

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: ASSESSING  
THE AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF THE READING MATERIALS AMONG PUPILS IN  
AKWA IBOM STATE**

By

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study investigates the availability and utilization of reading materials among pupils in Akwa Ibom State and further assesses the availability and utilization of academic libraries in primary schools. This critical analysis delves into the versatile nature of libraries, examining their relevance to the academic and reading materials of pupils in primary school. By focusing on the availability and utilization of reading materials, this study aims to offer an inclusive understanding of how these basics are vital in supporting the educational development of primary pupils. The study concludes that by addressing the identified challenges through targeted interventions, Akwa Ibom State can extensively improve the reading habits and academic performance of its primary school pupils. One of the recommendations was that the state government should allocate more funds specifically for the development and maintenance of school libraries. This includes purchasing up-to-date and diverse reading materials that cater to different age groups and reading levels.*

**KEYWORDS: Academic Libraries, Primary Schools, Availability, Utilization, Reading Materials, Pupils and Akwa Ibom State.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Academic libraries are essential to students' educational growth, especially in primary schools where students acquire their core literacy and study habits. These libraries are essential tools for supporting the curriculum and encouraging a reading culture. The availability and use of reading materials in elementary school libraries can have a big impact on students' academic achievement and habits of lifetime learning.

Improved literacy rates and superior academic results are associated with elementary schools having well-stocked and easily accessible libraries. Studies have indicated that pupils with access to a diverse range of reading resources typically demonstrate improved reading proficiency and greater academic success. For students in Akwa Ibom State to grow academically—many of whom depend on school supplies

for their learning needs—it is imperative that primary schools in the state have functional libraries. A school library must provide reading materials such as books, journals, and digital resources. They give students a variety of learning opportunities and support the development of a love of reading. Students' reading skills and general academic progress are directly associated with the availability of a wide variety of reading resources. Thus, determining whether these resources are offered in Akwa Ibom State's elementary schools is essential to comprehending the state of education today.

The utilization of available reading materials by pupils is another critical aspect. Merely having a library is not enough; pupils must be encouraged and taught to use these resources effectively. Studies have shown that regular library use enhances students' information literacy and research skills, which are essential for their future academic pursuits (Lance & Kachel, 2018). Primary school libraries in Akwa Ibom State face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness. These include inadequate funding, poor management, a lack of trained library staff, and limited access to current and diverse reading materials (Eyo, 2016). Government officials, educators, and the community must work together to address these issues in order to guarantee that school libraries may reach their full potential as hubs of knowledge.

In Akwa Ibom State, the availability and use of reading materials in elementary school libraries are important factors that influence students' academic progress. Even though there are still many obstacles to overcome, knowing how these libraries are currently doing and how students use them can assist develop ways to enhance library services. Providing well-stocked and efficiently used libraries to all elementary schools in the area is a first step in raising the standard of instruction in the area.

## **CONCEPT OF LIBRARY**

According to the American Library Association (ALA 2022), a library is a collection of resources in a variety of formats that is organized by information professionals or other experts who provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and offer targeted services and programs with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole. Estabrook & Haider (2024) postulated that traditionally, a library is the collection of books used for reading or study, or the building or room in which such a collection is kept. Bassey and Bantai (2021) defined a library as a collection of resources in variety of formats that are organized by information professionals or other experts.

Furthermore, Bassey, Onobrakpor and Nnah (2015) mentioned that a library is an organization established for unrestricted accessed to information in many formats. The library remains responsible for acquiring and providing access to books, periodicals, and other media that meet the educational, recreational, and informational needs of its users. Libraries can vary widely in size and may be organized and maintained by a public body such as a government, an institution, a corporation, or a private individual.

Moreover, Bassey and Umoh (2020) explained that libraries offer more than just book resources; they also have librarians on staff who are skilled in locating, choosing, circulating, and organizing information. They can also evaluate users' information needs and navigate and analyses vast volumes of data using a range of resources. However, Amiri (2024) defined a library as an organized collection of resources made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. The library provides physical or digital access to material and may be a physical building or room, a virtual space, or both. Moreover, the establishment of a library is to serve as a means by which the records of human thoughts, ideas, and expressions are made available to users.

Ashikuzzaman (2023) described the library as a place of knowledge and discovery where endless possibilities exist. Libraries also have a long and rich history, as they play a vital role in preserving and sharing knowledge and culture. It has been around for thousands of years and is an essential part of society, providing everyone access to information and knowledge, regardless of their background or financial means. Additionally, libraries also play a vital role in promoting environmental sustainability. Many libraries also offer green initiatives such as effective and efficient lighting, cooling, and recycling programs. Bassey&Umoh (2023) noted that libraries have also taken on a variety of shifting social and symbolic meanings. A library is a repository of information and knowledge, typically in the form of books, journals, and other printed materials that is organised and made available for use by members of a community (Bassey and Owushi, 2023).

