Zimbabwean School Libraries as Social Spaces: Empowering Students with Life- wide Skills in the New Millennium

Collence.Takaingenhamo Chisita
Harare Polytechnic School of Information
18 gilwell square southerton harare
Zimbabwe
mmarindo@yahoo.com

Abstract
The success of students in the future is dependent upon the foundation laid down during years spent at school. Libraries play a critical role in shaping the future of students by preparing them for life beyond the school. The school library as a key component of the school curriculum has great potential to shape students through providing opportunities for independent learning. The paper will seek to find out the strategies that school libraries employ to develop student's interpersonal skills in the advent of ICT's. It will also examine the role of school libraries in promoting interpersonal skills development amongst students to promote responsible behaviour or citizenship. The paper will explore the extent to which school libraries can utilize technology to enhance interpersonal communication thus enhancing social inclusion. The writer will use a phenomenological paradigm to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing school libraries in urban Harare to provide effective library services to students so that they can be adequately prepared for the dynamic technology driven life premised on such skills like information literacy.

Keywords: Independent learning, life wide learning, information literacy, collaboration, interpersonal skills, ICT's, civic education, social space

Introduction

Libraries play a key role in the overall development of society because access to information is central to the success of an individual, in the information/ knowledge and wisdom economy of the twenty first century. Similarly, librarians are the foundation for promoting such success. Mech and McCabe (1998) stated that professions are dynamic, and thrive or die depending on the vision, adaptability, and leadership of their members. The Information and Communication Technology revolution is transforming library space and services by providing seamless access to information by bringing the library into the homes of the users, especially in resource endowed societies of the developed world. It is through ICT's that school libraries can develop and broaden social capital, for example networks, in the form of interaction amongst users. Henri and Asselin (2005) argue that the educational value of technology can only be realised by the way schools will utilise an educational rationale to achieve objectivity through networks for learning and knowledge sharing. The school librarian and the teacher should develop a parabiotic relationship that helps to enrich the student with a repertoire of skills necessary for one to cope with the multifarious and confusing dynamics of the new millennium; for example, social skills and multimodal literacies should be prioritised. Together they should work towards developing what Zukin (1995) referred to as places whereby users will have ''the right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of ourselves.''

Libraries as Social Spaces

Zukin (1995) compares libraries to malls, restaurants, and many other social settings that provide a public space in which individuals may engage in a range of social and informational activities. However, the library environ is free from the profit driven market or money relationships characterising exchange of commodities in shopping malls. The author further argues that such places are constantly changing context as perceived by the various public and private interests of those who construct and use them.

The library fits well in Oldenburg's (1989) conception of space as "third space" because of the social, liberated, and inspiring ambience it provides to users. The "third space" is described as an area where informal social gatherings take place besides the first place (work) and second place (home) according to Oldenburg (1989). It is a place free from the market forces characterising exchange of commodities in commerce, rigorous, and intimidating rules and regulations, as well as a liberated zone whereby users navigate their way purposefully in a world of adventure, serendipity, leisure, and dialogue. Even though the reader might interpret and metabolise this as a utopian dream, nevertheless it is an ideal worth striving for. The library as a third space reflects an "anchor" of community life that enables and fosters broader, more creative interaction. Generally, social space can either be physical, virtual, or both, like: community centres, social media platforms, and other open spaces where people gather or network or link up for social discourse. These social spaces can either be publicly or privately controlled, like commercial databases, clubs, or malls.

School and Society Nexus

Mwinchande (2007) notes how schools cherish the beliefs and form of sociopolitical views of the society they operate or belong to, for example, the community or nation. The author further states that meaningful change that takes place in such institutions cannot be divorced from society. Schools and their libraries are dependant variables that are totally intertwined with their socio-economic and political milieu. World Bank (2005) "Expanding opportunities and building competencies for young people: A new agenda for secondary education" highlighted that investing in education brings direct benefits for example, contribution to growth and poverty reduction, improvement in health and living conditions, gender equality, and realization of democracy, among others. It would be impossible or unrealistic to expect changes to take place within the aegis of schools in isolation from the society, according to Mwichande (2007). "A library is a social instrument and its roles are established by the culture of the community which it is set to serve" (Hikwa, 2001, p. 11).

Komba (2004) argues that historically the school as an institution has been and continues to be perceived as an agent for personal and socio-economic and political community development and an agent of transformation. This transformation depends on the learning and working culture as well as how the administration perceives the school librarian and the school librarians' style of leadership, as well as the perceptions of the school administration. The school librarian should be a transformational rather than a transactional leader with the capacity to contribute towards the realization of institutional goals, vision, and mission.

