



## Short Case Study

# Challenges and prospects of school libraries in Kenya: a case of Kiambu County, Kenya

Daniel W. Muthee and Johnson Mulongo Masinde\*

<sup>1</sup>Department of Library and Information Science, School of Education, Kenyatta University, Nairobi City, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>School of Information Management, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, Hubei, China  
masindelitho@gmail.com

Available online at: [www.isca.in](http://www.isca.in), [www.isca.me](http://www.isca.me)

Received 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018, revised 5<sup>th</sup> January 2019, accepted 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019

## Abstract

*This paper assesses the current state of school libraries in Kenya in relation to perception, utilization and management as well as the challenges and prospects. The objectives include establishing the user and management perception about school libraries and examining their functionality. The paper noted low perception and minimal usage of school libraries. The challenges include lack of legislation that emphasizes mandatory establishment of school libraries, standards and guidelines. School libraries are not seen as core in teaching and learning but as peripheral school program.*

**Keywords:** School libraries, performance, prospects, Kiambu, Kenya.

## Introduction

The development in education has placed high premiums on the school libraries as a Center of learning, teaching process. This is an effort to address the current psychology of learning where learner is no longer regarded as a passive depository of knowledge. Effective learning allows the learner to participate in learning and generate knowledge through self-discovery of knowledge from resources and projects. School libraries are excellent conduits for enhancing learning and teaching. The resources in the school involve the learners as active participants in their learning process. This philosophical and psychological thinking of allowing learners in to the self-discovery arena of learning places a lot of weight on school libraries particularly on learning resources.

In the service vein, teaching and learning should not be restricted to the printed words in libraries and classroom. For teaching and learning to be effective, a variety of media must be involved. Such variety of media include; the film tapes, audio and video tapes and games, slides, photography, pictures or even relics. They all have their unique role to play in the teaching and learning process since there is no intrinsic difference between a book, a painting, a piece of sculpture, --- all are media for communication. They record facts or the product for imagination or both. Researchers have shown that leaning is more effective when learners utilize all their senses. The senses of sight, hearing or even touch all contribute to the learning experience...indeed, a home science teacher teaching the difference between silk and cotton is likely to spend a lot of time if she decides to describe the difference. It is also likely that she may not be understood finally. An opportunity for the students to see and touch the two materials will promptly bring

the difference out. This is an opportunity which the school library can afford to the teacher and learner. A school library makes the multi teaching approach to teaching and learning possible and enable the students escape from the limitations of monotony and drudgery of using only the teachers as a source of leaning or the print media.

There has also been a shift from emphasis of facts and role memorization to discovery. Problem solving and utilization of knowledge in the teaching and learning process. Emphasis is shifting from teaching to learning, from learning of facts to understanding of principles, from learning of knowledge to learning how to learn<sup>1</sup>.

With the foregoing, the school library can no longer be regarded as mere accessory to the school teaching /learning programme. It is at the core of teaching and learning. The librarian in school library guides the students to learn to learn and practice the technique of inquiry and research and mostly important in calculating the reading habits. Reading habits prepare the students into the lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>.

## Library stock

The ALA guides and standards for assessing the 21<sup>st</sup> school libraries gives a picture of collection of teachers and perception of learners in the schools in kiambu county. They also further show the integration of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and literacy schools in school libraries<sup>3</sup>. The few schools with libraries in Kiambu County depicted meagre resources. The study shows that 60% of the schools had a collection of not more than 2000 volumes. The school libraries in the sample comes from fairly well established schools with not less than 400 pupils. In the

same study, it was only 20 percent of the schools that had more than 10,000 volumes. A similar study conducted in 2006 by Lallong showed that the largest library in Bungoma County had only 9000 volumes while the smallest collection had 6000 volumes. About 70% of the schools in Bungoma County did not have school libraries.

Comparing the current ALA and IFLA guidelines of 2010 with 1975 ALA standards, which suggested a minimum base collection of 20,000 items for a school of 500 hundred or less, providing 40 items per pupil, the conclusion would be Kiambu County has not fulfilled the 1975 ALA standards leave along the 2010 standards.

Indeed the current stock is archaic, lack variety in terms of formats and content and is predominantly printed based. The survey showed old donated stock of books, dust newspapers and magazines. Other resources found were maps, charts and globes.

