are seldom taken to libraries by teachers for assignment-based or independent learning, training in library usage, reading sessions or even just to borrow books”.

Several studies have noted the lack of library use habits for most secondary school students, some of whom as a result, proceed to Universities and Colleges where they fail to make effective use of this important resource. Referring to India, Ranganathan (1973) claimed that “neither our schools nor our colleges train our students in the use of reference books, not to speak of the general use of library.” Kumar (1987) noted that “students fail to make effective use of these important library resources probably because they lack a foundation in the use of libraries.” Kawatra (1994) observed that “library use will become important if methods of teaching and examination in high schools are changed, that is, library use must become an integral part of the teaching programmes, so that students will be required to use the library resources heavily.” Thus, if the students are not groomed well in the use of libraries at secondary and high schools or even lower levels, they will fail to use the library in the expected manner at higher levels.

Methodology
This study used the survey research design whereby both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were applied. The study was conducted in Zanzibar, Urban West Region. Three out of ten public high schools and two private schools were selected for this study. The selected Public High Schools are Lumumba Secondary School (LSS), Ben Bella Secondary School (BSS) and Hamamni Secondary School (HSS). Private schools are Sunni Madressa School (SMS) and
Hermann Gmeiner School (Save Our Souls Village (SOS)). Also, the Public Library was involved as it has the responsibility of providing services to the entire community including teachers and students. The study population comprised of teachers, students, school library staff and administrators from the Public Library and the Ministry of Education. The sample of this study involved thirty five (35) teachers including Heads of high schools. Sixty (60) students. That is, twelve (12) students in each High School and five (5) school library staff. That is, one (1) library staff from each high school. The study also involved two (2) Administrators, one from the Zanzibar Public Library and one from the Ministry of Education in Zanzibar. The total sample size was therefore one hundred and two (102) respondents. Secondary data was collected through library research and Primary data was collected using a combination of various methods in data collection. A standard self-administered questionnaire with open-ended and closed questions was administered to high school students, teachers and library staff. Face to face interviews were conducted with some high school students and teachers; library staff and administrators from the Zanzibar Public Library and the Ministry of Education. The direct observation method was employed to validate some of the information obtained through the questionnaire and the interview.

**Historical context**

The history of library services in Zanzibar cannot be well narrated unless it is related to political changes which have taken place from the colonial period up to the present day. The colonial masters did not make much effort in developing the education sector. Nonetheless, history shows that a few libraries which were privately owned by communities, religious organizations and others existed in Zanzibar during the colonial times (Mohamedali, 2001). After the Revolution of Zanzibar in 1964, the government declared the provision of free education to all native children but it did not put more emphasize on library development, the crucial resource that could motivate these youths to learn.

In 1988, the first public library of Zanzibar was established and acted as the Headquarters for the development of library services in colleges as well as in secondary and primary schools. Nearly 60% especially of primary schools in Zanzibar have no school library in any form, while secondary schools seem to have some kind of libraries (ZLS, 2006). School libraries in Zanzibar differ greatly in terms
of form and functionality. A few of them are at present able to provide basic services to students. Currently, the development of school libraries in Zanzibar gets support from a number of external organizations such as Africa Muslim Agency, the British Council, Books Aid International, Books for Africa, Book Abroad, International House Japan and Munadhamat El ī Dawat Islamia. In spite of these examples of support, the question of sustainability, continuity and maintenance of school libraries still becomes a problem in the development of many school libraries especially when donors leave or withdraw their assistance.

**Availability of School Libraries Material**

The availability of up-to-date materials within the library is essential for the development of effective library services. Students can be easily attracted to use the library if it has current materials. Normally, not a single library can have only current materials, but even a small school library should possess at least old text books and related curriculum enrichment materials, books for education, information and recreation; reference books, newspapers and magazines. Also, a school library should give special emphasis on the acquisition of audio-visual materials including newer media such as television, computers, videos, audio cassettes, CDs, DVDs and others. The study revealed that in all the surveyed school libraries, a small number of mixed materials was available. That means the libraries contained both current and outdated books. The problem of outdated school library stock was mentioned by many researchers. A survey report of ZLS (2006) concluded that library stock in schools with any kind of library is largely outdated, inappropriate in terms of content and level, and irrelevant to the school curricula and cultural environment. This situation may put off students from visiting libraries, and later leads to their lack of the habit of independent learning, seeking information, and developing inquisitive minds, critical thinking and research skills.

Unfortunately, majority of school libraries were unable to buy stock for the library, relying instead on books supplied by external donors. In public school libraries, "weeding" does not take place because the school never knows when it will next get a chance to buy new stock. The study also revealed that school libraries have some relevant materials which allow students to utilize them for the betterment of their academic performance. Therefore, the remaining role of teachers is to encourage
students to make use of library materials efficiently. Usually the Public library distributes textbooks to school libraries and heads of schools are required to collect the books from the library. Unfortunately, the books remain in the library store for more than two years while few Heads of school collect them (ZLS, 2006). This shows that some heads of schools do not give much priority to the development of their school library collection.

