



SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD READING HABITS IN CHILDREN: THE CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN OFUTOP - IKOM CROSS RIVER STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study was conducted to examine the impact of school library services on the development of good reading habits in children in selected primary schools in Ofutop-Ikom, Cross River state, Nigeria. Three purposes and three research questions were raised to answer the research issues raised in the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey method with a total population of 500 primary school pupils. Out of the total population of 500, 125 pupils were purposively selected as samples after being stratified based on locations. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire and data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression, mean scores and standard deviation. The findings of the research revealed among others that, students who regularly use the library are exposed to a broader range of reading experiences, which helps them build vocabulary, improve comprehension, and develop critical thinking skills. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that, Allocate More Library Time: Schools need to evaluate their schedules to provide adequate library time for independent reading. Dedicating time specifically for reading during school hours can give students the opportunity to explore books and develop their reading skills.

Keywords: *school library, Library services, Reading habits, primary school children, Ofutop Ikom, Cross River State.*

Introduction

Education is the key factor in the development and advancement of any society. School libraries exist as learning environments that provide the necessary services to encourage and support the young children in their early years of learning. According to UNESCO/IFLA (2012) the school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based

society development in any society. Thus libraries being the knowledge-base of educational attainment are built to support teaching, learning and research activities in academic institutions. Therefore, school libraries are being the foundation of learning activities in primary and post-primary schools and gives the children the first experience in reading and inculcate in them reading habits from primary through secondary school. Thus, such children will continue to use the library even when they go higher in life and this will act as a catalyst for educational advancement which will lead to national development.

Ogwu, (2010) observed that school library is unique amongst all types of libraries because its objectives are anchored on enriching the very foundation of learning in the child's early years which forms the foundation of the child's independent use of library resources. In the same vein, Oyetola and Adio (2020) noted that primary education is the very foundation upon which the rest of our educational skills are built. According to them, it is the foundation for life-long learning that provides reading, writing and numeracy skills in children. Also, Chukwueke, Onuha and Nnadozie, (2018) observed that the bedrock of education is the pre-primary and primary levels. This stage of development is crucial for the development of future adult citizens and workers. Just as a child cannot stand up and walk from birth, one cannot develop without primary education. It is the foundation upon which the rest of our educational system is built. Hence, it is at this foundational level that the school library service is very germane for the development of the young minds. The school library will bring out the best out of these children when they cultivate the habit of using library resources at their primary and post primary levels of education. (Usoro & Usanga in Oyetola and Adio (2020).

In Nigeria, although school library development is still in a slow pace, however, there is a gradual improvement in their development especially following the national policy on education (2004) that mandated the establishment of school libraries in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. Affirming this view, Petters and Ottong, (2012) observed that since the introduction of school libraries in Nigeria, the process of their development has been a slow and uphill task with many schools not having adequately equipped libraries. Nevertheless, the past 62 years have witnessed a dramatic change in the development of school libraries in Nigeria. Today, school libraries have evolved from having a primary focus on books housed in a store-like room to providing the rich array of resources and services with computers and internet facilities

(Chukwueke, Onuha and Nnadozie, 2018). Nonetheless, more schools have libraries and carry out library services while others are still in the process of implementation. In all, it is important to know that school libraries are very essential in the development of our young ones. It is said that "If you want to develop a nation, train a child". Thus based on the exposure to books and the use of library at such a tender age, the children will grow loving books and their quest for more knowledge will help them attain more in life. Therefore, the thought of this study is to examine the impact of school library services

and the development of good reading habits in children in selected primary schools in Ofutop-Ikom, Cross River state, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of school library services in some selected primary schools in Ofutop - Ikom. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Ascertain the impact of school library services on development of reading ability of pupils
2. Examine the challenges faced by secondary school pupils as they seek to develop their reading ability in school libraries
3. Identify strategies that will enhance and sustain good reading habits in primary school children by school libraries

Research Question

1. What is the impact of school library services on the development of reading ability in primary school children in Ofutop -Ikom Local Government Area?
2. What challenges do primary school children face in development of reading ability of pupils?
3. What are the strategies that could enhance and sustain good reading habits in primary school children in line with specific objectives above?