A stock that is predominantly print based cannot fully stand the test of 21<sup>st</sup> century expectation of teaching and learning process. For instances, the mood and tone of a song is best captured in the audio dramatic presentation and the suffering and horror of civil war in a film. All the drama and thrill is lost if the song is presented in log monotonous passages in a dusty tone book as at the survey showed in most libraries<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, the currency of the stock was noted to be outdated. The sample showed 62% of the library stock being over 20 years .the justification for these gloomy state is that the libraries depended on a donation from the NGO, foreign agencies and private organizations/individuals .such donated books are usually the needed books with no relevance to the curriculum. For instance, one library had a book entitled “the lives and times of our king and queen and their people 1865-1935 Ed. By Phillip Gibbs. This is an irrelevant book to a modern reader in kiambu county, Kenya.

The implication of stock consisting of books with no currency poses a serious threat to the learners reading habit. The information is usually outdated and obsolete and comprises of learners interest and consequently lowers the learner’s perception and use of library<sup>5</sup>.

The survey also found out that the few libraries existing rarely organize their stock professionally. This finding was similar to Khisa’s study that showed that only 22% of the school libraries where catalogued while Killong’s study in Bungoma county reported that only 37% of the school libraries in Bungoma county had their stock fully catalogued,16% partly catalogued while 47% had not been catalogued.

It was noted that the former well established missionary schools had fairly well organized library resources. Majority of the school libraries had poor stock and some were nonexistent. Many schools lack purpose built libraries.

## Library staffing

The survey noted that majority of the school libraries in Kenya are run by teachers. This is done without the regard that they have normal teaching load and have no basic training in librarianship. This is actually the genesis of school librarianship in Kenya. For instance, without basic training in librarianship, how would they organize school libraries? The learning resource lesson in teachers training college is usually substituted with examinable subject’s. The learning resources and simple librarianship taught in teaches training college is not examinable and consequently majority of the teachers training colleges disregard it and substitute it with relevant subject.

It is no wonder that the study showed that all the school libraries sampled were run by teachers with no training in librarianship and 88% of the teachers running the school libraries had maximum teaching load as advocated by teachers service commission (TSC) the teachers employer. It was only 12% of the teachers running the school libraries who had lower teaching load than the other teachers not involved in the running of the school libraries. In a similar study conducted in TharakaNithi in selected primary schools, it was found that deputy head teachers and senior teachers were running the school libraries and they too lacked basic training in librarianship<sup>6</sup>. Khisa’s study of 1986 collaborated Kithumbi’s study of 2010 and shows that nothing much has changed over the years<sup>7</sup>. Khisa reported that 81.8% of the schools that responded that there were no fulltime librarians. In any case, there is only one responded who can claim to be fully trained librarian since she has a certificate of librarianship from polytechnic. In other schools deputy head teachers are fully responsible in spite of their heavy administrative and classroom work load. The status of school librarianship compare well with the rest of Africa with exception of South Africa. Though the situation in Nigeria looks a little bit better than that in Kenya, the staffing and material resources is quite similar .just like in Kenya, the school libraries in Nigeria are supervised by teacher librarians who are in actual since teachers assigned library duties in addition to the normal school workload without any reduction of work. Majority of the teacher librarians in Nigeria just like their counterparts in Kenya lack prior training in librarianship (pike).

This shows the low perception accorded to school librarianship in Kenya and rest of Africa. The common perception is that one can serve as school librarian without any training and as an insignificant side study. This are the reasons for poor service delivery, irrelevant stock and disorganized libraries.

But despite the poor state in school libraries, there was notable fair attempt by the pupils to use them, in deeds 68% of the pupils surveyed indicated that they use the library to borrow reading materials. While 32 percent used the library to do their own reading and to do their homework. This is a very low percent which could be explained by the fact that there were purpose built libraries. Majority of the libraries surveyed are

simple rooms and other were just store and therefore very little sitting space. Ideally a school library is supposed to provide relevant reading materials, comfortable and quite space where students can do serious studies unfortunately, only 32% of the students thought they will use them for their homework which again is very low. A school library should have adequate and relevant resources which should enable students do their homework. There is a likelihood that the low percentage could be due to teaching methods in use. Perhaps the teacher do not give students assignment that are inquisitive and require self-discovery and there for they need to use school libraries. It could also be because the students have repeatedly failed to get relevant resources to their homework and assignment and thus they no longer bother. Likewise, 8% of the students indicated that they look for leisure materials. This is shocking considering that the students out to provide leisure reading, promote hobbies and games. The fact of the matter is that schools school management concentrate on passing examination at the expense of school libraries. Note that learning and memorization suffices if the objective is to pass examination. This is part of the reason for the low perception of school libraries. The low usage and perception of school libraries was also noted among the teachers. For example on 25% of the teachers in the sample indicated that they use school libraries and 72% indicated that they do not use the libraries neither do they have interest in the library. One teacher said in a matter of fact way that the only time he visits the library is for parties and meetings.

