Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Using Evidence in Practice

Engaging Students Who Have Insufficient Library Resources: A Case of a Secondary School in Lahore, Pakistan

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Setting

The majority of schools in Pakistan have libraries that are nonexistent or in poor condition. Where school libraries exist, students are not interested in visiting them due to a lack of interest from principals and teachers, inadequate curriculum structure, and outdated and irrelevant resources available in these libraries. Government Pilot Higher Secondary School is situated in Wahdat Colony, Lahore City, the provincial capital of Punjab province, Pakistan. It is one of the oldest and biggest schools in Lahore, covering 25 acres and including 41 classrooms, one library, one staff room, two canteens, and a large

playground. It was initially started as a high school in 1958 and then upgraded to a secondary school in 2017. It consists of a qualified and well-experienced principal and a total of 80 teachers, including 70 males and 10 females.

Approximately 2,000 students from grades 1 through 12 are studying in the school. The school has a library room with a collection of approximately 5,000 books. There are a total of 28 iron shelves on which books are arranged by subject. The majority of the books are related to religion and history. There is no spine labelling of books. The borrowing facility is available for the students and teachers and is maintained through a register. Initially, books are issued for seven working days but can be extended on demand. There is no specified budget for the purchase of books; rather, the government provides books for the library. There is no professional librarian appointed; rather, a teacher who has a M.Phil. in Urdu is voluntarily assisting with the library, and he is gaining no extra financial benefits for this service.

Problem

According to the rules, it is compulsory for academic institutions in Pakistan, whether public or private, to have a library to support teaching and learning. As per the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) Act of 1975, a school must have a well-stocked library building to be affiliated with the board. In the case of the establishment of a new school library, Rs. 25000 must be spent in the first year, with the provision of Rs. 5000 in subsequent years' budgets. There should also be an adequate number of newspapers and periodicals. Here, newspapers are considered as printed publications issued daily containing news, articles, and advertisements whereas periodicals indicate monthly magazines, journals, and newsletters. The school must appoint a library assistant having a certificate or diploma in library science.

We have observed in the case of Pilot Higher Secondary School that there is an inappropriate library building, non-provision of budget for collection development, and no appointment of a library professional, resulting in minimal use of the school library. Scanning of the currently available library collection revealed that the majority of books were not written at the appropriate level for students or are outdated or irrelevant. Although there is a provision of a library period every day, equal to one class time, students have not utilized that period due to irrelevant books, unavailability of a library professional, lack of interest by the principal and school teachers, and student and teacher misperceptions regarding leisure reading habits and their benefits.

Evidence

We established a team of six graduate students studying at the Institute of Information Management to visit the school. We planned to conduct face-to-face interviews with the principal, schoolteachers, and students to better understand the status of the school library and to explore why there was minimal use of the school library. To devise interview questions, we consulted Tabassum et al.'s (2019) study, which explored the status of school libraries and their developmental issues in a Pakistani context.

The interview questions were categorized in terms of school heads/principals, librarians/teacher-librarians, teachers, and students. The principal was asked about his educational profile, role in extending school library services, and future library development plans. The teacher assisting with the library was asked about his perceptions of the school library, the library management system, and library facilities and services. Schoolteachers were asked about their own use of the school library, perceptions about library benefits, and their strategies to promote library use among students. Students were asked about

their library perceptions, visitation practices, and their satisfaction with the library services. Our team was trained to conduct and record in-depth interviews.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted with the principal, five schoolteachers, the teacher assisting with the library, and 15 students from different grades in August and September 2022. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interview took an average of 15 minutes to complete. This evidence helped us to understand the situation and perceptions of the principal, teachers, and students regarding the school library.

Views of School Library Stakeholders

Although there was a view that the school library had a significant place in engaging students towards leisure reading and lifelong learning, interviewees expressed frustration with the lack of support from the government for the provision of infrastructure, finance, staff, and required resources for the library. They stated that the staff member working in the library was unqualified to provide professional library services, and interviewees mentioned that there was almost no use of the school library for library-related activities. The school library opens every day during the library period, but a low number of students use it due to the non-availability of relevant sources and facilities, and a lack of motivation.