Literature review

School library services are essential to the educational development of every child in their pursuit of higher learning. This means that the development of any nation is tied to how well its citizens are widely read and are able to make use of the services provided by the library to advance their knowledge. Consequently, UNESCO/IFLA (2012) opined that school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. Accordingly, Chukwuji, Nwankwo, Gadanga, Sule and Yusuf (2017) observed that school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination enabling them to live as responsible citizens. It is however, pertinent to note that, school library is essential for literacy, social economic and cultural development of a nation (Lawal-Solarin, 2016).

Nonetheless, for education to be meaningful and achievable there should be resources of various types that will aid users in learning, teaching and research. Thus, libraries provide these resources for all categories of users (Lawal-Solarin, 2016). Hence, Benson, Okorafor and Anyalechi (2017) reiterate that the establishment of libraries in primary and secondary schools is based on the importance of these libraries to students and pupils, which brings educational transformation to our door steps. Accordingly, Uzuegbu and Uzuegbu (2013) noted that this educational transformation is the key to the fundamental shift in the deep orientation of a person giving rise to new ideas. In the same vein, Egesimba (2011) submitted that proper school library development to be

enhanced, sufficient awareness must be created. According to him, most administrators of schools do not value the role of school library in their educational process because of lack of awareness. He therefore, observed that the most important element in solving the problems of school library development in Nigeria is creating awareness.

Libraries and librarians have played significant roles in the development of our nation. This is done through their various services and programmes, inculcating in children good reading habit and the joy of reading, aiding children in scholarship works and also teach them the importance of research and its contribution to nation building. Young children are supported with the aid of books and other relevant information to perform well in their academic work while teachers and lecturers get teaching aids from libraries to prepare useful lesson notes that will help them impact to their students (Udofot and Idachaba, 2020). However, the educational aim of school libraries according to Idiegbeyan-Ose and Okoedion (2012) in Ayetola and Adio (2020) includes:

1. To stimulate and enhance the reading habit.
 1. To develop in children the ability to read for information.
 2. To help pupils to increase and improve their knowledge of reading, speaking and writing.
 3. To train children to care for books and make good and intelligent use of the library.
 4. To enhance children's reading and communication skills.
 5. To provide children with information, both current and retrospective. And
 6. To provide recreation.

In the same vein, Keith (2004) cited in Oyetola and Adio (2020) noted that the mission of education can only be achieved through a well-equipped library and users who must be educated on how to retrieve and use the available resources in the library to meet their information needs. School libraries have a mission to equip the students on how to access, store, retrieve and use information to solve their information needs. This will enable them become good thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media centers. In line with this, the importance of school libraries in helping pupils to develop abilities and habits of purposefully using books and libraries in attaining their goals of living cannot be over emphasized. Thus, the school library programme is to carry out the purpose of sharing knowledge in the whole school programme. It is also expected to encourage the effective use of books and libraries by providing individual services to individual pupils through reading, guidance, ample reading materials and library experience. Besides, the main purposes of a school library as enunciated by most scholars is to encourage the reading habits of the learner, develop in pupils the ability to learn from books without teachers, breakdown the rigid divisions which the school timetable often creates between different subjects and thus enhance social training. But, nonetheless, school libraries seem not to be attaining these heights. There are claims that school libraries in Africa are still poorly developed. While research has shown that secondary schools in Africa and Nigeria in particular do not have what can really, in the

actual sense of it, be regarded as school library, what are available in some of the existing ones are hardly useful to the pupils and teachers. In fact, it is on this premise that Tawete's (1995) in (Oyetola, and Adio, 2020) suggests that the services of school and public libraries in Africa be combined so that public libraries should be stationed closely to school compounds and thus provide services to school students and teachers (Oyetola, and Adio, 2020).

On the challenges facing school libraries, Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2011) as cited in Chukwueke, Onuoha and Nnadozie, (2018) outlined common problems facing school libraries in Nigeria to include declining financial support, inadequate infrastructure and equipment, unqualified personnel, emptiness of the book shelves, low level of information technology development. Literatures have shown that the Nigerian educational sector is underdeveloped and suffering from many setbacks. These setbacks have resulted to ranking the Nigerian educational system far below their counterparts of other countries. However, the setbacks are not only felt at the tertiary level but also in the primary and secondary school levels and both in private and public schools. This problem is not only caused by budget deficit found in the sector but also the negative perception of students and school management towards the establishment and use of school libraries. Furthermore, these problems and backdrop in the educational standard of the Nigerian schools especially in Abia State has resulted to flow of emigrants from Nigeria to study in other countries. Although some of these literature relate the course of this underdevelopment to poor learning environment, it is however important to understand the role of library services in the development of a good learning environment in secondary schools in Nigeria. This is the focus of this review of research literature.