The Ministry of Education expressed commitment to support the revitalisation and development of school libraries in Zanzibar. This commitment is reiterated in the 2006 Zanzibar Education Policy which states that ‘Every school will have a library or resource centre, supply of books, funds and trained librarians’ (MOEVT, 2006). However, practically, there is little evidence of this commitment at school level, since most of the head teachers are not even aware of schemes operated by the MOEVT which are intended to support the improvement of school libraries. Also, there did not appear to be any policy or standard set of guidelines produced by the Ministry for schools, outlining practicable steps that can be taken in order to secure funding for books (ZLS, 2006). A report of the World Bank (2008) stated that, in Tanzania a functioning school library is required by every private school applying for certification and registration, but the requirement appears to have no teeth. Concern was expressed that so long as a school has a sign on a classroom door that identifies it as the library, no other inspection is undertaken.

**The Patterns of Library Use by Students and Teachers**

The study revealed that a good number of secondary school students use the public library to find the information they need. But the question which still remains is ‘Does a good number of students who use the public library reflect a well developed independent learning and life-long reading habit?’ In fact, a good number of students who use the public library go after the library services provided there compared to school libraries, such as internet, newspapers, journals, adequate reading materials and a conducive environment for studying.

The Zanzibar Library Services Director stated that ‘Students who frequently visit the public library seemed to have special duties forcing them to do so. Sometimes they use the library for reviewing notes from their teachers or reading the recommended Kiswahili and English literature books.’ A very important point to be noted is that,
many students do not renew their library membership once they finish their examinations. The problem with our schools is that students are not encouraged to use the library to support their learning. A library staff said "Teachers do not encourage students to use the library because they still use the chalk and talk approach and produce readymade notes for students. Therefore students do not use the library to seek information, instead they use their teachers' notes." This explanation supports the observation of Ruzegea (2002) who stated that "great dependence by almost all students is on teachers' notes in locating references for assignments or preparation for examinations, and many students seek information from tuition to supplement teachers' notes and lectures."

Not only students but also teachers' interest in library was noticeably low. Ndaki (2006) observed that "teachers themselves do not use library so they lack creativity to stir up the sense of love for reading in students. Likewise, teachers concentrated on teaching how to answer examination questions rather than teaching to make sure students understand the subject." This may be due to several reasons which are: lack of understanding by both teachers and students of the role and function of a school library, large numbers of students per class, very loaded school time table, nature of secondary school examinations set up, existence of question and answer books and the reliance on part time teachers who were really busy in teaching two or three schools per day.

The crucial role of library staff is to encourage teachers and students to use the library and its resources effectively. Thus, education must be provided for both teachers and students on the importance of library use in the teaching and learning process. The study noted that none of the library staff claimed to have any regular training program for students and teachers. Staff do assist students to access library materials when they visit the library but they do not get enough chance to move around the classrooms to perform their duties. This indicated that, no or little instructions on library use were provided to secondary school students. Thus, it is obvious that most of students have no idea on library education. As explained earlier, school administrators do not put emphasize on the library, so library staff activities were confined to their rooms where they waited for students to visit the library. Also, staff are not included in any school committee. This marginalisation of library staff contributes a lot to the ineffectiveness of the school library as a place for
students to develop habits of independent learning which they can carry with them and use even long after they have completed their secondary school education. On the other hand, the study revealed that the responsibility of the library usually rests on one or two library staff who have not had training to run a school library effectively. One public school library staff said that “there was no one to take care of the library so I was asked to do so.” The absence of qualified library staff within a school can be a major obstacle in fostering students' independent learning through the use of the school library.

**Cooperation between Teachers and Library Staff in Fostering Students’ Independent Learning Through Library Use**

The success of a school library depends a great deal upon the cooperation between teaching staff and library staff. Teachers should use the library and guide students regarding how to learn independently through the library. In this case the library staff and students should look upon the library as part and parcel of their studies. The question to find out whether or not teachers and library staff cooperate in fostering students' independent learning through library use was asked to teachers and library staff. Responses to the question are summarized in Table 5.
The findings in Table 5 shows that 24 (80%) of the 30 teachers stated they did not cooperate with school library staff and only 6 (20%) cooperated with library staff. On the part of library staff, 4 (80%) stated they did not cooperate with teachers and only 1 (20%) cooperated with teachers. The overall response therefore shows that 28 or 89.8% of the 35 respondents do not co-operate with one another while only 7 or 10.2% co-operate.

Cooperation between teachers and library staff is indispensable in fostering students’ independent learning through library use. Looking at these responses reveals one reality, that is, there was none or low cooperation between teachers and library staff. Further discussion showed that the matter has so far not been given any priority. This fits in so far with the trend being revealed in this study, that school libraries have not yet been given the attention they deserve from various stakeholders. That means there is little chance for teachers to foster students’ independent learning through the use of schools libraries.

