

Challenges Facing Students in Using School Libraries in West ‘A’ District Unguja, Zanzibar

Asma Juma Haji^{1*}, Dr Shehe Abdalla Moh’d²

¹Department of Education Foundation, Instructions and Leadership, the `State University of Zanzibar, Zanzibar, Tanzania

²Department of Early Childhood, Primary, Inclusive and Special Needs Education, the `State University of Zanzibar, Zanzibar, Tanzania

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*Corresponding author: Asma Juma Haji

Department of Education Foundation, Instructions and Leadership, the `State University of Zanzibar, Zanzibar, Tanzania

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to assess the challenges facing students when using the school library in Zanzibar. The study was conducted in Zanzibar West “A” District, Unguja. It involved three public secondary schools. This study used a qualitative method and employing a descriptive case study design. The objective of the study was to assess the challenges students face when using the school library. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations from 48 respondents selected from schools in the West “A” District in Zanzibar. The findings of the study revealed the usage of school libraries was low due to the various challenges facing students in using school libraries in Zanzibar, including shortage of resources, insufficient reading space, shortage of facilities in reading rooms, limited designated time for library usage, poor customer service from librarians, limited library hours, and shortage of librarians. The study recommends that schools be supported in establishing well-equipped, furnished, and resource-rich libraries to encourage students to enjoy visiting and utilizing these spaces for reading books and accessing informational materials.

Keywords: Challenges, Facing, Students, Use, School Library.

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1. INTRODUCTION

School libraries in the educational institutions, such as secondary, primary and preprimary schools are the backbones of qualitative education. Without school libraries, academic excellence may not be attained (Esan & Akporhonor, 2021). School libraries are crucial for promoting extensive reading for pleasure, general understanding and are the main place in a school where students can read out of the class context (Vuzo, 2022). However, Benard and Dulle (2014) revealed that the inadequacy of relevant information resources in school libraries contributed to low levels of student performance. The school library has always had a wide range of collections that students and teachers can use, including printed materials like manuscripts, books, newspapers, and magazines as well as art reproductions, films, sound, and other media, maps, photographs, microfiches, CD-ROMs, computer software, online databases, and recordings of all kinds (Iruoma *et al.*, 2022, Onuoha & Chukwueke, 2020, Benard and Dulle, 2014).

School libraries in Europe and other industrialized nations have advanced significantly, particularly in terms of assisting students in enhancing their abilities and performance. Every school schedules a time slot for library use for entirely class. During this time, students can borrow or return books from the library (Lawal-Solarin, 2022).

Therefore, numerous research have looked into the challenges facing students in using in sub-Saharan African nations. Onuoha and Chukwueke (2020) did a study in Nigeria and discovered that due to a lack of access to information resources in the school library, students are turning to cybercafés, social media, and the internet, which all provide similar information access services, in search of knowledge without thinking through the implications of the information they are exposed to. Also, Lawal-Solarin (2022) added that there were the challenges of lack of up-to-date facilities, inadequate staffing and funding. Moruf (2015) revealed that school libraries were not utilized effectively by students due to inadequate resources, poor funding and lack of adequate provision for school library development.

In Tanzania, Bernard & Dulle (2014) stated that about 70% of students used libraries, in the Morogoro municipality, although the majority of the resources borrowed were books, which were generally out-of-date and not current. The results of the study also showed that students had a number of difficulties, including limited reading time, a shortage of seating areas, and a shortage of librarians with formal training. Also, Nguzo & Kuboja (2023) added that there was a lower level of library usage among Ilala district secondary students. It was also determined that, given that most students only read infrequently, the students' reading habits are still insufficient. Ramadhani and Kitula (2022) stated that the majority of school libraries lacked current books, indicating a poor state of library resources in public secondary schools.

In the context of Zanzibar where the study is targeted, Omar *et al.*, (2023) found that public and school libraries had to deal with a number of issues, such as a limited budget and a dearth of policies and implementation plans for the goals of lifelong learning. Therefore, there are little studies that discuss the challenges facing students in using school libraries in Zanzibar. Hence, this study filled this knowledge gap by assessing the challenges facing students in using school libraries in public schools in West 'A' District Unguja, Zanzibar.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

On this basis, many researchers have reported the challenges facing students in using school in various perspectives for the succeeding sections; this embraces the study from the global to the local contexts.

