

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL LIBRARY: IT'S PROSPECTS AND ROLES IN THE PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examined the school library's prospects and roles in the promotion of public health. A school library is a library whose primary function is to cover information. The school library plays a key role in the cultural and social life of the school. It can be a central point for engagement with all kinds of information about public health can be assessed. Public health benefits everyone, young and old, rich and poor, healthy and unhealthy, millions at a time, and in ways that ensure health beyond what any of us alone can accomplish. The paper summarized that school libraries are employed for health education and public health services. And that an iCentre can help as the central facility within the school library where information, technology, learning and teaching needs are supported by qualified information and technology specialists. School libraries are adapting the physical and virtual spaces to encourage traditional creative behaviour while also accommodating new forms of practice to enhance public health implications and remedies in hybrid information settings. One of the recommendations made was that the government should provide health professionals and the general public with equal access to health information.*

**KEYWORDS:** School Library, Public Health, and Remedies

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## INTRODUCTION

Libraries are social institutions created to conserve knowledge, preserve the cultural heritage and provide information for education and research purposes. There are different types of libraries, such as public libraries, academic libraries, special libraries, and so on, established to cater to the information needs of different groups of people in society in order to improve health. According to Elaturoti (2000), a school library can be defined as a place designed for the provision of all kinds of learning

resources. School libraries are free and open to the public, and they serve as important hubs for community engagement and education, making them natural partners in improving the public health (Wahowiak, 2018). Because people are more likely to go to the library than to see a doctor, health advocates can reach people where they live and learn. Across the country, school libraries serve as locations for health education, outreach, and public health services. School libraries are expected to strive to collect and make available relevant and appropriate materials for health literacy development (Moruf, 2010). The public library is one of the crucial factors which facilitates implementation of the new educational policy and objectives by promoting efficiency in health.

According to Flint (2013), providing quality health information services to the public requires school libraries to possess a unique set of competencies. An advisory group of public librarians, consumer health librarians, health educators, and health care professionals offered input on the necessary skills and knowledge needed to provide health information services to library patrons. School libraries have been noted to support community development in various areas, such as education, the economy, research, and health. Experience shows that libraries act as a bridge of information between people and information providers such as governments, organizations, and institutions. Libraries are known as knowledge centers that collect a variety of information resources, including health information resources for their users, as well as local gateways to knowledge capable of providing basic conditions for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, and cultural development of individuals and social groups (Ghosh, 2013). It is through libraries that some communities get information about public health. The school library is more than just a storage place for books. Libraries also have an important role in developing public health.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Over the years, public health has been a prevalent issue in the school library despite its implications and remedies. School libraries have an important role in society in advancing public health. But understanding the value of school libraries is a complex issue due to the wide-ranging services that school libraries provide and the inherently public health services (most are free at the point of use). However, given the significance of the school library in ensuring the success of public health, there is a need to investigate the implication and remedies of public health in the school library. It is also imperative to identify the implications and remedies of public health in school libraries which have a good selection policy where teachers and students fully participate in the selection process of public health. Therefore, the study was to investigate the school library's implications for public health and remedies.

### **THE LIBRARY CONCEPT**

"Library refers to a growing area of interactive and social tools on the web which create and share dynamic content (Cornnor, 2007). Francis, Estabrook, Foskett & Haider (2017) explain that the library has its origins in the Latin word "liber", which means "book". From this standpoint, it infers that a book is inseparable from the concept of a library. The conservative definition of a library as a storehouse of knowledge where resources are shackled to preserve and prevent them from any form of theft, making access to them very narrow, is no longer adequate. Merriam-Webster (2020) defined a library as an apartment in which literary, musical, artistic, or reference

materials (such as books, manuscripts, recordings, or films) are kept for use but not for sale. Achebe (2008) defines a library as a collection of books and other non-book materials, housed, organised, and interpreted to meet the yearning needs of people for information, knowledge, recreation, aesthetics, research, and enjoyment. FRN (2004) sees the library as the pivot of the educational enterprise, which gives the platform for the sharing of knowledge aimed at rejuvenating Nigerian schools through the provision of current books and journals.

According to Eberhart (2010), a library is a collection of formats that are 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. The library provides physical (hard copy documents) or digital access (soft copies) materials, and may be a physical location or a virtual space, or both. The library's collection can include printed materials and other physical resources in many formats, such as DVDs, CDs, and cassettes, as well as access to information, music, or other content held in bibliographic databases (Wikipedia 2021). All of these definitions agree on one thing: a library is an organized collection of books and other non-book materials stored for use by library patrons.