Further discussion demonstrated that for those who said they cooperated with library staff their mode of cooperation was indirect. In most cases, it involved teachers suggesting to the library staff the titles of the books they need, and the library forwarding the requests to the school administration. This was the only kind of cooperation claimed by the teachers, and it has no direct impact on fostering independent library use among students.

The expected type of cooperation between teaching staff and library staff in this study was organization of students’ regular library periods at least once a week. Deliberately, teachers could take students to the library, and stay in the library so
that they maintain discipline in the library while library staff instruct students on how to use the library stage by stage. In addition, school library staff should be innovative in designing various programs concerning fostering students' independent learning through library use. In this way, they will become more valued for their information expertise.

**Measures to Be Taken To Make Teachers Instrumental in Fostering Library Use among Students**

School library services should be improved in terms of manpower and library resources. This is a key factor in attracting teachers to foster library use among students. Second, the education policy should put emphasis on the use of school libraries and Heads of schools should be in the frontline to encourage the implementation of the policy. Third, teachers should be trained on the importance of using libraries. This can be through seminars and workshops. It is very important for teachers to be trained on the importance of teaching through the library and how to do so. This training will help them to be in a better position to encourage students in the use of the library. Fourth, teachers should be trained to change the methods of teaching. This is necessary because in most secondary schools teaching is examination-oriented, based on the teacher-classroom approach. Therefore, in order for teachers to be instrumental in fostering students' independent learning through library use, teaching methodologies should be improved to meet the current trends of education, that is teaching should be students-resources centred. Fifth, to foster commitment and cooperation between Heads of schools, teaching staff and library staff. This will facilitate the success of students in their academic programmes. These are the general suggestions provided by all the respondents in this study. However, it is observed that for all these suggestions to be implemented, a strong commitment is needed between the Ministry of Education, Heads of schools, teaching staff and library staff.

**Measures to Be Taken to Improve Students’ Library Use**

Schools should organize special programmes in fostering students' habits of library use and library periods must be shown in the school time table. In addition, school library services should be improved in terms of library staff and library materials. It was also noted that deliberately, students should be given more tasks that strongly
require them to find information from the library. Students should also be motivated to use the library. This could be achieved by giving them rewards so that they develop interest in library use. Also, the Ministry of Education and private school administrators should employ qualified library staff so that they can encourage students to use the library.

**Summary**

The study revealed that most secondary schools in Zanzibar were faced with the problem of inadequate library stock, and where library stock existed it was outdated and often irrelevant to the current curricula and teacher/student interests. The majority of the schools with libraries were unable to buy stock for the library, relying instead on books supplied by external donors, primarily the Zanzibar Library Services. The lack of materials in Kiswahili language within these libraries negatively impacts on the inculcation of a passion for reading amongst younger students.

Furthermore, the lack of understanding by both teachers and students of the role and function of a school library led to a growing inability to use libraries properly even if they were well-established. Generally, students were not encouraged to use school libraries to support their ongoing learning. In most of the surveyed schools, students were expected to visit the library unsupervised. Likewise, some of the high school students used the public library frequently, but this did not reflect well-developed skills of library use. Teaching staff did not themselves seem to use libraries, so they were not in a position to cultivate the use of libraries in students.

Also the study revealed that teaching and library staff were not cooperating in fostering students' independent learning through library use. In most cases, school libraries appeared to be present as a separate unit outside the daily activities of the school. School libraries were mainly staffed by one or two untrained staff. Thus, there was a big gap between the teaching and the library staff in schools. That is to say cooperation in fostering students' independent learning through library use was a dream. Heads of schools and teaching staff were not serious in matters pertaining to the fostering of independent learning among students.
Recommendations

There are various problems which have been mentioned as barriers in fostering students’ independent learning through library use in the selected high schools in Zanzibar. If all the problems are not solved the underutilisation of the school libraries and its resources will continue. The study therefore, recommends that special attention should be given to the development of basic library facilities with emphasis on electronic materials. MOEVT should design special school library development policy which will point out objectives and strategies for developing school libraries. Also, it should establish and support school library development funds for secondary and high school libraries. Schools’ administration should pursue grants to purchase locally published materials including Kiswahili texts, to be distributed to secondary school libraries. High schools must have an obligation of establishing and offering interactive reading programmes and library usage sessions to students.

Moreover, due attention must also be paid to the recruitment of qualified librarians or well-trained library staff to manage the library. Therefore, library staff must also cooperate with teachers in establishing a variety of library programmes plus fostering in all students the use of the library and developing independent learning habits. At least elementary library courses should be provided to university graduates who are specializing in education (B.A Education) this will prepare them to be familiar with the use of the library and will enable them to be in a good position of fostering students’ independent learning through library use. The teaching approach in high schools should be changed from teacher centred to student centred approach. This approach will require students to find information from the library independently; hence the habit of library use will be easily nurtured.
Bibliography