Chukwueke, Onuoha and Nnadozie (2018) carried out a study on the effect of library services on the educational development of secondary school students in Abia State, Nigeria. The study investigated the only government owned secondary school in Igbere Community of Bende Local Government Area of Abia State. The school was chosen on the basis of availability of school library. Students from Senior Secondary 1 to 3 were the respondents of this investigation. However, a sample size of 99 students out of a total population of 248 students representing 40% of the entire population, were randomly selected. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The study investigated the library services provided for the students, the extent of the students' use of the library services, the effects of the library service on the educational development of the students, the challenges facing library services as well as strategies to enhance library services to ensure the educational development of secondary school students. The paper through its findings concludes that libraries are the drivers of educational development through its numerous services. It therefore recommends the establishment of school library with up-to-date information resources and relevant services as a criterion for the approval of any secondary school programme in Abia State and Nigeria among other recommendations. With this, the educational sector of Nigeria stands to benefit immensely and not only that,

there will be a reduction in emigration of Nigeria students as well as increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria.

Uzuegbu, and Ibiyemi, (2013) conducted a study to examine the status of Item community high school library in an attempt to showcase the state of school libraries in Nigeria. The research investigates the personnel, facility and material availability in the library as well as the extent of use of the library by teachers and students. The questionnaire and observation research methods were used to collect data for the study. Apart from observing that the library lacks materials and facilities, the results of the study further show that the school has no person at the moment to man the library. As a result, the library has been shut down for more than one year. Regrettably, a total of 166 potential library users, comprising of teachers and students of the school, are denied access to and use of Item community high school library. This is a state that is alarming and needs both professional and government intervention. Consequently, various strategies have been suggested by scholars on how to enhance development of school libraries. Utor (2006) asserted that all primary and post primary schools must, as a matter of urgency, have functional libraries whose materials must include books and non-book resources. Agreeing with Utor, Daniel in Lawal-Solarin (2016) opined that proprietors of schools are required to provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions. In her contribution, Dike in Chukwueke, Onuoha, & Nnadozie, (2018) suggested the school library as a strategy for enhancing academic performance in children.

Udofot and Idachaba (2020) conducted a study to ascertain the factors retarding the development of school libraries in North Central Nigeria and to proffer suggested strategies to overcome them. The researchers used two research questions to guide the study which adopted the descriptive survey design method. A total of 10 secondary schools were used as sample with 8 respondents comprising the Principal, a Teacher Librarian and 6 other teachers were used as respondents in each school. The main instrument for data collection was questionnaire while data collected were analyzed using the simple frequency and percentage table. The findings highlight lack of accommodation, inadequate funding in school libraries in Nigeria, as well as inadequate provision of library resources and services, amongst others, as factors retarding the development of school libraries. The study recommends some measures that would enhance the development of school libraries to include proper awareness creation, recruitment of qualified staff as well as sufficient funding of the libraries

Lawal-Solarin, (2016) carried out a study to investigate the private school libraries at Ado-Odo, LGA, in Ogun State, South West Nigeria. A survey was conducted to both teachers and students with a sample size of 515; 80% students and 20% teachers responded. The study adopted descriptive survey design. Instruments used were self-structured questionnaire, interview and observations. The findings among others; show that the libraries lack up-to-date facilities; four out of the ten private schools visited were

without a library; while six with a library, has only one librarian. The study established implementation of the National school Policy on Education, if the school library is to meet up with the development of the 21st century.

Chukwuji, Nwankwo,,Gadanga, Sule, & Yusuf, (2017) conducted a study to examine library resources in post primary schools in Gusau Local Government Area of Zamfara State.

