

Socio-Economic Impediments in School Libraries: A Focus on 'Thenmarachchi', Sri Lanka

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This study delves into the socio-economic challenges affecting Type 3 school libraries in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone of Sri Lanka. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews with librarians from 27 schools, it identifies barriers such as financial constraints, resource limitations, and declining reader interest. Correlation analyses reveal intricate relationships between these barriers. Notably, collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerges as a significant strategy, showing potential to alleviate financial constraints and enhance resource availability. Qualitative insights highlight community involvement and reading initiatives as complementary to proposed strategies. This study advocates comprehensive approaches to address socio-economic obstacles in fostering school library development, emphasizing the need for further research to evaluate the long-term sustainability of interventions.

Introduction

School libraries serve as pivotal hubs within educational systems, promoting literacy, fostering intellectual curiosity, and supporting academic achievements (Kuh, 2018). Their extensive resources significantly impact the formal learning process and play a crucial role in shaping well-rounded student growth. Despite their importance to education, certain educational settings face challenges hindering school library efficiency and progression. The 'Thenmarachchi,' a historical region located in northern Sri Lanka ("Thenmarachchi," 2021), presents unique socio-economic obstacles that impede the optimal functioning and development of its school libraries, particularly in Type 3 schools focusing on elementary education.

This research aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the primary socio-economic barriers impacting school library development in Type 3 schools of the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone?
2. How do these identified barriers interrelate and collectively influence school library functioning?
3. What strategies can be implemented to effectively overcome these socio-economic challenges?

The purpose of this study is to identify and assess the challenges encountered by Type 3 schools in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, examine proposed remedies, and analyze their interrelations to develop potential solutions for augmenting accessibility and efficacy of school libraries.

Utilizing a sample size of 27 Type 3 schools within the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, this research explores the perspectives of librarians managing these school libraries. By employing statistical analyses such as Spearman's (1904) rank-order correlation and ordinal regression, the study aims to establish relationships between identified barriers and proposed strategies. Moreover, qualitative perspectives offered by participants offer detailed recommendations, spotlighting the significance of community engagement and cooperative endeavors in effectively tackling these challenges.

This research exposes socio-economic challenges that impede the progress of school library development and proposes ways to minimize these hindrances. The study highlights collaborative efforts, especially partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in resolving various barriers simultaneously. These initiatives offer a potential solution for improving resource accessibility, encouraging community involvement, and advancing the overall expansion of school libraries within this educational setting.

Gaining a thorough comprehension of how socio-economic obstacles and recommended tactics interact is vital for creating all-encompassing initiatives to enhance the progress of school libraries. The goal of discoveries of the research is to offer significant knowledge for decision-makers in education, those responsible for schools' affairs, and invested parties with regard towards promoting scholastic assets within analogous socio-economic settings.

Review of Literature

In contemporary academic discourse, school libraries have emerged as essential components for fostering academic excellence and holistic student development. Positioned as dynamic centers within educational ecosystems, these libraries play multifaceted roles by offering vital resources, cultivating information literacy skills, and instilling a passion for lifelong learning. Despite their recognized significance, school libraries encounter numerous challenges, prominently among them being socio-economic impediments that hinder their efficient operation and growth.

The Role of School Libraries in Education

School libraries are widely acknowledged as vital educational hubs crucial for facilitating learning and supporting students' comprehensive growth (Duncan & Kayoro, 2022). They serve as repositories of essential resources and information necessary for academic success and holistic development (Mahwasane, 2016). Emphasizing their pivotal role, Lonsdale (2003) underscores how school libraries promote literacy, enhance academic achievement, and cultivate a love for reading among students. Furthermore, scholars like Kavitha and Chandrashekara (2022) illuminate the indispensable function of school libraries in providing students with unrestricted access to

knowledge while advocating for the rejuvenation of school libraries as central hubs of literacy and information through efficient management practices. Similarly, Kumbar (2021) proposes that these libraries can enhance the quality of education by promoting resourceful utilization of available resources and services, and employing innovative strategies to engage students effectively. In the Indian context, the importance of libraries, including school libraries, has been accentuated by Jayamma et al. (2023). They emphasize that libraries are instrumental in promoting digital literacy, facilitating research endeavors, and nurturing critical thinking skills among students at higher education levels. Koimett (2021) underscores the pivotal role of school libraries in equipping students with essential life skills necessary for navigating an information-centric society and fostering responsible citizenship.