From a sociological perspective, schools and their libraries are also agencies of socialization as they induct students into the norms and values of society. The success of the school library in empowering citizens is dependent upon a number of factors, for example the socio-economic and political environment, the initiative of the librarian, teachers and support staff, attitudes of learners, motivation of staff, the extent of community engagement, availability of resources, and learning infrastructure among others. Greef (2012) argues that the ambience of the library is critical because the school community must be convinced of the indispensable role of the library "...with a welcoming, positive and stimulating ambience, which develops the whole person."

Learning environment
Boettcher (2003) described envisioning the learning experience as consisting of the learner "on stage" actively learning under the direction of the mentor/faculty member using a set of resources containing the knowledge/ content/skills to be learned within an environment. The author fully acknowledges the whole idea of the relationship between the learner and the environment in her articulation of the elements of the learning experience comprising of the learner/Mentor (lecturer), knowledge, and the environment. However, this analysis fails to take into consideration the critical role of the library as part of the curriculum and the environment in a broader context. It ignores the centrality of the library and librarian in the learning process.

The school library plays a crucial role in fostering independent learning amongs students through a conducive environment for researching and broadening horizons beyond what is commonly given by teachers. Barker (1998, p.7) described learning as a process involving "...permanent or temporary change in behaviour or knowledge that arises in consequence of internal or external stimulus..." The key issues in learning revolve around change, behavioral change, and learning in response to internal or external stimulus. The librarians' roles in learning institutions is broadened through assuming a pedantic or pedagogical philosophic midwifery dimension, and this can be achieved through collaboration with teachers in the design of information literacy programmes. Learning encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, each with varying levels ranging from the basic to the most complex.

Webb and Prowis (2004) state that in the information age, the role of the librarian in a learning organisation has shifted from encouraging dependency, to supporting and guiding outright independence or autonomy in the quest for information, knowledge, and wisdom among students and members of the community. The author further noted that for a librarian to be effective at teaching and supporting learning, they should adopt reflective practice and cultivate a professional approach regarding the principles of effective learning and autodidacticism.

The School Library Manifesto
 IFLA School library manifesto (2000) acknowledges the crucial role of teachers and school librarians in the cultivation of the habit of the use of library and reading among students. "We must raise the bar in our thinking; libraries and librarians enhance the total development of our society. If we do not seek to strengthen the link between libraries and the classrooms, the real losers will continue to be our students" (Grant, 2006). The success of students is hinged upon the synergistic relationship between librarians and teachers in empowering students with expert power to read beyond the word through the development of critical thinking skills "when librarians and teachers work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills" (IFLA School Library Manifesto, 2000). In Zimbabwean schools, the librarian works closely with the English teacher to facilitate access to reading material for students, but there is a need to work with all teachers to optimise resource usage.

Civic Education: Libraries and Schools
Kranich (2003) argues that information is critical to civic participation and also in promoting the development of civil society because informed citizens are more likely to participate in policy discussions where they can communicate their ideas and concerns freely. The author further argues that society should provide citizens with civic commons to freely exchange ideas, and that this is possible through libraries reconfiguring physical and virtual space for the betterment of the community. Libraries and librarians are better positioned to provide free social spaces where members of the community can partake of information, exchange ideas, and engage in meaningful intergenerational and intercultural dialogue like storytelling

sessions. "If a society through its schools to educate for citizenship in a significant way, what is needed at the practical level is wide ranging and informed national debate, to establish as far as possible a degree of agreement, about how citizenship and education can for citizenship are to be understood" (McLaughlin,1992).

Civic education refers to the teaching of knowledge, skills, and conditions critical for one to participate effectively as a responsible and effective citizen of a representative and constitutional democracy. It involves the provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower young people to actively participate in the democratic process, according Rietbergen-MacCraken (1996). Most developments buttressing civic education can be traced to the last decade of the twentieth century when the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna reaffirmed the importance of promoting respect for human rights through education and recommended a framework for strengthening of respect for human rights .