2.1 Challenges Facing Students in Using School Libraries

Different reviews have written on different challenges facing student's while using school libraries in many countries. Tabassum *et al.*, (2019), examined the use of public girls' high school libraries in Lahore, Pakistan. The study employed a qualitative approach. Focus group discussions, observation, and interviews were used to collect data. The findings showed that there was a general lack of satisfaction with school libraries, which caused low use of school libraries. Also, libraries faced a number of problems, including a lack of staff, a restricted budget, and poor facilities. Students found the facilities uncomfortable, and they were not likely to use the school library.

In Sub- African countries there are different studies that discussed the challenges facing students in using school libraries. A study done by Jean (2021) in Rwanda examined school library facilities and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Nyamasheke District-Rwanda. The research included both qualitative and quantitative methods. The respondents were 3633 students from 32 secondary schools, making up the target population. Data were

gathered by an observation, an interview, and a questionnaire. Findings showed that many secondary schools lacked library resources. Furthermore, the study's district lacked a reading culture, children lacked reading motivation, and they did not set aside enough time to improve their performance in the district.

Also, Suleiman *et al.*, (2018) examine students' perceived influence of library services in secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study used 27,883 secondary school students in the study population, representing both public and private schools. Quantitative data were employed in the study. The study's findings showed that students' academic progress was positively impacted by the availability of library services. The results showed that a number of difficulties, including a lack of appropriate materials, a lack of facilities (such a desktop computer, printer, and internet), a lack of chairs and other seating areas, and insufficient library staff, make it difficult to provide library services.

In Tanzania, also there are studies that discussed the challenges facing students in using school libraries Benard and Dulle (2014) did a study on assessment of access and use of school library information resources by secondary school students in Morogoro municipality. The research was conducted in five specifically chosen high schools in Morogoro Municipality. There were 150 participants in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized in the research. Information was gathered through document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations. The results also showed that high school students encounter various challenges when using the school library, such as inadequate access to current and updated reading materials, limited hours for reading, insufficient seating arrangements, and absence of professional librarians to assist with processing materials.

In Zanzibar where the study is targeted library use faced with different challenges Omar *et al.*, (2023) did a study about assessing the capability of public and school libraries toward the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Head teachers, education officers, and library staff of public libraries and schools in Zanzibar provided the data. The research employed a cross-sectional design, and a mixed approach with a convergence method. The data for the study were gathered through focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. The study found that while school and public libraries offered standard, conventional services like book circulation and reference, their contribution did not match the initiatives required to support lifelong learning in the contemporary day. The libraries had to deal with a number of issues, such as a limited budget and a dearth of policies and implementation plans for the goals of lifelong learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges students face when using the school libraries in Zanzibar the study expected to answer the research objective what are the challenges facing students in using school libraries. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, and the presentation was done in words being supported by direct quotations. Thus, the sample for the study was 48 participants which included 30 students, 12 ordinary teachers, 3 librarians and 3 heads of schools in three secondary schools in West A district Unguja, Zanzibar. Interview, Focus group discussion and observation were the instruments used to collect data. Ethical issues were detected in this study, authorization was achieved from appropriate authorities. Thus, the focus groups and interviews were carried out in secret and with identity preserved by using pseudo names like HT to mean the head teachers, L to mean librarians, T to mean ordinary teachers. ST to mean the students.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Socio - Demographic Data of the Participants

The socio-demographic data of the participants, such as age and gender are shown in this section.

4.1.1 Table 1 Distribution of Participants by Gender

The researcher asked questions related to gender profile of participants. Results are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Gender of participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	20	42
Female	28	58
Total	48	100

Source: Primary data (2024)

Accordingly, Table 1 reveals that male are 20 (42%) while the female students who participated in research process of the present study were 28 (58%). The female students were more than the male students though the difference was minimal implying a normal distribution of the respondents by gender.