Global Contexts and Socio-Economic Challenges

The challenges faced by school libraries are not isolated phenomena but reflect broader global trends. For instance, in Africa, the socio-economic landscape profoundly impacts the operation and development of school libraries. Tokwe (2023) discusses the role of rural school libraries in bridging the information gap and promoting educational attainment, stressing the necessity of adequate infrastructure, equipment, and ICTs to effectively serve remote schools. Similarly, Baffour-Awuah (2021) emphasizes the potential impact of grants from organizations such as the Carnegie Corporation on school library development in disadvantaged African communities.

In South Africa's post-apartheid era, community libraries confront major obstacles, spotlighting the need for high-ranking officials to explore and resolve these problems (Mojapelo, 2018). This situation underscores the broader challenges faced by libraries in regions undergoing significant social and political transitions.

Spear (2018) illuminates the challenges faced by school library managers, including limited budgets, staffing constraints, and shared facilities, while also noting common issues shared with other types of libraries. Koimett (2021) underscores the pivotal role of school libraries in equipping students with essential life skills necessary for navigating an information-centric society and fostering responsible citizenship. However, the challenges faced by these libraries, particularly in rural and underserved areas, are significant. These discussions accentuate financial constraints, inadequate resources, and community-related issues as formidable obstacles to the optimal functioning and growth of school libraries.

Besides, the literature also explores the function of school libraries in addressing socio-economic impediments within educational settings. Seasholes et al. (2023) emphasize the critical role of school libraries in student success by providing equitable access to resources and fostering lifelong learning. However, they emphasize challenges such as socio-economic status and digital citizenship hindering their effectiveness. This aligns with research showing that children and teenagers from low-income backgrounds are two to three times more prone to developing mental health issues compared to their more affluent peers (Reiss, 2013), showcasing the broader societal challenges that libraries must navigate.

Partnerships between universities and public libraries in economically challenged areas can boost student achievement by tailoring services to their unique requirements and backgrounds

(Power et al., 2021). Such collaborations could potentially be extended to school libraries, offering a model for addressing resource constraints and enhancing educational outcomes.

Rahmah et al. (2019) illuminate that pivotal elements such as human resources, information resources, financial support, and infrastructure significantly shape the advancement of information technology-centered school libraries, especially within Padang City. This echoes the broader challenges faced by libraries globally, where knowledgeable and articulate librarians can successfully navigate challenges in humanities and social sciences, assisting patrons in adapting to changes and optimizing resource use (Tucker, 1992).

Contemporary libraries grapple with questions of purpose, function, and significance, requiring a careful balance of government policy and professional education to address these concerns (Mazuritsky & Kuzichkina, 2019). This applies equally to school libraries, which must continually adapt to changing educational landscapes and societal needs.

These global examples illustrate that while the challenges may vary, the underlying principle remains that school libraries are essential in fostering educational equity and excellence. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions and collaborations can significantly enhance the role of school libraries worldwide, ensuring they remain pivotal in supporting student development and academic achievement. The situation in academic libraries in Pakistan, which are experiencing a leadership deficit and various challenges related to user conduct, staffing, funding, technological advancements, and societal factors (Ashiq et al., 2021), serves as a reminder of the complex issues facing libraries across different contexts and the need for unified action and backing from key stakeholders.

In Sri Lanka, the socio-economic barriers are represented by Gunasekera and Balasubramani (2020), who stress the challenges faced by school teachers in utilizing libraries due to weak collections, improper services, and outdated materials. Mohideen (2023) points out significant challenges in adapting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring substantial government support. Noora (2023) discusses how increased prices of school equipment have exacerbated challenges for low-income families, resulting in higher rates of child dropouts and psychological challenges, particularly in regions like the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone. Studies investigating the nexus between socio-economic status (SES) and academic performance in Sri Lanka recognize a favorable association, albeit influenced by varying social backgrounds and educational structures.