> "Learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels... an important means for capacity development on the societal level by empowering people for effective civic engagement... an essential dimension in strengthening a society's ability to manage its own affairs and is complementary to capacity development on the individual and institutional levels." (UNDP Democratic Governance Group, 2004)

Print and Lange (2012) noted that modern democracies face the challenge of sustaining themselves in times of crises because of diverse culture, inequalities, and political traditions. The authors further acknowledge that the future of any democracy rests on the extent to which a nation prepares its young people through community engagements so that there won't be any disharmony and distrust of politicians by the young. Komba (2004) stated that society should create conditions to empower citizens by providing access to sufficient and correct information that will enable them to participate in making informed choices according to their value preferences. The author further emphasises an empowerment mindset and the process of creating an atmosphere whereby individuals supported by the school take full responsibility for their lives in their endeavour to achieve academic and socioeconomic goals.

Print and Lange (2012) made reference to Europe, even though their findings and recommendations can generally be applied worldwide; for example, every nation has to grapple with coming up with key competencies that can empower young people to participate actively in the future of their country and how to translate such competencies into school based activities in the form of a curriculum and pedagogical strategy. Such competencies should encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in order to strike a harmonious equilibrium between theory and praxis with reference to socioeconomic and political living.

The greatest challenge of school libraries in Africa is how to incorporate civic education in the curriculum considering the heterogeneity of African societies with regards to the diversity of culture, language, politics, economic status, and religious beliefs among others. In Zimbabwe, civic education is incorporated in the educational curricular as part of either general education or content, and then as a specific subject in higher education. The country has more than sixteen indigenous languages, yet the language policy only regards English, Shona, and Ndebele as official languages. Heather (1990) hinted that civic education should embrace all learning domains in order to produce well balanced students physically, practically, intellectually, and spiritually. Information/Multimedia literacies should be the basis of such education, and this will provide librarians with a niche in the pedagogical scheme of things in a learning environment. The Alexandria Proclamation on

Information Literacy and Lifelong –learning (2005) emphasises that "Information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life...it is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations."

Conceptual Framework of Space: Transforming Ambience of the School Library

Libraries as dominated spaces reflect the domineering role of the librarian because of explicit rules limits and delimitations with reference to use of space. It is out of this context that this paper advocates for a fundamental rethink of the school library space and its use given the liberating role of ICT's. The future library should be free from the excessive limitations of procedures, rules, regulations that undermine the individual users to realise their full potential with regards to use of space and other library resources. This can be realized through infusing the philosophy of transformational leadership in the education and training of future librarians. Greef (2012) states that a transformational leader values relations, enlisting in a vision for learning and working with everyone in a motivational, inspiring, and participatory way in the process. There is need for librarians to reconfigure library space considering the proliferation of ICT's and subsequent e-learning, e-libraries, and/or virtual environments.

Bourdieu (1989) states that social worlds can be represented as a multidimensional space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active within the social universe. The author further defines social field as a multi-dimensional space of positions whereby position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables within the field. May (2011) noted that research on library space is critical for LIS researchers, since it provides information on the use and meaning of library spaces and further assists in rethinking the concept of space in a changing world. The author further notes that research on library space is indeed a timely topic as more information can now be Googled. Research can be premised on either positivist, post-positivist, or interpretivist paradigms in that it will present qualitative and quantitative explanations and perspectives of the phenomenon relating to library space, and also reflecting the lived experiences of users in their interactions within the library space.

Despite advancements in technology and the increasing lacunae between developed and developing countries in adapting to new technology, it is still critical for librarians in developing countries to view library space in all its dimensions or manifestations, for example, the physical and virtual space. A social space is physical or virtual space such as a social centre, online social media, or other gathering places where people gather and interact. Social spaces can be private or public, for example: parks in urban areas are public places, while houses owned by individuals, nightclubs, restaurants, websites, or shopping malls are privately owned and controlled spaces. Public space refers to a social space that is freely accessible to all irrespective of race, gender, sex, class, or any other factor, like the library. Kumar (1998) views the library as a unique kind of public space anchored on education, and knowledge and epitomising freedom and free access to knowledge. The library is a public space because it is free from market forces that characterize the market place, for example bookshops and supermarkets. The provision of space for intercultural, intergenerational, and interracial interaction reflects the democratic dimension of the library as a social and public space. It also reflects the extent to which the library can respond to allomorphic factors in respect of relevancy to local circumstances. The modern library is both a physical and virtual social space whose foundations are grounded in knowledge, culture, and education.

Soja (2003; 2002) differentiated between the physical space or "space per se" and the socially-based 'spatiality' which is the created space of social organization and production.