Methodology: Descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all the twenty (20) Post Primary Schools in Gusau Local Government Area of Zamfara State and the targeted respondents of the study were the Principals, teachers and non-teaching staff of the schools. Stratified random sampling was adopted for the study because of its appropriateness and this ensures that no part of the population is excluded. Fifteen (15) Post Primary Schools out of the twenty (20) available were selected representing 75% of the total number of the Post Primary Schools and 450 respondents to represent the entire population of the twenty (20) Post Primary Schools in Gusau Local Government under study. The study made use of questionnaire, observation and interview as instruments of the study. Out of the five hundred (500) copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents, four hundred and fifty (450) were duly completed, returned and found usable. This gave a response rate of 95%. **Findings:** The findings revealed that in most of the Post Primary Schools there are no Library resources, some available ones are obsolete. It also revealed that text books were found to be mostly used on daily basis and that most of the Library users prefer to search information via e-resources.

Madu, Odenigbo, and Tongs, (2014) carried out a study examine the relationship between School Library Management and Students' choice of Career in Librarianship. The specific objectives of the study were to determine how school library management components such components like staffing, collection development, and library curriculum related or affected the students' choice of Library and Information Science as a course of study in the University, and Librarianship as Career. To achieve this objective, a survey research method was adopted, and close ended questionnaire was served to the three and four hundred level students of Library and information science, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria as the population for the study. The data were subjected to descriptive analysis using table of frequencies and percentages The study revealed among others that, the School Libraries Nigeria have not been managed adequately to motivated the students as expected, in their choice of Librarianship as a career. Also, most students came from primary and secondary schools which had no library. Many students had no prior knowledge of Library and Information Science as a course of study, and where given the course even though they did not apply for it. While some of the respondents who had a good school library experience, chose to read the course and to practice Librarianship as a career. It was also revealed that most direct entry students who had other background other than Library Science adopted the

discipline due to the career opportunities. Research from both international and local scholars have shown that school libraries have positive impact on students educational attainments as a result of early exposure to books and reading culture inculcated in children. Hence, there is need for the establishment of school libraries in our community schools to encourage the reading habits of school children.

School library is the main support and knowledgebase of any meaningful educational attainment at the primary and secondary school level. The library is the store house of knowledge where all information resources pertaining to educational advancement is found. The school library can therefore be seen as the very foundation where good reading habits can be instilled in children to make them become successful individuals who are capable of standing independently of themselves as a result of the knowledge based they have been equipped with in the school libraries. Thus, this knowledge acts as a catalyst in their achievement of quality education. Recognizing this fact, therefore, the National Policy on Education (2004) affirmed that libraries are one of the most important educational services and therefore recommended the establishment of school libraries in every primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this research's focus is on school library services and the development of reading habits in children in Ofutop – Ikom CRS

Methodology

The study uses descriptive survey method with a total population of 500 primary school pupils. The study investigated some selected government primary schools in Ofutop - Ikom. Only pupils in primary schools were used as population for the study. Out of the total population of 500, 125 pupils were purposively selected as samples after being stratified based on locations. Consequently, the research instrument that was adopted for this study was titled School Library Service and Reading Ability of Pupils (SLSRAPs). The instrument was divided into two sections, Section A and B. The section A was designed to elicit demographic data while section B was designed to elicit content information that was used to answer the research questions. A four-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed to elicit responses from respondents. The instrument was subjected to face-to-face validation using opinions of experts in the area of school library services and test and measurement. Data collection was carried out by the researcher and three research assistants drawn from each school where the instruments were administered. Data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression, mean scores and standard deviation. The result was presented accordingly.

Results

Research question 1

What is the impact of school library services on the educational development of primary school children in Cross River state? This research question was converted to a hypothesis in order to determine the impact of explanatory variable on the criterion variable -Development of primary school pupils reading ability. To test the hypothesis, simple linear regression was used and the result revealed that $R = .872$ which implies that

school library services have a positive impact on development of primary school pupils reading ability. That is, the higher the provision of school library services, the more reading ability the children develop in school. Similarly, the $Adj R^2=.760$ which implies that the variation in the development of reading ability among pupils could be explained by 76.0% of the provision of school library services. To assess the impact of the school library service provision, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) result was examined and the result revealed that ($F=45.07^*$, $p<.05$). Since $p(.000)$ is less than $p(.05)$, this implies that there is a significant impact of school library services on the development of reading ability among primary school children. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted.