### **CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY**

Academic libraries are those found in universities, polytechnics, teacher training colleges, colleges of education, and the Institute of Aviation, among too many more higher education establishments to list. According to Bassey&Igajah (2017), libraries are indispensable in every facet of higher education, and no university establishment can achieve academic excellence without a functional library to back up its teaching and learning mandates. They are meant to serve the teaching, learning, research, and community development of academic staff and other supporting staff of the institution. Amiri (2024) described an academic library as an organized collection of resources made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. It provides physical or digital access to material and may be a physical building or room, a virtual space, or both. A library's collection can include books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, maps, prints, documents, microform, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, e-books, audio books, databases, and other formats.

A university or other postsecondary institution establishes an academic library to gather and preserve a collection specific to its parent institution's taught courses and recreational needs in order to assist the staff and students' research as well as the curriculum. Ashikuzzaman (2023) mentioned that an academic library is a specialized repository of knowledge and information within educational institutions, primarily universities, colleges, and research centers. Unlike public libraries, which cater to a broader audience, academic libraries are tailored to meet the specific needs of students, faculty, researchers, and other academic community members. These libraries play a

crucial role in supporting the educational mission of their institutions by offering a wide range of resources that facilitate teaching, learning, and scholarly research.

Teresa (2024) stated that academic libraries contain materials that support both general research and the specific programs and degrees offered at the institution. An academic library is a library that is attached to a higher education institution and serves two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum and the research of the university faculty and students. Moreover, an academic library serves as a space for intellectual engagement and academic collaboration. It offers a conducive environment for students to study, work on assignments, and engage in group discussions. Academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting the educational and research missions of their affiliated institutions, and they are valuable resources for students, faculty, and researchers in their pursuit of knowledge and academic excellence.

Academic libraries frequently provide a range of services and resources to enhance research and learning in addition to their holdings. These services and resources may include computer workstations, computer workstation programmes, online databases and journals, reference services, and venues for group collaboration. Academic librarians frequently play a crucial role in the teaching of information literacy because they are typically trained to help users locate and use information effectively. Academic libraries are information hubs created to further the goals of their parent universities, which are to create knowledge and empower individuals with it so they can benefit society and improve humankind as a whole. John (2024) defined academic libraries as those special libraries found in educational institutions whose main purpose is to serve the special needs of the specialized or homogenous clientele.

## **CONCEPT OF READING MATERIALS**

Reading is one of the English language skills that is very important to developing students' knowledge. Okono (2023) noted that the English language is used as a medium of instruction from the primary school level up to the university level. On the other hand, if one has good reading ability, they will have a better chance in their studies at school. Reading materials are very important because they are equipment that helps students in reading classes. It is also important because it is one of the language skills that have to be learned and mastered by students when learning English. Okonoko, Ukanga, and Bassey (2024) highlighted that young learners reading habits are encouraged and the learning and teaching process is supported. It also influences the quality of students and their interests. Reading materials are written materials intended to be read (Kartikasari, 2017). Any written or printed content meant for readers to understand, interpret, analyse, or obtain information or enjoyment from is also referred to as reading material. A person needs to be able to read in order to utilise the reading resources. Nonetheless, reading is the act of deciphering written symbols and letters through visual inspection. The ability to recognise words, comprehend their meanings, and make connections between words and meanings is necessary for reading to become accurate and automatic.

Moreover, McDonald's (2021) mentioned that not all reading materials are books. Reading material refers to any text or passage that brings a certain message or idea to be shared with the reader through the process of reading activity (Muslikhati

2015). In preparing the materials, there are some aspects to be considered, including the level of the reader's interest as well as the objectives of the reading activity. Grell & Blakeley (2023) defined reading as the cognitive process of decoding symbols to determine a text's meaning. Reading is an ongoing activity that calls for both basic and sophisticated elements. A reader must possess a fundamental comprehension of the symbols that make up the language, as well as the vocabulary and grammatical rules. Technical gadgets are also included in the category of reading materials, in addition to books. Reading materials with context provide kids a better comprehension, which might inspire them to learn.

Atmazaki & Indriyani (2019) explained that students have better understanding of the text if it is close to their environment. Technology revolves around the world; as a result, writers can write their contents and upload them on the internet, making it easier for readers to access the reading material with the aid of their technology devices. However, technology is an unavoidable resource in the education sector, as it can facilitate learning online and offline and can be used for language learning. The idea behind using reading material is that it supports the objective or purpose of learning plans.

#### **AVAILABILITY OF READING MATERIALS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY**

A vital component of meeting the demands of instructors, researchers, and students for teaching and research is the availability of reading materials in academic libraries. Over the past few decades, academic libraries have undergone tremendous evolution. They have gone from being typical collections of physical books to becoming varied repositories that contain digital resources.