Strategies to Address Socio-Economic Barriers

Drawing insights from successful strategies implemented in comparable scenarios can offer valuable knowledge on effective measures to undertake. Gordon and Cicchetti (2023) propose strategies to address socio-economic barriers in school libraries, encompassing staffing, resources, instruction, funding, and the integration of traditional library values with educational beliefs and social justice principles. Seasholes et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of leveraging the expertise of school librarians and diverse resources in addressing these barriers. In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Patel and Anitha (2021) illuminate the use of technological tools by school

library professionals to offer virtual support to patrons, overcoming technological and socio-economic barriers. Koretskii (2022) underscores the innovation potential of libraries, encompassing various components such as technological, personnel, financial, marketing, organizational, and information aspects, to formulate strategies for advanced development. Shaifuddin et al. (2022) outline possible actions to address socio-economic barriers in rural libraries, including funding, infrastructure development, utilization of information communication technology, availability of local content resources, and strengthening human resources. Additionally, Igarashi et al. (2023) assert that public libraries contribute to overcoming social divisions by reducing inequality and promoting interaction among citizens through addressing digital, economic, and demographic divisions within society. In the Sri Lankan context, Ranaweera and Silva (2023) highlight the challenges faced by Sri Lankan school libraries during the COVID-19 phase and the current economic crisis, emphasizing efforts to offer reading materials and staff training to students in the Western Province. F. M. Nawastheen et al. (2023) discuss how school principals in Sri Lanka have managed teaching and learning during the economic crisis through strategies such as flexible attendance policies and temporary accommodations, emphasizing the need for increased government support to enhance resilience in the education system.

The literature reviewed illuminates significant socio-economic challenges hindering the development and effectiveness of school libraries. While these challenges are well-documented, there remains a need for deeper exploration and practical studies to fully understand their complexities and nuances, especially within specific contexts like the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone. Customized methodologies tailored to the unique socio-economic landscape of such regions are essential for effectively addressing these obstacles. Sustainable research initiatives and strategic interventions are crucial for mitigating socio-economic barriers and fostering the optimal functioning and growth of school libraries in these areas.

Methodology

The research investigation focused on type 3 schools in Sri Lanka, particularly in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone. In Sri Lanka, various educational establishments exist, such as government schools (National and Provincial), private schools, Assisted Schools, International Schools, Pirivenas, and Madrasas (Keerthirathne, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2021).

The Jaffna region in northern Sri Lanka is divided into five educational administrative zones. One of these zones is 'Thenmarachchi.' This particular zone encompasses a broad geographical area and is home to a significant number of students and schools (Vipulan et al., 2019). Within the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, government schools are predominant and categorized into four primary classifications based on their academic programs: Type-1AB, Type-1C, Type-2, and Type-3. The government schools offer an internationally recognized qualification, the General Certificate of Education (GCE), awarded to the students who successfully complete their secondary education. There are two levels of the GCE examination: the Ordinary Level (O-level) and the Advanced Level (A-level). The GCE O-level is typically taken at the end of the 11th year of formal education, while the GCE A-level is taken at the end of the 13th year. Schools classified as Type 1AB and Type 1C provide GCE A-level education. Type 1AB schools offer all major disciplines, whereas Type 1C schools focus specifically on non-science subjects. Type-2 schools exclusively offer GCE O-level

education up to Grade 11, while Type-3 schools primarily focus on elementary education up to Grade 8 (3i) or Grade 5 (3ii) (Babapulle & Mendis, 1984; Gnanaretnam, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2021; Pedley, 1964).

According to data provided by the Ministry of Education (2021, p. 18) and Provincial Department of Education (2024), the distribution of Government Schools in the 'Thenmarachchi' Education Zone is tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Government Schools in the 'Thenmarachchi' Education Zone

Type	No of Schools	Teaching Staff	Number of Students
1AB	6	219	5266
1C	6	164	1476
2	20	326	2539
3	27	177	2312

The research selected 27 Type 3 schools from the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone to examine socio-economic barriers in school library development. These schools were chosen to represent a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds, considering factors like geographical distribution, student demographics, and economic profiles. Focusing on Type 3 schools offers a strategic approach for a nuanced examination of socio-economic barriers, especially at the elementary level. Additionally, the prevalence of Type 3 schools in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone makes them an ideal representation of the educational landscape in the region.