Schoolteachers mentioned that there was almost no use of the school library; rather, the library room was used for other activities. They pointed out that the irrelevant and outdated library stock, lack of budget, and non-library-oriented curriculum structure, which focuses on passing tests and examinations rather than the development of voluntary reading, were major obstacles to extensive use of the school library. The interview data also revealed that schoolteachers did not consider the library to be an important place because the emphasis at the school is on the completion of coursework.

Views of Students

The majority of the students (n = 9, 60%) claimed they rarely visited the library (once a month). They disclosed that their teachers did not give any assignments that required a visit to the library. Because there was a peaceful environment for reading but unavailability of relevant and interesting reading materials, they did not like to visit the library. The students were of the view that the structure of their curriculum did not support voluntary reading, but rather encouraged assigned or examination related-readings. A 12th grade student stated: "unfortunately, we have to spend the library period out of the school library." This expression showed the ineffectiveness of library periods for the students due to the lack of resources and services, and the teachers' and administration interests in developing and promoting the school library.

Implementation

The evidence helped us to understand the situation that although there was a lack of resources and staffing in the school library, we should work on changing the perceptions of the principal, schoolteachers, and students regarding the importance and significance of the use of the school library. We were also planning to work on how and what activities were possible to be conducted through available resources to engage students in leisure reading.

First, we conducted an audit of the available library collection to find relevant and interesting reading materials. We separated a total of 250 books that were up to the level of the students and might interest them.

Second, we planned three activities to conduct with the students in the presence of their teachers and the principal in the library during library periods. The activities—quiz competition, Urdu poetry competition, and book reviews—were planned according to available resources, and with the guidance of the principal, the teacher assisting with the library, and schoolteachers. A flyer was designed to advertise the library activities and was placed on notice boards and near the entrance of the school. Three days before the program, our team visited each classroom to prepare students for participation. The details of the conducted activities are described below.

Quiz Competition

The program took place on October 3, 2022, with 10 5th grade students who voluntarily agreed to participate, with their remaining classmates as an audience. The quiz contained questions related to general knowledge, about which students were informed during the advertisement of the activity. Each student was asked five questions and upon failure to answer, they were dropped from the competition. After two rounds of competition, two students remained, with the final winner announced by the chief guest.

Poetry Competition

This competition of poetry in Urdu language was held among students from upper grades: two students from each class from 6th to 12th grade. The competitors were given letters from the alphabet (i.e., ا، ج، ل) and were asked to read a verse starting with that letter. Three students were announced as winners of the competition.

Book Reviews

The students of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade were provided books according to their level to read silently for half an hour. These books were selected by our team with the consultation of a teacher, the principal, and a library committee member. The library committee consisted of three schoolteachers from science and arts subjects and the principal. The students were requested to provide a review of the books they read. Interesting and analytical reviews were received. At the end of these activities, prizes were distributed among the winners.

Outcome

The outcome of the project was wonderful. The students showed surprising interest and enthusiasm to be part of these activities. We observed that these activities stimulated their interest in leisure reading and in visiting the school library during library periods. They urged for a continuation of such activities in the future.

The principal, teacher assisting with the library, and schoolteachers learned a lot and they demonstrated that despite minimal resources it was wonderful to conduct these activities to stimulate students' reading motivation and literacy engagement. They asked us to serve voluntarily as consultants for the school library, which we accepted. The principal committed to focusing on the development of the library

collection by establishing an active library committee. He was also in support of students utilizing the library period in the library in the presence of a teacher who would assist with the library.

Reflection

The process was long and required continuous focus. However, cooperative behavior, specifically from the principal and the teacher assisting with the library, helped us a lot in planning and conducting these activities. As there was no funding for this project, it was difficult for us to manage traveling, printing, and prize purchasing. Overall, it was a wonderful opportunity for us to learn new things, and we felt satisfied to be able to engage students who previously had minimal chances to use the library. In the future, we are planning to visit other public schools situated in the geographical boundaries of Lahore and adjacent rural areas. Collecting evidence from these school libraries, we plan to conduct varied innovative reading promotion activities to engage school students.

Acknowledgments

Author Contributions

Abdul Jabbar: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft
Nosheen Fatima Warraich: Conceptualization, Project administration, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing

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