4.1.2. Distribution of Participants by Age

The researcher sought to found out age of respondents are categorized under 22 years old, between 23-40 years old and more than 40 years as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Age of participants

Age groups	Frequency	Percent
Under 22 years	30	62.5
23-40 years	8	16.6
above 40 years	10	20.8
Total	48	100

Source: Primary data (2024)

According to Table 2, 30 (62.5%) of the participants were students below years, 8 (16.6%) and 10 (20.8%) were head teachers, ordinary teachers and librarians. The findings indicates that most of respondents were students aged under 22 years 30 (62.5%). This is because these are the users of school libraries. The result also imply that the students in these years participate much in using libraries when they are at school. The overall result indicate that most of these participants involved in this study are mature enough there is a positive probability to provide relevant information.

4.2 Challenges Facing Students in Using School Libraries

This objective sought to determine the challenges facing students in using school libraries as shown below:

4.2.1 Shortage of Resources

In this area, the findings revealed a shortage of various resources especially reference books were a major constraint for students using school libraries, according to the researcher's survey. When the students were given assignments to borrow the books or read in the libraries, the books were not enough for them. Additionally, the findings showed that some resources were absent in certain libraries, such as magazines, government publications, newspapers, and some books, notably literary English and Swahili books and also, some recent books were absent in the libraries. During an interview with HT1 from school A indicated that:

Yes, there are some challenges such as a shortage of reference books for the students. When they are given assignments in class to borrow books or read in the library, they often find that there are not enough books available. This challenge significantly affects students' willingness to use the school library (1st March, 2024).

Also, during an interview with HT2 from school B added that:

The library has some resources, but they are insufficient to fulfill the students' requirements. There is a lack of diverse materials such as magazines, government publications, and newspapers, as they were not provided by the ministry (5th March, 2024).

Moreover, during FGD 2 with STB5 from school A reported that:

When you visit the library, you will find many books, but some of the ones you need are missing. For example, there are no literary English or Swahili books, and some recent publications are not available. Additionally, questions from recent national examinations are based on these missing books (29th February, 2024).

The explanation indicates a scarcity of various resources. For example, reference books posed a significant barrier to school library use. When the students were given assignments in one class to borrow books or read in the library, the books were not enough for them. Moreover, the findings show that some resources did not exist in libraries, such as magazines, government publications, newspapers, and some literary books like English and Swahili books and also some recent books were absent. Therefore, the shortage of resources makes the students reluctant to go to the libraries. These findings are in line with Onuoha and Chukwueke (2020) indicated that a lack of updated and accurate information materials indicated a deficiency in available resources. Therefore, the scarcity of various resources in the school libraries impose a threat to students' use of the library.

4.2.2 Insufficient Reading Space in the Library

The study findings revealed that there was no enough space for many students to utilize the library at once. A significant issue facing secondary school libraries was insufficient reading space. During an interview with HT1 from school A claimed that: *the library is small and does not have enough reading space* (1st March, 2024).

In connection to that, during FGD with STF5 from school C said that:

The limited number of seats is due to the small size of the area. It is a small room, so if there are more than ten students, some of us have to sit on the mats, because there is not enough space for everyone to sit. This makes it challenging for us to find a place to read, so we end up borrowing books instead of reading in the library (8th March, 2024).

The responses indicate that inadequate area for reading is a problem in school libraries. When there are more than ten students, some have to sit on the mats. As a result, students have to borrow books instead of being able to read comfortably in the library. These findings supported Shandu *et al.*, (2014) Katlehong secondary schools stated that school libraries did not have sufficient space to provide efficient services. Thus, insufficient reading space causes students not to use the school library effectively.

4.2.3 Shortage of Facilities in Reading Rooms

The findings indicated that in some libraries, there were insufficient facilities such as chairs, tables, and shelves to properly store the books. As a result, the books had to be kept in boxes and cupboards. Consequently, when students visit the library, librarians had to search for the books in these boxes or cupboards. Additionally, the study revealed that some school libraries had no facilities such as fans, lighting, and computers, which are essential for attracting students to

use the libraries. During FGD 3 with TC3 from school C indicated that:

The school library faces the problem such as a shortage of basic facilities including proper lighting, sufficient seating, and computers for the students and storing information. Some students have to sit on the floor or stand due to the scarcity of chairs and tables. As a result, many students do not go to the library (7th March, 2024).