The studies conducted by Charef et al. (2021) and Jeremy et al. (2021) underscore the importance of engaging stakeholders to gain comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with complex processes or innovations. Following this principle, interviews were conducted with stakeholders from selected schools in the Thenmarachchi education zone, including teaching staff, librarians, parents, and school administrators, to identify variables related to perceived socio-economic barriers and potential strategies for addressing them.

Stakeholders identified various socio-economic barriers and strategies. Teaching staff have identified several socio-economic barriers through interactions with students and their families, as well as observations within the school environment. These barriers include economic crises, financial and budget constraints, limited availability of educational resources, and a lack of interest among readers. Librarians, who directly observe issues related to resource availability and reader engagement within the library setting, have also highlighted budgetary constraints and the need for training and resources to enhance library services. They emphasized the limited availability of educational resources, the lack of interest among readers, insufficient budget allocations, the need for digital resources and technological integration, and training and professional development for library staff. Parents have expressed concerns about their socio-economic status impacting their ability to support their children's education and the resources available at home, noting a lack of interest in reading among their children. School administrators have underscored the financial

challenges faced by schools, the potential for collaboration with external organizations such as NGOs, and the need for technology integration and staff development to address socio-economic barriers. They specifically pointed out economic crises, financial and budget constraints, cooperation with NGOs, and the need for digital resources and professional development for library staff.

Table 2 presents a breakdown of the variables identified in each stakeholder category.

Table 2. Summary of Identified Variables by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder	Identified Variables
Teaching Staff	Economic crises (V1), Financial and budget constraints (V2), Limited availability of educational resources (V4), Lack of interest of readers (V5)
Librarians	Limited availability of educational resources (V4), Lack of interest of readers (V5), Budget allocations (V6), Availability of digital resources and technological integration (V9), Training and professional development for library staff (V10)
Parents	Economic crises (V1), Socio-economic status of parents (V3), Limited availability of educational resources (V4), Lack of interest of readers (V5)
School Administrators	Economic crises (V1), Financial and budget constraints (V2), Cooperation with NGOs (V8), Availability of digital resources and technological integration (V9), Training and professional development for library staff (V10)

This tabling analysis led to defining the unique variables for the study as listed in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Variable in Socio-economic Barriers

Variable	Barriers
V1	Economic crises
V2	Financial and budget constraints
V3	Socio-economic status of parents
V4	Limited availability of educational resources
V5	Lack of interest of readers

Table 4. Variable in Strategies for Addressing Socio-economic Barriers

Variable	Strategies
V6	Budget allocations increased

V7	Social engagement and support
V8	Cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
V9	Availability of digital resources and technological integration
V10	Training and professional development for library staff

Each Type 3 school has a library managed by at least one librarian. Librarians play a pivotal role in overseeing these libraries and providing necessary reader services. Hence, they were chosen as participants for the survey conducted in this study. Out of 42 librarians serving in 27 libraries within the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, 41 participated in the survey. Limitations of the survey included potential biases in self-reported responses and the specific focus on the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, impacting the generalizability of findings beyond this region.

To comprehensively examine the obstacles hindering school library progress in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, the research employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods similar to the work of Prakash et al. (2013). To gather the data on socio-economic barriers impacting school library development and potential improvement strategies, a structured questionnaire was developed. The questionnaires, developed after meticulous literature review and validation processes, employed Likert-scale items to assess socio-economic barriers and strategies for enhancing school library progress. Additionally, qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questions. The qualitative approach aimed to capture nuanced perspectives on challenges and successful strategies related to school library development. The compilation of questions utilized in the research can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. The Structured Questionnaire of the Study

Socio-economic factors

Likert-scale questions

1. Do economic crises affect library development?
2. Do financial constraints and budget allocations affect library development?
3. To what extent does the socio-economic status of parents influence library development?
4. Does the limited availability of educational resources impact on library development?
5. Does the interest of readers in the library have an impact on development?