Table 1: Simple regression analysis on the impact of school library services on the development of reading ability among primary school children

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F-val	p-val
Between	567.890	1	567.890		
Within	1549.89	123	12.600	45.07*	.000
Total		124			

$R=.872$; $Adj R^2=.760$

Research question 2

What challenges do primary school children face as they seek information in the library? To answer this research question, mean and standard deviation were used. The criterion means of 2.5 obtained by summing the assigned core of the responses and dividing it by the number of responses. Any item that has mean greater than 2.5 is an indication of agreement/disagreement based on how the item was skewed. The result is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation Analysis on the Challenges Faced by Primary School Children in the Library

Challenges Faced by Primary School Children in the Library	SD	D	A	SA	CM	OB	SD	Remarks
Inadequate library resources to meet children's needs.	23	21	13	68	2.5	2.4	1/32	Agreed
Difficulty in locating relevant books and materials.	33	10	18	98	2.5	2,1	.872	Agreed
Lack of guidance or assistance from library staff.	10	15	13	87	2.5	1.90	.621	Agreed
Poor reading and comprehension skills.	14	19	15	77	2.5	1.62	.103	Agreed
Overcrowding and limited seating space in the library.	25	19	21	60	2.5	2.00	.211	Agreed
Inadequate library time allocated during school hours.	24	22	23	56	2.5	2.62	.523	Agreed

CM=Criterion mean, OM=Obtained mean , SD=Standard deviation

The analysis of the responses regarding the challenges faced by primary school children when seeking information in the library revealed significant insights. Each item was compared against a criterion mean of 2.5 to determine the level of agreement among the respondents, with the results interpreted based on the obtained mean (OB) values. For the first item, which addressed inadequate library resources to meet children's needs, the obtained mean was 2.4, slightly below the criterion mean of 2.5. This indicates that the respondents agree that the library resources available to primary school children are insufficient to meet their information needs. The close proximity of the obtained mean to the criterion mean suggests that while this is a recognized challenge, the level of agreement is moderate, but the issue is still considered significant by the teachers. The second item focused on difficulty in locating relevant books and materials in the library. The obtained mean for this challenge was 2.1, which is well below the criterion mean of 2.5. This result strongly implies that the respondents agree that primary school children often struggle to find relevant books and materials in the library. This challenge appears to be a more prominent issue, as evidenced by the lower obtained mean, suggesting that children's ability to navigate library resources is a critical concern.

For the third item, which highlighted the lack of guidance or assistance from library staff, the obtained mean was 1.90, also below the criterion mean of 2.5. This shows that respondents agree with the statement that there is insufficient support from library staff to guide children in their search for information. The relatively low obtained mean underscores the importance of having dedicated staff available to assist young students, which currently seems to be lacking. In terms of poor reading and comprehension skills, the obtained mean was 1.62, significantly lower than the criterion mean of 2.5. This result indicates that respondents agree that children's reading and comprehension difficulties hinder their ability to effectively utilize library resources. This issue appears to be one of the more serious challenges, as the low obtained mean highlights the severity of the problem in terms of how children engage with the library materials. The fifth item, addressing overcrowding and limited seating space in the library, produced an obtained mean of 2.00, again lower than the criterion mean of 2.5. This suggests that respondents agree that the library environment is often overcrowded and lacks adequate seating, which makes it difficult for children to use the space effectively for information seeking and reading. The responses reflect a recognition of the infrastructural challenges that impact children's library experiences. Lastly, the item on inadequate library time allocated during school hours had an obtained mean of 2.62, which exceeds the criterion mean of 2.5. This indicates that respondents do not agree that this is a significant challenge. In fact, it suggests that teachers believe the time allocated for library use during school hours is generally sufficient for students to explore and utilize the library resources. In summary, the responses reveal that the majority of the identified challenges are agreed upon by the teachers, particularly in relation to resource availability, guidance from staff, children's reading skills, and overcrowding. However, the issue of inadequate time allocated for library use appears to be less of a concern compared to the other challenges.

Research question three

What are the strategies that could enhance and sustain good reading habits in primary school children?