The author believed that physical space has been a "misleading epistemological foundation upon which to analyse the concrete and subjective meaning of human spatiality." Generally library space has been viewed as the physical space with regards to the users, equipment, tools, and holdings as well as the mythic or gothic or elitist or anachronistic architectural designs and other infrastructure symbolic of knowledge, peace, and freedom.

Giddens (1981a) defines space as an important element for social integration and organization, for example, integration through interpersonal communication with actors co-present in space. Giddens (1984) notes that "space is not an empty dimension along which social groupings become structured, but has to be considered in terms of its involvement in the constitution of systems of interaction". Zukin (1995) acknowledges the democratic nature of public space considering that both public culture and public space are socially constructed and produced by the many social encounters that add up to the daily social life in social spaces. The author further explores the concept of public culture by exploring the right to be and use public spaces as well the sense of ownership and belonging to such spaces.

Oldenburg (1989) distinguished between the sociological functions of people's first places (homes), their second places (workplaces), and the public spaces (libraries) that serve as secure, nonaligned spaces in an age of alignment or bipolarity, free from ideological or orthodoxical dichotomies and informal meeting spaces. The author further felt that due to the complex and demanding life of the modern era social spaces or third places were becoming extinct, because many people shuttled between their first and second places, and not stopping over at alienating and anonymous locations such as shopping centres, which fall short as third places, since they are not rooted in knowledge, education, culture, and social conviviality. Furthermore, governments are not investing in the development of libraries as third spaces to foster community cohesion and sustain culture. Librarians should lobby for more school libraries and strive towards transforming such spaces into inspiring and invigorating places that are quite distinguishable from home or work.

Lefebvre's (2002) theory is based on the concept of "the spatial triad", referring to the various dimensions of space, such as the physical, mental, and social. Lefebvre (2011) describes a three part framework for space, three ways of thinking about and experiencing space, namely: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. The author identifies space with regards to the perceived, which refers to spatial practice, and the conceived, referring to representational spaces. Spatial analysis of space makes more sense when we consider not only the things or people embedded but also the social relations or patterns and activities done or the phenomenology of user behaviour in the library: "space is social: it involves assigning more or less appropriated places to social relations....social space has thus always been a social product" Lefebvre (2009). Spatial practice refers to space slowly produced by society, for example, physical space or perceived space. Elborg (2011) notes that spatial practices encompasses practices of the body, for example, roads, benches, chairs, and sleeping or sitting mats, which enable us to feel space. Representation of space or the dominant space refers to the conceptualized space, conceived by scientists, architects, planners, urbanists, technocratic sub-dividers, and social engineers; for example, there are rules that govern use of the road, buildings, libraries, archives, galleries, museums and related cultural heritage centres, and churches. From a phenomenological perspective, the representational space refers to space as lived and experienced through its associated images and symbols, rituals, or rules, for example the golden rule "silence in the library" or any other rules of social control.

Kroll (1975) distinguishes between three ways of creating social space, namely, authoritarian (power coercive), rational (empirical /normative rationale), and reductive (liberal/libertarian).The former relates to ultimate control of events while the latter refers to the democratic space like the community or the social space, for example, the free public,

academic, national, or school library. Kroll (1975) is of the view that the more librarians dominate space with explanations, for example, top down approaches to user education, information literacy would be confirmation of a drive towards authoritarian (power coercive) and totalitarian worldviews of space and how it should be used. The authoritarian space tends to be characterised by a propensity to control, with a high degree of institutionalisation and politicisation. "What is different is, what is excluded: the edges of the city, shanty towns, the spaces of forbidden games, of guerrilla war, of war. Sooner or later, however, the existing centre and the forces of homogenization must seek to absorb all such differences, and they will succeed if these retain a defensive posture and no counterattack is mounted from their side" (Lefebvre, 1991). The author is implying that globalisation loses control from its creature and its propensity to homogenise can be neutralised by micro-allomorphic factors, for example, culture, tradition, and local or national politics.

Elmborg (2011) contends that thinking about "Third Space" can help libraries and librarians develop innovative ways of working with increasingly diverse populations in increasingly dynamic contexts. The author further contends that collections, technology, and services provided by libraries can no longer be thought of in traditional twentieth century terms considering the changing technological landscape and increased access to information, for example the drive towards access through shared portals. School libraries have to grapple with the complexities and intricacies of cultural and racial heterogeneity, collective social agency, and social inclusion. Lefebvre (2002) felt that the introduction of market forces in absolute spaces results in abstract space, or space devoid of or hollow in meaning and poor in social interaction, other than cold rock and stone consumerist or market driven relationships, or culture characterised exchange of commodities in markets.