Open-ended questions

6. What are your thoughts on which specific socio-economic factors have a significant impact on the development of school libraries in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone?
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7. Can you provide examples of projects that can be proposed to overcome the socio-economic challenges faced by school libraries in the area?
 8. Identify possible strategies or recommendations to improve the development of school libraries by removing the socio-economic barriers identified in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, in your view.
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Implemented and proposed strategies

Likert-scale questions

9. Are budget allocations for library resources being increased?
10. Is there social engagement and support for library development?
11. Is there cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for library development?
12. How is the availability of digital resources in terms of technological integration?
13. Is the training and professional development of library staff considered to be satisfactory?

Open-ended questions

14. Can you provide examples of successful strategies that can be handled to overcome the barriers to developing school libraries in the 'Thenmarachchi'?
15. In your view, what are the challenges and barriers in effectively implementing the best strategies aimed at improving school libraries?

The data collection involved the distribution of structured questionnaires among librarians from the 27 Type 3 schools. Printed surveys were distributed to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' answers while adhering to ethical codes with informed consent received from all individuals involved in this study. The combination of personal interaction, clear communication, and ethical practices, along with the structured survey instrument, was aimed at achieving a high response rate to facilitate a robust data collection process essential for the comprehensive analysis of socio-economic barriers impacting school library development.

For data analysis, Python Programming language was chosen for its suitability in handling mixed-methods data. Statistical measures like medians, modes, Spearman's (1904) rank-order correlation, and ordinal regression analysis were employed. These analyses aimed to identify common barriers, potential development strategies, and their interconnections regarding school library development.

Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic interpretation of qualitative data were essential in comprehending socio-economic obstacles and proposed methodologies to overcome them.

Results and Discussion

Table 6. Socio-economic Barriers

Variable	Barriers	Median	Mode
V1	Economic crises	3	3
V2	Financial and budget constraints	4	4
V3	Socio-economic status of parents	3	3
V4	Limited availability of educational resources	4	4
V5	Lack of interest of readers	5	5

Significant perceptions regarding socio-economic barriers emerged amongst respondents as shown in Table 6. Moderate agreement was noted for V1 (Economic crises) and V3 (Socio-economic status of parents), with median and mode values both at 3, revealing the impact of economic crisis and parental socio-economic status on school library development. Financial constraints highlighted in V2 along with limited availability of educational resources noted by V4 were prevalent challenges indicated through their shared median and mode values of 4. Furthermore, V5 (Lack of interest of readers) was notably high with a median and mode of 5, indicating a consistent concern regarding declining interest among readers in utilizing school libraries.

Table 7. Strategies for Addressing Socio-economic Barriers

Variable	Strategies	Median	Mode
V6	Budget allocations increased	3	3
V7	Social engagement and support	3	2
V8	Cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	3	4
V9	Availability of digital resources and technological integration	3	2
V10	Training and professional development for library staff	3	3

Table 7 presents proposed strategies to mitigate these socio-economic barriers. V6 (Budget allocations) and V8 (Cooperation with non-governmental organizations) both attained a median score of 3, indicating an agreement among respondents on their significance. V9 (Availability of digital resources and technological integration) received a median of 3, with a mode of 2, suggesting a notable emphasis. V7 (Social engagement and support) garnered a median and mode of 3 and 2, respectively, showcasing moderate agreement but with varied opinions. Lastly, V10 (Training and professional development for library staff) obtained a median and mode of 3, demonstrating collective recognition of its importance. These findings illuminate the varied emphasis on strategies highlighted in Table 7.

The consistent occurrence of the mean score of 3 across both tables indicates a moderate level of agreement among respondents regarding the significance of various socio-economic barriers and strategies for addressing them. However, it is notable that there are some differences in emphasis among respondents, as reflected in the mode values and in the case of social engagement and

support (V7), the mode deviates from the median, suggesting some divergence in opinions regarding its effectiveness. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding among respondents regarding the challenges posed by socio-economic factors in school library development and the importance of adopting diverse strategies to address these challenges.

Spearman's (1904) rank-order correlation analysis investigated the relationships between socio-economic barriers and proposed strategies affecting school library development.