Also, during an interview with L3 from school C said that:

The places to put books (shelves) are few; some books, as you can see, are in the boxes, and I have kept the others in the cupboard for a while. When students come, I should look for them in the boxes or cupboard (7th March, 2024).

The quotes show that some libraries had shortage of sufficient chairs, tables, and shelves to store books and other resources. Consequently, students were required to stand or sit on the ground, and books ended up being stored in boxes and cupboards, making it difficult for students to access them. Also, the findings indicated that some schools had no basic facilities in their libraries, such as fans, lights, and computers, which are essential for students to utilize the libraries and access information. These findings supported by Udem *et al.*, (2018) in Nigeria pointed out that poor lightening, poor seating arrangements, and lack of convenience can impose a threat to students' use of the library. Also, Shandu *et al.*, (2014) in Katlehong secondary schools, the findings revealed that there were not enough chairs or tables, forcing students to stand or sit on the floor during library hours or when they needed to use the library for academic work. Therefore, the challenge of facilities can contribute much for some students not to go to the school libraries. Hence, the school should ensure the school library has enough facilities that contribute to the students' use school libraries.

Furthermore, the findings show that the school libraries are faced with the challenge of Information Communication Technology (ICT) resources, such as computers and internet services that may allow the students to access different learning materials. For example, in Kiswahili the students can access narrated books like Ngoswe Penzi Kitovu cha Uzembe. Also, in other subjects, there are different topics the students can learn practically. Thus, the availability of ICT services is significantly contributes to the student's being comfortable in using school libraries. During FGD 1 with TA1 from school A claimed that:

The current education system includes ICT, which allows students to learn various subjects through practical applications. For instance, in Kiswahili, students can access narrated books such as "Ngoswe Penzi Kitovu cha Uzembe". Additionally, in subjects like science, it is

essential for students to have practical learning experiences rather than solely theoretical knowledge. However, our library lacks computers and internet services which could allow the learners access to information effectively. In that sense, I believe that equipped the school libraries with full ICT resources would attract students to utilize these resources more frequently (29th February, 2024).

Therefore, the statement indicates that the accessibility of school libraries with ICT services is important to enhance learners' ability to learn practical subjects. Consequently, the presence of ICT services in school libraries would positively influence a conducive learning environment. The same case was supported by Baro and Eze (2016) the findings revealed that some students have been deterred from visiting the library for academic purposes because it lacks basic amenities like ICT equipment. The situation shows that the lack of library amenities such as ICT tools discourage the students to use the school libraries. Thus, ICT equipment should be available in school libraries to encourage students to use them.

Additionally, the findings showed that in some school libraries, the computers were stolen due to ineffective security services. This minimized the usage of the school library because the students use computers to get different information that is missing in the books. During an interview with HT1 from school A indicated that: *library usage from 2022–2024 is low due to the theft of computers in the library (1st March, 2024).*

In relation to that, during an interview with STB4 from school A added that:

In our library, there were so many computers and a lot of students went in the library but the stolen of computers led some students to stop using the library because many things were missing from the books so we looked at the computers (29th February, 2024).

The quotes show that the challenge of thieves to steal computers minimizes the usage of the library at school. These findings supported by Bernad and Dulle (2014) in Morogoro municipality the findings revealed that theft of computers due to inadequate security is one issue school libraries face. The situation show that, the theft of computers minimizes the usage of school libraries to the learners.

4.2.4 Low Awareness among the Students on Library Use

The study's findings showed that the awareness among the students of using the school library was low, especially among form one and form two compared to form three and form four students. Additionally, the findings indicated that in some schools, Form Four students were using the library the most, while form one,

form two, and form three students using it to a smaller extent. This is because their teachers did not encourage them to visit the libraries. During an interview with HT 2 from school B indicated that:

The Form Three and Form Four students use the library more than Form One and Form Two, because they are in a hurry to go home after leaving school, and their teachers do not encourage them to visit the library in order to read or borrow books (5th March, 2024).