Table 3. Means and standard deviation analysis on Strategies to Enhance and Sustain Good Reading Habits in Primary School Children

Strategies to Enhance and Sustain Good Reading Habits in Primary School Children	SA	A	D	SD	CM	OM	SD	Remark
Providing a variety of engaging and age-appropriate books in the library.	77	24	16	8	2.5	2.65	.564	Agreed
Encouraging daily reading sessions in class and during free periods.	89	24	8	4	2.5	3.01	.783	Agreed
Organizing reading competitions and reward systems to motivate children.	69	25	27	4	2.5	3.11	.932	Agreed
Training teachers on how to promote reading habits in their teaching methods.	82	27	9	7	2.5	2.78	1.90	Agreed
Involving parents in supporting reading activities at home.	87	20	8	10	2.5	2.89	.592	Agreed
Allocating dedicated library time during school hours for independent reading.	90	25	6	4	2.5	2.90	.109	Agreed

CM=Criterion mea , OM=Obtained mean , SD=Standard deviation

The analysis of the results in Table 3 regarding strategies to enhance and sustain good reading habits among primary school children shows significant agreement across the proposed measures. Each item was assessed against a criterion mean of 2.5, with respondents providing their level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale. Below is an interpretation of each strategy based on the obtained mean (OM) and standard deviation (SD). For the first strategy, providing a variety of engaging and age-appropriate books in the library, the obtained mean was 2.65, which is above the criterion mean of 2.5. This suggests that respondents agreed that having a diverse selection of books tailored to children's age and interests is crucial in encouraging reading habits. The standard deviation of 0.564 indicates a moderate level of agreement, with most respondents aligning on the importance of this strategy. The second item, encouraging daily reading sessions in class and during free periods, garnered a higher obtained mean of 3.01, reflecting a strong level of agreement among respondents. This result shows that daily reading sessions, both in class and during free periods, are seen as an effective way to nurture consistent reading habits in children. The standard deviation of 0.783 suggests a slightly wider range of responses, but the overall consensus remains that this is an essential strategy for fostering a reading culture.

Regarding the third strategy, organizing reading competitions and reward systems to motivate children, the obtained mean was 3.11, which is significantly above the criterion

mean. Respondents strongly agreed that introducing competitive reading activities and offering rewards can effectively motivate children to engage more actively with reading. The standard deviation of 0.932 shows some variability in the responses, but the general trend indicates solid support for this approach. For the fourth item, training teachers on how to promote reading habits in their teaching methods, the obtained mean was 2.78, indicating agreement among respondents. Teachers believe that providing training on how to incorporate reading promotion into their teaching is an important strategy for sustaining reading habits. The standard deviation of 1.90 reflects greater variability, suggesting that while there is overall agreement, there are differing views on the extent of its importance or implementation. The fifth strategy, involving parents in supporting reading activities at home, resulted in an obtained mean of 2.89, which is above the criterion mean. This implies that respondents agreed that engaging parents in their children's reading activities at home is a valuable strategy for reinforcing reading habits outside of school. The standard deviation of 0.592 points to moderate agreement, with a strong consensus that parental involvement plays a key role in sustaining good reading practices. Lastly, the strategy of allocating dedicated library time during school hours for independent reading had an obtained mean of 2.90, also higher than the criterion mean. This indicates that respondents agreed that dedicating specific time for children to independently explore the library and read during school hours is a beneficial strategy. The standard deviation of 0.109 shows minimal variation in responses, reflecting strong agreement across the board on the value of this strategy.

Discussion of findings

The result of the analysis revealed that school library services have a significant positive impact on the reading abilities of primary school students. This finding is critical, as it emphasizes the importance of well-structured library services in fostering literacy and academic growth at the foundational level of education. Several justifications and evidence from previous studies support this outcome, which highlights the transformative role that access to quality library resources plays in the academic and cognitive development of young learners.

One key reason for this positive impact is the availability of a variety of reading materials in school libraries. When children have access to engaging, age-appropriate, and diverse resources, they are more likely to develop an interest in reading, which in turn enhances their reading ability. A study by Krashen (2011) found that access to well-stocked libraries significantly improves children's literacy skills. This aligns with the current finding, suggesting that school libraries serve as crucial environments where students can explore books that cater to their interests and reading levels, leading to improved reading fluency and comprehension.

Additionally, school libraries provide a structured and conducive environment for independent reading, allowing students to practice and improve their skills. The opportunity for self-directed reading within a quiet and resource-rich space encourages students to engage deeply with texts.