- **Traditional Print Collections**

Traditionally, academic libraries have been known for their vast collections of print materials, including books, journals, theses, and dissertations. These collections are often carefully chosen to support the specific curricula and research interests of their institutions. University libraries typically maintain extensive collections that align with the academic programs offered by their institutions, ensuring that students and faculty have access to essential textbooks and reference materials (Smith, 2021). But there are difficulties in keeping these collections up to date. Constraints related to physical space, financial resources, and the requirement for frequent revisions to maintain the materials' currency are persistent issues. Notwithstanding these difficulties, print collections are still a useful tool for a large number of users who, for a variety of reasons—such as portability and less screen time—prefer real books.

- **Digital Collections and E-Resources**

The rise of digital technology has significantly transformed the landscape of academic libraries. Digital collections, which include e-books, online journals, databases, and multimedia resources, offer several advantages over traditional print materials. They provide 24/7 access to a wide range of resources from anywhere with an internet connection, facilitating greater flexibility for users. A recent survey, over 70% of academic libraries have significantly increased their digital holdings over the past

decade (Jones, 2022). E-books and online journals have become particularly important in supporting distance education and online learning programs. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital resources, highlighting their importance in ensuring uninterrupted access to educational materials. Libraries have invested in various digital platforms and technologies to improve the accessibility and usability of these resources, including user-friendly interfaces and advanced search capabilities (Brown & Green, 2023).

- **Open Access Resources**

Open access (OA) resources are another critical component of modern academic libraries. OA resources are freely available to users and do not require subscription fees, making them accessible to a broader audience. The proliferation of OA journals and repositories has expanded the availability of scholarly articles and research papers. This movement is supported by initiatives such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and institutional repositories that promote the dissemination of research outputs (White, 2023). Funding organizations and academic institutions that mandate the unrestricted dissemination of publicly financed research have also played a significant role in driving the acceptance of open access. It is anticipated that this tendency will continue, expanding the selection of reading materials available in university libraries.

## **CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Despite the advancements in digital and open-access resources, academic libraries face ongoing challenges in ensuring the availability of reading materials. Budget constraints, copyright issues, and the digital divide are significant barriers. Libraries must balance the cost of acquiring and maintaining digital resources with the need to support a diverse user base that includes those with limited access to technology. Future directions for academic libraries include continued investment in digital infrastructure, collaboration with publishers and other institutions to expand access to resources, and the development of innovative services that support the evolving needs of their users. Libraries are also exploring the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance resource discovery and user experience (Miller & Thompson, 2024).

## **UTILIZATION OF READING MATERIALS BY THE PRIMARY PUPILS**

Children's reading proficiency affects their academic achievement in many topics and their school results. Children may therefore learn more quickly and easily when they are taught how to use reading materials, which may improve their academic success in school. Primary school students' use of reading materials is crucial to their overall literacy and academic development. In addition to improving students' reading abilities, having access to a wide range of reading materials has a favourable impact on their cognitive and emotional development.

Reading materials, ranging from textbooks and storybooks to digital resources, provide essential tools for language acquisition and literacy skills. Exposure to diverse reading materials significantly enhances vocabulary development and comprehension

skills among young learners (Reutzel& Cooter, 2017). Reading materials available for primary pupils are highly influenced, largely by technological advancements. Digital reading materials, such as e-books and educational apps, have become increasingly prevalent in classrooms. These digital resources offer interactive and engaging content that can cater to various learning styles, thus supporting differentiated instruction (Kim, 2018). Furthermore, it's critical to strike a balance between the conventional print and digital forms of reading materials in order to offer a comprehensive reading experience that fosters engagement and deep reading abilities.

The utilization of reading materials by primary pupils is integral to their educational development. The diverse range of reading materials available today, including both print and digital resources, offers numerous opportunities for enhancing literacy skills. Furthermore, the role of teachers and parents is vital in the utilization of reading material. Teachers' ability to select appropriate and varied reading materials that align with the curriculum and cater to students' interests can significantly enhance engagement and motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2020). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that parental participation in reading activities at home has a good effect on kids' reading achievement. Outside of the classroom, parents who read aloud to their kids or support independent reading contribute to the development of a positive reading environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The critical analysis underscores the vital role of academic libraries in primary education and the need for concerted efforts to enhance their availability and utilization. By addressing the identified challenges through targeted interventions, Akwa Ibom State can extensively improve the reading habits and academic performance of its primary school pupils. A strategic approach that involves increased funding, capacity building, community engagement, and policy integration is essential for realizing the full potential of academic libraries as a cornerstone of educational development.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The state government should allocate more funds specifically for the development and maintenance of school libraries. This includes purchasing up-to-date and diverse reading materials that cater to different age groups and reading levels.
- Develop and implement state-wide policies that mandate the establishment and proper maintenance of libraries in all primary schools. These policies should set standards for library resources, staffing, and usage.
- Provide regular training and professional development programs for school librarians. These programs should focus on library management, effective cataloging, and engaging students in reading activities.
- Encourage parents to take an active role in their children's reading habits by involving them in library activities and programs. Workshops and seminars for parents on the importance of reading can be beneficial.

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