According to the survey there is a lot of potential in the utilization of school libraries. Both students and teachers need to be encouraged to use the libraries. However, that has to be deliberate effort to stock the library with relevant resources selected by the teacher.

## Challenges and prospects

The paper has apparently discussed some of the challenges and problems that impede satisfactory development of school libraries in Kenya.

The lack of professional trained librarians in Kenya has been a major impediment to the growth of school library services. From the earlier discussion it is apparent that the school, board and government do not highly regard libraries otherwise they would ensure recruitment of trained librarians, purpose built libraries or adequate training of teachers librarians. The fact that teacher librarians are heavily loaded with maximum teaching work means that they can only give partial service to the libraries and only open the libraries when they must. The teacher librarian core business is the classroom and not library service. The standard of library organization consequently become low and perception about school libraries is extremely low. Currently there are several universities and polytechnics teaching librarianship. In addition, teachers training colleges teaching learning resource course which partially deals with librarianship. Some of the university undergraduates have taken

bachelor of education (library science) whose objective is to produce students with dual professional (librarianship and teaching). This is a major strength in boosting primary and secondary school libraries.

Teacher librarians interact with other teachers and are fully aware of the curriculum. They attend meeting with the rest of the staff and participate in curriculum discussions.

Low perception and lack of awareness in the usefulness of the school libraries among teachers and management board is a major constraint. The administration has little regards on the role played by school libraries in promoting teaching and learning. Of greater concern is teachers and administrators who succeed in going through primary and secondary schools without the library having an impact in their school life? The inception and success of school libraries is hinged on the perception and attitude of the administrator and the management. Thus, the success of a library in a modern school depends upon the administrator making the library part of the child's everyday experience<sup>4</sup>. Precisely school libraries should be uncalculated into the teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools.

Kenya is one of the countries where there is no legislation to make all schools to have functional libraries mandatory. Schools in Kenya are inspected and registered even though they don't have simple libraries. This sorry state persists despite the existence of many official policy statements, ministry of education and reports from the commissions on education emphasizing the need and importance of the school libraries. Kenya need an act of parliament accorded in law on establishment of school libraries in all schools. The legislation and establishment of school libraries would set the required standards and guideline in terms of purpose and functions. Standards establish clear cut expectation as it is the case in USA, UK and the developed world.

The ALA standards and guideline stipulates the expectations from all the school libraries<sup>3</sup>. The Kenya library association could successfully steer the establishment of standards and guidelines. The standards on school libraries would focus on space and accommodation for staff, user and stock, collection/resources, staffing and budgetary estimates<sup>8</sup>.

## Conclusion

This papers mainstreams school libraries as part of the core business of school process. Learning and teaching is best supported by school libraries. However several problems for instance lack awareness, low perception. Lack of proper legislation and professional trained staff have suffocated the development of school libraries in Kenya. There is need to borrow leaf from the developed world such as US A and UK where there is defective standards and guidelines on the establishment of school libraries and mandatory legislation<sup>9</sup>.

## References

1. Carroll F.L. (1981). Recent Advances in School Librarianship. *Pergamum*, 3(1), 10-12.
2. Dike V.W. (1981). School Libraries in Nigeria. *Comparative Educational Review*, 26(2), 221-234.
3. Woolls B. (2004). The school library media manager. *CT Libraries Unlimited*, 9(14), 47-62.
4. Trehan G.L. (1985). School Libraries Management. *Sterling Publishers*, 4(3), 21-34.
5. Killong G.C. (1986). A Study of Library Facilities in Selected Secondary Schools with Particular Reference to their Management, Organization and Use in Bungoma District, Western Province, Kenya. Kenyatta University, Kenya.
6. Kithumbu W.A. (2010). A Survey of the Qualifications of Librarians in Selected Primary Schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. Kenyatta University, Kenya.
7. Khisa W.H.L. (1986). A Survey of the Learning Materials in Selected Primary Schools in Nairobi; Management, Organization and Use. Kenyatta University, Kenya.
8. Greenwood H. and Maynard S. (2010). Successful Primary School Libraries in Challenging Circumstances. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 15(2), 89-113.
9. Gordon C. (2009). Raising active voices in school libraries: authentic learning, information processing and guided inquiry. *Scan*, 28(3), 34-41.