Olson (2001) deconstructs the usefulness of library classification schemes because of the functional and structural limitations they impose based on a Eurocentric epistemological and ontological basis. Matare (1998) echoed similar sentiments when she called for a fundamental rethinking regarding the use of biased intellectual structures like classification and cataloguing schemes, and the rules, regulations, and procedures that determine the use of space. These calls for a rethink on alternative ways to classify intellectual resources could make it easier for users to comprehend the scheme of things.

Challenges and Opportunities
In Zimbabwe, school libraries are more pronounced in resource endowed schools, while those in resource starved urban and rural areas, and low and high density residential areas have limited access to library services. Some schools do not have libraries, let alone decent classrooms, and the challenge is to correct this circumstance and promote access to information for all. Young people face a myriad of challenges ranging from HIV/AIDS, child abuse, poverty, crime, and social exclusion and school libraries can play a critical role in turning these into opportunities through creating spaces for open dialogue and exchange of ideas. Since Africa is has a deep tradition of oral history, school libraries should engage story tellers in communities, to help in strengthening culture through human narratives. Other alternative innovative approaches for consideration would be information consolidation and mediation, or repackaging into song, drama, and dance using rudimentary technology, for example, recording oral stories or help students tell their own stories based on their own experiences. There is a need to bridge the lacunae between rural and urban areas and ensure equitable access to school libraries for students and communities. School libraries should exploit the opportunities provided by the information/knowledge dispensation and embark on Continuous Professional Development and Workplace Learning (CPDWL) to add more value to their praxis so that they are able to serve students and communities better with respect to life-wide skills.

Considering that the curriculum in schools embraces all domains of learning from cognitive, affective, and psychomotor it is imperative for librarians to tackle the information deluge by

equipping students with information literacy skills. Greef (2012) argues that the integration of information skills into the school curriculum is one of the prime focus areas of the teacher librarian, and that this is critical in transforming the library into a vital cog in the teaching and learning mission.

School librarians should learn more on the philosophy, psychology, and sociology of education so as to appreciate the key components of life skills, for example critical thinking, communication, and self-management skills. Currently, information literacy skills programmes vary from one school to another; in some institutions they are referred to as user education while in others they use the term information literacy. The formation of a school library consortium would help to standardize information literacy programmes for schools. However, the success of such a consortia will depend on the extent to which members are willing to share resources irrespective of their status; for example, will low densities libraries be willing to cooperate with those in high densities?

Conclusion
School libraries have an onerous task to develop spaces that inspire and add value to library services. Oldernburg (2011) reiterated that the concept of third space was not a solution to library problems, but that it enables librarians to engage in rigorous intellectual debate in exploring their profession amidst micro and macro factors, for example, globalisation, continuous learning, democracy and the need to contribute towards a better world. The school librarian should rise to the occasion by embracing technology and justifying and advocating for the redesign or reconfiguration of space to enhance collaboration in the technology driven era. Furthermore, there is a need to lobby responsible authorities to address issues of schools without libraries and to resuscitate those that are dysfunctional libraries in order to serve not only students and staff, but the entire community through linkages with public and national libraries. It is also critical to consider public and private sector partnerships in the development of school libraries; for example, companies operating in communities should provide support for school libraries as part of their social responsibility rather than just exploiting resources without investing in the development of the communities. A national policy for school libraries should be formulated with input from all stakeholders, namely: government, professional associations, commerce and industry, communities, Library and Information Training Schools, and others.

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Biographical note

Collence Takaingenhamo Chisita is a Principal Lecturer and Researcher based at Harare Polytechnic's School of Information Sciences. He specialises in lecturing and researching on various subjects ranging from Use of ICT's in Information Management, Information Retrieval, Research, School librarianship, Philosophy of Education Records Management and Information Consultancy among others. Chisita has a keen and wider interest in the modern technologies of the Knowledge Age. Chisita is a holder of a Master of Sciences in Information Sciences, Bachelor of English and Communications, Higher Diploma in Information Sciences, Diploma in Public Relations and Communications. Currently, he is studying for a Doctorate on Information Science with a focus on Use of ICT's in enhancing knowledge sharing. Chisita is a renowned writer and speaker who has presented papers at various fora including Euro Africa Partnership for Research in ICT's, Promoting African European Research Infrastructure Partnerships (PAERIP), IFLA,   among others.   He is also a member of the Records Archives and Information Management of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Library Association and International Association of Sound and Audio Visual Archives.