Table 8. Correlation of Socio-Economic Barriers

Variable	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
V1	1.000	0.249	0.076	-0.060	0.125
V2	0.249	1.000	0.066	0.522	0.416
V3	0.076	0.066	1.000	0.219	0.044
V4	-0.060	0.522	0.219	1.000	0.570
V5	0.125	0.416	0.044	0.570	1.000

In Table 8, the analysis highlights significant correlations among socio-economic barriers. V2 (Financial and budget constraints) and V4 (Limited availability of educational resources) displayed a robust positive correlation of 0.522, indicating an interconnected influence between financial constraints and resource scarcity in the context of school library development. V4 (Limited availability of educational resources) and V5 (Lack of interest of readers) exhibited a substantial positive correlation of 0.570. This noteworthy correlation underscores a relationship between the scarcity of resources and declining reader interest in utilizing school libraries. V2 (Financial and budget constraints) and V5 (Lack of interest of readers) showed a positive correlation of 0.416. This correlation suggests a moderate connection between financial constraints and the decreasing interest among readers in utilizing school libraries. While V2 (Financial and budget constraints) and V4 (Limited availability of educational resources) demonstrated strong correlations, the significant positive association between V4 and V5 also warrants consideration. The correlation of 0.570 indicates a relationship between limited resources and the declining interest of readers, a crucial aspect influencing school library development. In essence, the observed correlations underscore an interdependence among variables V2, V4, and V5, which underscores the diverse array of obstacles affecting school libraries.

Table 9. Correlation of Proposed Strategies

Variable	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10
V6	1.000	0.264	0.455	0.327	0.291
V7	0.264	1.000	0.527	0.564	0.364
V8	0.455	0.527	1.000	0.618	0.318

V9	0.327	0.564	0.618	1.000	0.277
V10	0.291	0.364	0.318	0.277	1.000

Table 9 showcases measured correlation values among proposed strategies. The analysis revealed significant correlations among the strategies. Strong positive correlations have been seen notably between V8 (Cooperation with non-governmental organizations) and V9 (Availability of digital resources and technological integration) with a coefficient of 0.618. Additionally, V7 (Social engagement and support) displayed a strong positive correlation with both V8 and V9, with coefficients of 0.527 and 0.564, respectively. These strong positive correlations indicate potential collective influences or complementarities among strategies. The observed patterns propose that social engagement, NGO collaboration, and digital resource integration might collectively impact or complement each other in addressing socio-economic barriers affecting school library development. Notably, based on the correlations, an interconnection between V7, V8, and V9 is evident.

Based on these identified correlation patterns, V2, V4, and V5 were chosen as suitable dependent variables, while V7, V8, and V9 were identified as independent variables for the subsequent ordinal regression analysis. This selection aimed to delve deeper into understanding the potential influence of proposed strategies on socio-economic barriers affecting school library development.

Table 10. Ordinal Regression and Impact of the Strategies on Socio-Economic Barriers

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-Score	P-value	Pseudo R-square.
V7	-0.7948	0.156	-5.101	0	0.3832
V8	-0.9479	0.2598	-3.6463	0.0003	0.4267
V9	-0.2877	0.068	-4.214	0	0.3833

The ordinal regression analysis, as presented in Table 10, yielded a noteworthy finding: a significant negative coefficient of -0.9479 linked to the independent variable V8 (Cooperation with non-governmental organizations). This negative coefficient was observed across all dependent variables (V2, V4, and V5), with a p-value of less than 0.001. Such negative coefficients denote a considerable and consistent influence of NGO cooperation in potentially alleviating perceived socio-economic barriers affecting the development of school libraries.

The remarkably negative coefficients of V8 (Cooperation with non-governmental organizations) suggest that enhanced collaboration with non-governmental organizations might significantly mitigate financial constraints (V2), limited availability of educational resources (V4), and the declining interest of readers (V5) in utilizing school libraries. This implies that strategies involving partnerships with NGOs could be pivotal in addressing multiple barriers concurrently, potentially leading to improvements in school library development. These partnerships might facilitate access to additional resources, funding opportunities, and community engagement initiatives, addressing various socio-economic challenges identified in the education zone.

Combining endeavors encompassing social connection (V7), and availability of digital resources (V9), with the partnerships of non-governmental organizations could potentially generate mutually reinforcing outcomes in overcoming the recognized hurdles. Although NGO collaboration displays potent influence, further research is necessary to evaluate collective projects' nuanced effects, the durability of accomplishments along their long-term impact on developing school libraries.