Moreover, during an interview with L3 from school C added that:

Form Four is the one who comes the most, and if you look at the book, you will find that Form four is the one that comes to the library the most, but Form one, Form two, and Form three come, but not to a large extent due to the low awareness among them (7th March, 2024).

The quotes show that the awareness among the students on using the school library was low, for example, in form one and form two, because their teachers did not encourage them to go to the library and they were in a hurry to go home after leaving school. Also, the findings showed that in some schools form four students were using the libraries most, but form one, form two, and form three go to the library, but not to a large extent and even the record book shows the situation.

Moreover, the findings showed that some students were unaware of the need to return books to the libraries timely. They kept the books for extended periods or did not return them, something which restricts proper utilization of library resources. During an interview with L1 from school A indicated that:

Some students fail to give back the books, no matter what you do, I tell them to return them until I give up but they do not return them. Also, some students return but stay with the books for a long time without reading, so they cause some students do not get a chance to read some books because some books are few (12th March, 2024).

The quote indicates that some students may not be aware of how to use school libraries, as they either keep books for long periods without reading them or do not return them. Consequently, this behavior prevents other students from having the opportunity to read or borrow books. These findings supported by Jean (2021) in Rwanda, found that students lacked reading motivation, there was no reading culture, and they did not set aside enough time to advance their knowledge and abilities. Therefore, the inadequate knowledge of the students in using libraries cause the usage of school libraries to be low.

Moreover, the findings revealed that some students find it difficult to go to the libraries, but boys

were much more reluctant visit the school libraries regardless of being encouraged by the head teachers and ordinary teachers. During FGD 2 with STB3 from school B indicated that:

It is a challenge for some students to go to the library, especially boys. The head teacher has said that if he does not see your name in the library book, he will discipline us. Despite this, some students still do not go to the library (29th February, 2024).

Also, during an interview with L1 from school A claimed that:

The number of students using the library is low and they are encouraged to visit the library by their teachers. Some girls are more encouraged to go to the libraries than boys. Boys seem to dislike using the libraries because they are troublesome and think it is more suitable for girls (12th March, 2024).

The quotes indicate that some students find it challenging to go to the library, while boys were more disinclined to use it. Despite the efforts of head teachers and ordinary teachers in encouraging students, some still did not utilize the library. Contrary to the study of Desta and Anagaw (2020) on the practices and challenges of library usage in secondary schools of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia, revealed that the average library usage among female students was lower than that of male students.

4.2.5 Limited Specific Time of Using School Libraries

The research findings indicated that students had no specific time to go to the libraries. The researcher observed that they only went to the libraries during breaks, when the teachers were absent from the classrooms, and after school hours. During an interview with HT1 from school A indicated that:

We do not have a specific time for students to use the libraries. They only go during breaks, when the teachers are absent from the class, they can come earlier or late to leave. There is no specific time because all the time they are in the classrooms (1st March, 2024).

In relation to that, during FGD 1 with students STA4 from school A added that:

For my side, I have no specific time to go to library, going to the library when the lesson continues is difficult because I do not like to miss periods in the class. It may be that, if the teacher is absent, but if the teacher is in the class, I cannot leave the class and go to the library for reading (29th February, 2024).

The quotes indicate that students had no specific time to go to the libraries all the time they were in classrooms. They only visited the libraries during breaks or when the teachers were absent, and after school hours. These findings supported by Bernad and Dulle

(2014) in Morogoro municipality. Their findings revealed that the usage of school libraries was hindered by limited library hours. Also, Jato *et al.*, (2014) in Nigeria recommended incorporating library study hours into the academic schedule to ensure students consistently use school libraries at specified times, allowing them to spend over 30 minutes regularly.

4.2.6 Poor Customer Care among the Librarians

The findings from the study indicated that there were poor customer care among the librarians. They were reported to be rude and use harsh words with students at the libraries, which discourages some students from visiting the libraries. During FGD 3 with STC5 from school B stated that:

One of the reasons which make some students do not like to go to the library is the presence of rude librarians, other days, you may go and meet with rude librarians, and if you ask something you do not know, they do not inform you, they answer by harsh words (4th March, 2024).