### **THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

A school library is a library whose primary function is to cover the information needs of learning and research. This includes libraries of institutions of higher education and general research libraries. A school library is a library attached to all types of schools below the third (tertiary) level of education, whose primary function is to serve the pupils and teachers of such a school, although it may also serve the general public (Otike, 2007). The school library is a learning center through which students and teachers alike further their educational programs. According to Wikipedia (2007), a school library is a library that serves the students, faculty, staff, and parents of a public or private school. Essentially, the school library's mission is to offer learning services, books and resources that enable the school community to use information effectively in various formats and media, and thus enhance critical thinking. The school library brings together four components, namely information resources, users, library staff, and the environment. The first three elements must be operating in an environment that supports learning in order for a library to function effectively.

According to Government Model High School (2015), the school library is central to learning and plays a key role as a place for encouraging innovation, curiosity, and problem-solving. The school library is a catalyst for literacy and reading, as well as for teaching and scaffolding inquiry learning. School libraries make a difference to students' understanding and achievement and provide support for teaching and learning throughout the school. The school library is an important part of the school community. There is an excellent set of proposals for the future of school libraries. As noted by Hay (2010), an iCentre can help as the central facility within the school library where information, technology, learning, and teaching needs are supported by qualified information and technology specialists. The goal of the school library is to ensure that all members of the school community have equitable access to books, information and information technology. The school library serves as the center and coordinating agency

for all materials used in the school (Morris, 2013). The school library plays a key role in the cultural and social life of the school. It can be a central point for engagement with all kinds of reading, cultural activities, access to information, knowledge building, deep thinking and lively discussion.

### **THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

Public health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations, not on individual patients or diseases. Public health is commonly defined as the public, private, and voluntary entities that contribute to the delivery of essential public health services within a jurisdiction (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2018). Public health refers to the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, promoting physical and mental health, sanitation, personal hygiene, control of infectious diseases, and organization of health services (Rhodes, 2020). Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities (CDC 2021). Public health is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury, preventing and responding to infectious diseases. Public health is concerned with protecting the health of entire populations. These populations can be as small as a local neighborhood, or as big as an entire country or region of the world. Public health is defined as the science of protecting the safety and improving the health of communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention.

Public health refers to one of the efforts organized by society to protect, promote, and restore the peoples' health. According to the American Public Health Association (2021), public health promotes and protects the health of people and the communities where they live, learn, work and play. Public health is the practice of preventing disease and promoting good health within groups of people, from small communities to entire countries. Public health refers to global health, which is the health of populations in a worldwide context (Brown, Cueto, & Fee, (2006). Public health is the area of study, research, and practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health for all individuals. Public health is responsible for everything from clean air and water to safe workplaces; from controlling the spread of infectious diseases and preventing chronic diseases to improving prenatal nutrition; from reducing automobile accidents to designing quality health systems. Partnering with national and local governments, public health scientists respond to natural disasters, pandemics, and any other threat to population health (Mailman School of Public Health 2010). And while medicine is vital for each of us when we get sick, public health benefits everyone, young and old, rich and poor, healthy and unhealthy, millions at a time, and in ways that ensure health beyond what any of us alone can accomplish.

### **PROMOTION AND RESOURCING OF WELLBEING INITIATIVES THROUGH SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

School libraries can play a valuable role in the promotion and resourcing of wellbeing initiatives. This can be provided through school libraries, as school librarians can play a key role as "health information gatekeepers" (Lukenbill & Immroth, 2009). Despite acknowledgement of the importance of resourcing the population with self-help information and resources (PCDR, 2019c), and the potential of school libraries to play

an important role in this regard (Adkins et al., 2019; Lukenbill & Immroth, 2009), very little is known about how school libraries can promote and resource diverse mental health and wellbeing initiatives. This supposition is supported by a 2016 review, which noted that "school librarians have a unique opportunity to improve the health literacy of children and teachers, but these libraries are underrepresented in the literature" (Barr-Walker, 2016). Dotson-Blake and Dotson (2012) suggest that school librarians can work collaboratively with school counselors to resource them with educational materials focused on mental health and wellbeing issues. Merga (2020) noted that school libraries can be important resources for identifying and building young peoples' digital health literacy skills, which can support them to access resources in mental health and wellbeing.