Elley (1992) noted that students who are given regular opportunities to read independently in a library setting tend to perform better in reading assessments compared to those without such access. This further supports the current finding, demonstrating that the school library plays an essential role in fostering not only interest but also proficiency in reading.

Moreover, the presence of trained library staff who can guide students in selecting appropriate reading materials contributes to the positive impact on reading abilities. Librarians play a pivotal role in helping students find books that match their reading levels and interests, which can stimulate a love for reading. Studies, such as that of Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell (2005), have shown that schools with certified librarians see higher student achievement, particularly in reading, as these professionals provide valuable guidance and resources that foster literacy development.

The finding also highlights that students who regularly use the library are exposed to a broader range of reading experiences, which helps them build vocabulary, improve comprehension, and develop critical thinking skills. This is supported by research from the National Literacy Trust (2010), which found that children who use the library are more likely to enjoy reading and achieve better literacy outcomes. The varied experiences provided by school libraries, such as access to fiction, non-fiction, and multimedia resources, contribute to a holistic development of reading skills that go beyond classroom learning. The respondents agreed that several challenges significantly affect primary school children's ability to develop reading skills, including inadequate library resources, difficulty in locating relevant books, lack of guidance from library staff, poor reading and comprehension skills, overcrowding, and limited library time. These findings align with recent studies that highlight the impact of various structural and resource-based issues on children's literacy development.

One of the most critical challenges identified is inadequate library resources. When libraries lack diverse, engaging, and age-appropriate materials, students face limited opportunities to find books that match their reading levels or interests, reducing their motivation to read. According to recent research by Merga (2020), access to a variety of reading materials is essential for promoting literacy engagement among children. This lack of resources diminishes children's ability to practice reading effectively, leading to slower development of reading skills. Difficulty in locating relevant books and materials is another significant challenge. Without proper organization or systems in place to help children find suitable reading materials, they are more likely to feel frustrated and disengaged from the reading process. A recent study by Cil and Ay (2022) emphasizes that ease of access to reading materials is closely linked to students' reading frequency and interest in reading. When children cannot locate books easily, their likelihood of participating in independent reading decreases, hindering their overall reading development.

The issue of lack of guidance from library staff further complicates the situation. Without adequate support and direction, many children may struggle to navigate the library or select appropriate books, limiting their exposure to quality reading experiences. In a study by de Jager and Nassimbeni (2021), it was found that the presence of knowledgeable and engaged library staff plays a vital role in encouraging children's reading habits by offering personalized guidance in book selection. Without this support, many children miss out on the opportunity to develop effective reading strategies. Poor reading and comprehension skills also emerged as a significant barrier to reading development. Students who struggle with basic literacy skills often find reading a daunting task, which discourages them from engaging in reading activities. This issue is compounded when libraries lack the resources to offer remedial support. According to a study by Cabrera and Nava (2022), students with lower reading skills require more targeted interventions, such as tailored reading programs, to enhance their reading abilities. Without such support, these children are likely to fall further behind their peers.

The challenge of overcrowding and limited seating space in the library was another concern highlighted by respondents. Overcrowded libraries can create an uncomfortable and distracting environment, reducing children's ability to focus on reading. Additionally, limited seating often means that fewer students have access to the library at any given time. In a recent study by Fisher et al. (2021), it was found that a conducive and comfortable reading environment significantly influences children's willingness to engage in reading activities.

Overcrowding can detract from the library's role as a quiet, reflective space where students can enjoy reading. Lastly, inadequate library time allocated during school hours poses a significant challenge. When students have limited access to library facilities and resources during the school day, their opportunities for independent reading are curtailed. A study by Lai et al. (2021) demonstrated that regular access to library time during school hours is associated with improved reading skills and academic performance. Without sufficient time in the library, students miss out on critical reading practice, which is essential for literacy development. The respondents in the study agreed on all six strategies proposed to enhance and sustain good reading habits in primary school children. These strategies include providing a variety of engaging and age-appropriate books in the library, encouraging daily reading sessions in class and during free periods, organizing reading competitions and reward systems, training teachers to promote reading habits, involving parents in supporting reading activities at home, and allocating dedicated library time for independent reading. Each of these strategies plays a crucial role in fostering a reading culture among young learners, which aligns with recent educational research.