During FGD 3 with STC3 from school B stated that:

The librarian some time gives us a torn book, and then when we return it, she tells us that, I did not give it torn by harsh word, so it becomes a conflict. I have witnessed this from my friend, thus why I do not like to go to library (4th March, 2024).

The quotes show that the librarians have poor customer care for the students, as they are rude and use harsh words, this discouraged some students from going to the school libraries. Contrary, to the study of Malekani & Mubofu (2019) in Tanzania stated that, in a school library, a school librarian serves all patrons equally, irrespective of their socio-economic background, by providing information services.

4.2.7 Limited Library Hours

The research findings revealed that the libraries had limited hours for students. On certain days, the libraries were closed and not open as indicated in the observation conducted by the researcher. Additionally, the findings indicated that librarians did not exchange, and they sometimes left early or arrived late to open the library. This makes it difficult for students to complete assignments. During FGD 3 with STC1 from school B stated that:

The library is closed on some days. On days when it is open, it opens at nine o'clock. We have an assignment to complete, so we are waiting for the teacher to punish us because we have not completed it. On the days when it is closed, we have to wait until the afternoon for the librarians to come and open it, they are not exchanged and sometimes they are late (4th March, 2024).

Also, during FGD 3 with STC4 from school B stated that:

At our school, some students are unable to stay after school because the library is closed. It remains closed until other librarians arrive in the afternoon to open it. On other days, it opens late or does not open at all (4th March, 2024).

The information indicates that school libraries had limited opening hours, leading to closures on some days. Additionally, the librarians did not exchange; they left early and arrived late, making it difficult for students to use the library when they had assignments, often resulting in punishments from their teachers. Ternenge and Agipu (2019) in Makurdi Metropolis found that restricted library hours are a significant obstacle for students seeking to utilize library resources. Therefore, the opening and closing times of the library present challenges for students.

4.2.8 Shortage of Librarians

The findings indicated that some schools did not have enough librarians, as observed by researchers. When librarians had an emergency, the library did not open. During an interview with L1 from school A stated that: *there is only one librarian, so when I have an emergency, it becomes challenging (12th March, 2024).*

In relation to that, during an interview with HT1 from school A stated that:

There are few library services now in our school due to the existence of one librarian and have an emergency. This cause the library do not open at the specific time and some time is closed. This become a challenge to the students because they do not get enough time of using school library (5th March, 2024).

Also, during FGD with STA4 from school A stated that:

At our school, we only have one librarian who is currently unavailable due to an emergency, which has led to the closure of the library. This is posing a challenge for the students because we are not accustomed of using the library, and we are not getting enough time to utilize the school library (4th March, 2024).

The quotes indicate that some schools did not have enough librarians, resulting in the library not being open at specific times and sometimes being closed. This affects the effectiveness of library services, as evidenced by a study conducted by Udem (2018) in Nigeria, which found that secondary school students have challenges when utilizing the school library due to the absence of professional librarians to process library materials. Therefore, it is essential for schools to ensure that their libraries are adequately staffed with librarians to encourage the use of school libraries.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the usage of school libraries was low due to the various challenges facing students in using school libraries, including shortage of resources, insufficient reading space, shortage of facilities in reading rooms, low awareness among the students, limited time, poor customer care among the librarians, limited library hours, shortage of librarians. Thus, the study come up with the following recommendations in light of its findings:

- The Ministry of Education Vocational Training Zanzibar (MoEVT) acting on behalf of the government together with other partners, needs to make sure that all essential resources are provided to public school libraries to fulfill the information requirements of students.
- The MoEVT needs to permit schools to create their library schedules for the students to use school libraries so the students have a specific time to go to libraries.
- The MoEVT should take an effort of increasing enough librarians for each school to ensure school libraries provide services excellently.
- The school administration should establish effective programs that make the students use the school library.
- The school administration should ensure security measures to protect the materials in the school library, such as computers.
- School librarians should have customer care for the students and create a conducive reading environment in the school libraries to attract them to go to the library.
- Teachers should encourage students to use school libraries by giving them assignments that direct them to go to the libraries.

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