### **THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN PROMOTING HEALTH LITERACY**

Libraries have been shown to aid community growth in various areas, including education, economics, research, and health. Libraries serve as a link between individuals and information sources such as governments, corporations, and institutions. Libraries are known as knowledge centers that gather various information resources for users, including health information resources, as well as local gateways to knowledge capable of providing basic conditions for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, and cultural development of individuals and social groups (Ghosh, 2013). Some members of the public obtain information about socio-economic issues through the use of libraries. Public libraries, university libraries, health libraries, and information centers abound in Nigeria, except for a few health libraries. However, nothing is known about how these libraries participate in health promotion. These health libraries are playing a vital role in promoting health literacy. Libraries should continue the AHILA-Tanzania Chapter's efforts to promote health literacy in order to battle non-communicable illnesses. The role of libraries in preventing non-communicable illnesses is to gather critical, high-quality, and relevant health information resources. Libraries, according to Obidike and Nkechi (2011), should gather and synthesize health information and preserve it in an appropriate medium that policy and decision-makers as well as other health information consumers may easily access. Librarians are encouraged to collaborate with community health workers, such as medical physicians, veterinary doctors, and other medical professionals, in order to obtain access to critical health information for illness prevention and development. Ntlotlang and Grand, (2016) stated that Botswana public libraries serve communities with health information through various ways such as outreach, library brochures/leaflets, newsletters and library exhibitions.

According to Chipungahelo et al. (2015), libraries are able to collect vital health information, including information resources on how to avoid the circumstances that cause health problems and on providing preventative health programs and treatment programs. Libraries should be able to harness and store relevant health information resources which can help in combating non-communicable diseases. Promotion of health information resources is important in order to raise awareness of non-communicable diseases and how to combat them. It is the obligation of public libraries, academic libraries as well as hospital libraries to provide accessible and reliable health information sources and services to the community (Orban, 2005). Libraries and health centers can help in disseminating health care information to the unprivileged community, especially the rural community. It is the role of health librarians or health

information officers to promote and enhance access to health information as they are capable of providing needed assistance through training and through the selection, repackaging, and dissemination of relevant materials. Chipungahelo et al., (2015) stated that libraries should distribute health information regarding the cause of non-communicable illnesses and how to prevent them. Promotion of health information should be made by using brochures, leaflets, newspapers, magazines, and others which should be distributed to the public with the aim of increasing awareness about diseases and how to fight them. Librarians have the role of promoting health information literacy to all kinds of library users, in order to help many people have "the ability to recognize a health information need, identify likely information sources and use them to retrieve relevant information; assess the quality of the information and its applicability to a specific situation; and analyze, understand, and use the information to make good health decisions" (Orban, 2005).

Libraries are supposed to provide training and health education to the community on health literacy for combating non-communicable diseases. They should organize seminars on health education (Obidike and Nkechi, 2011), education which, for example, will help people change their behavior and hence combat non-communicable diseases. Librarians should make sure they impart knowledge of health literacy for combating non-communicable diseases to health information consumers (Chipungahelo et al., 2015). Moreover, they should provide training on how to use ICT devices to access health information for combating non-communicable diseases (ECOSOC, 2010). Apart from training and seminars, libraries, particularly health libraries from health institutions in Tanzania, can create an e-repository of systematic documentation of health information resources or a virtual library of health promotion practices, which will include good practices and lessons learned, which will be consulted by practitioners, policy-makers, and academicians (McQueen et al., 2014). The repositories will help various health information consumers make the best health decisions concerning non-communicable diseases and how to combat them. Also, the repositories will help health practitioners, doctors, decision makers and politicians to get useful information which in return will help them to make good decisions on how to protect the community and combat non-communicable diseases. The experience from other countries shows that health promotion in the library is not a new thing. According to IFLA (2010), 81% of local government library authorities in England provide access to information on health and wellbeing as well as literacy skills to support health literacy so as to improve access and use of health information. Parker and Kreps (2005) state that public libraries are involved in informing the public about important health issues through speeches from doctors, nurses, and other health professionals, as well as the provision of special health services for the disabled.

## **SUMMARY**

School libraries are employed for health education and public health services. And that an iCentre can help as the central facility within the school library where information, technology, learning and teaching needs are supported by qualified information and technology specialists. School libraries are adapting the physical and virtual spaces to encourage traditional creative behaviour while also accommodating new forms of practice to enhance public health implications and remedies in hybrid information settings.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The government should provide health professionals and the general public with equal access to health information.
2. Governments should adopt the process of building school libraries and furnishing them with equipment for the improvement of public health.
3. To improve public health, governments should embrace the technique of establishing school libraries.
4. The government should improve school library guides with resources and reflection questions to support health-related services for the public.

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