The qualitative insights provided by participants regarding strategies and initiatives to address socio-economic barriers and promote reading within the educational context are tabulated in Table 11.

Table 11. Qualitative Observations on Strategies to Address Socio-Economic Barriers and Promote Reading

Theme/Category	Number of Mentions	Extracted Quotes
Importance of community involvement	3	"We believe community involvement is crucial for addressing socio-economic barriers in education."
Alumni support	2	"Alumni can play a vital role in supporting current students and providing resources for educational initiatives."
Collaborative efforts	3	"We need to collaborate with public institutions and social organizations to create a more supportive environment for students."
Projects to promote reading	2	"We propose organizing reading competitions to spark interest among students."
Enhancing reading spaces	2	"Improving reading spaces within schools can create a more conducive environment for learning."
Improving students' reading abilities	3	"We should focus on implementing strategies to enhance students' reading skills to combat declining interest."
Donating books	4	"Donating books can help alleviate resource shortages in schools and encourage reading among students."
Extending library hours	3	"Extending library hours can offer students with more opportunities to access resources and study."
	3	

Launching educational initiatives

"Educational initiatives such as workshops and seminars can supplement classroom learning and engage students."

In the qualitative perceptions, participants emphasized the importance of community involvement, alumni support, and collaborative efforts involving public institutions and social organizations. These recommendations aligned with identified correlations found in the quantitative analysis linking socio-economic factors with community engagements. Additionally, in response to the declining interest in reading identified in the quantitative analysis, qualitative observations put forth several projects. These projects prioritize community support, propose reading competitions, aim to enhance reading spaces, and focus on improving students' reading abilities. Furthermore, participants suggested strategies like donating books and extending library hours to address resource shortages and enhance the learning atmosphere.

The findings of this study align with and expand upon previous research on socio-economic challenges faced by school libraries. The identified barriers, including financial constraints, limited resources, and declining reader interest, echo challenges highlighted by Spear (2018) and Koimett (2021). The strong correlations found between these barriers underscore the interconnected nature of socio-economic challenges, as noted by Mazuritsky and Kuzichkina (2019). The emergence of NGO collaboration as a significant strategy aligns with the emphasis of Baffour-Awuah (2021) on the potential impact of external organizations on school library development. The importance of community involvement and social engagement, highlighted in both quantitative and qualitative findings, resonates with the call of Gordon and Cicchetti (2023) for social justice. Additionally, the focus on digital resources and technological integration of the study reflects the growing importance of these aspects in modern library development, as emphasized by Rahmah et al. (2019). The multifaceted approach to addressing socio-economic barriers, combining NGO partnerships, community engagement, and digital resources, aligns with the comprehensive strategies suggested by Shaifuddin et al. (2022) for rural libraries. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on school library development in challenging socio-economic contexts, offering insights that may be applicable beyond the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone to similar settings globally.

Conclusion

This study examined socio-economic challenges facing Type 3 school libraries in the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, with a focus on elementary education. The findings align with and expand upon previous research, echoing challenges highlighted in recent literature. Financial constraints, limited resources, and declining reader interest emerged as pivotal, interconnected barriers, corroborating observations on the complex nature of socio-economic challenges in educational settings.

Collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerged as a significant mitigation strategy, aligning with recent emphasis on the potential impact of external organizations.

This approach, combined with community involvement and social engagement, resonates with social justice in current educational discourse.

The study's focus on digital resources and technological integration reflects the growing importance of these aspects in modern library development. The multi-faceted approach to addressing socio-economic barriers aligns with comprehensive strategies suggested for rural libraries in similar contexts.

While the combined approaches of NGO collaborations and social engagement offer promising prospects for the 'Thenmarachchi' education zone, further research is needed to assess their sustained impact over time. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on school library development in challenging socio-economic contexts, offering insights potentially applicable to similar settings globally.

This research underscores the interconnected nature of socio-economic challenges in school library development and illuminates the potential of collaborative, community-oriented strategies. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, particularly in resource-constrained environments, such holistic approaches may prove crucial in fostering sustainable improvements in school libraries and, by extension, educational outcomes.

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