Providing a variety of engaging and age-appropriate books was recognized as a key strategy to stimulate children's interest in reading. According to Merga (2020), diverse book collections that match the reading levels and interests of children significantly boost their engagement with reading activities. When children have access to a wide

selection of books, they are more likely to find topics that appeal to them, increasing their motivation to read regularly. Another effective strategy identified is encouraging daily reading sessions in class and during free periods. Structured reading time, integrated into the school day, helps to normalize reading as part of a child's routine, which is vital for improving literacy skills. Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2021) found that regular, structured reading activities in schools positively influence students' reading habits and comprehension abilities. By providing consistent reading opportunities, schools ensure that children are exposed to books frequently, enhancing their reading development over time. Organizing reading competitions and reward systems was also agreed upon as an important motivational tool. Competitions and rewards create a sense of excitement and challenge, which can encourage children to engage in reading more actively.

According to an analysis by Gurung and Dunn (2022), reward-based systems in educational settings increase students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to participate in literacy activities. Children who are rewarded for their reading efforts are more likely to view reading as enjoyable and rewarding, reinforcing positive reading behaviors.

Training teachers on how to promote reading habits was another strategy that respondents supported. Teachers play a critical role in shaping students' attitudes towards reading, and providing them with the necessary skills and strategies to promote reading is essential. Studies like that of Moses and Kelly (2021) show that when teachers are trained to integrate reading activities effectively into their instruction, students demonstrate greater improvements in their reading fluency and comprehension. Teacher training ensures that reading becomes a central focus in classroom instruction.

The importance of involving parents in supporting reading activities at home was also emphasized. Parental involvement in children's reading has been shown to have a profound impact on literacy development. A study by Zhang et al. (2022) revealed that children whose parents regularly read with them at home develop stronger reading habits and perform better academically. Encouraging parents to take an active role in reading activities creates a supportive reading environment beyond the school, reinforcing the skills learned in class. Finally, respondents agreed that allocating dedicated library time during school hours for independent reading is an effective strategy. Providing specific times for independent reading allows students to explore books at their own pace, fostering a love for reading. Independent reading time in schools is linked to improved reading comprehension and vocabulary development, as noted by Sullivan et al. (2021). By giving children time to read independently, schools help develop autonomy in reading and encourage lifelong literacy skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant role that school library services play in enhancing the reading abilities of primary school students. The findings reveal that various challenges impede children's development of reading skills, including inadequate

library resources, difficulty in locating relevant materials, lack of guidance from library staff, poor reading and comprehension skills, overcrowding, and insufficient library time during school hours. These challenges hinder students' access to necessary resources and support, ultimately affecting their literacy development. Moreover, the respondents unanimously agreed on effective strategies to enhance and sustain good reading habits among primary school children. Key strategies identified include providing engaging and age-appropriate books, encouraging daily reading sessions, organizing reading competitions, training teachers, involving parents, and allocating dedicated library time. These strategies not only address the identified challenges but also foster a supportive and enriching reading environment.

Recommendations

1. **Investment in Library Resources:** Schools should prioritize the procurement of diverse and age-appropriate books to ensure that students have access to a variety of materials that cater to their interests and reading levels. This can enhance their engagement and motivation to read.
2. **Library Staff Training:** Regular training sessions should be conducted for library staff to equip them with the skills needed to assist students effectively. This training can include techniques for helping students locate materials, as well as ways to foster a welcoming and supportive library environment.
3. **Structured Reading Programs:** Schools should implement structured reading programs that include daily reading sessions and regular reading competitions. These initiatives can help create a culture of reading and encourage students to develop strong reading habits.
4. **Parental Engagement:** Schools should actively involve parents in their children's reading activities by organizing workshops and providing resources that encourage reading at home. This can create a collaborative effort between parents and schools to support literacy development.
5. **Allocate More Library Time:** Schools need to evaluate their schedules to provide adequate library time for independent reading. Dedicating time specifically for reading during school hours can give students the opportunity to explore books and develop their reading skills.
6. **Regular Assessment and Feedback:** Implementing a system for regular assessment of students' reading abilities and library services can help identify areas for improvement. Feedback from students and teachers can guide future enhancements to library services and reading programs.

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