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Original Article

Perception of Value and Utilisation of School Libraries in Government-Aided Schools in Kabale District, Uganda

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Keywords:
*Perception,
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This study investigates the perception of value and the extent of utilisation of school libraries in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale District, Uganda. Recognising the transformative potential of libraries in supporting education, especially within learner-centred curricular reforms, the research explores how students, teachers, and school administrators perceive the library's role and how these perceptions influence usage patterns. Employing a convergent parallel mixed methods design, data were collected through questionnaires from 345 students and interviews with key informants, including teachers, librarians, and school administrators across five selected schools. Findings reveal a generally positive perception of school libraries, with students acknowledging their significant contribution to academic performance, self-study habits, and access to curriculum-aligned resources. Notably, 71% of students reported daily library visits, though this figure was skewed toward urban schools. In contrast, rural schools faced infrastructural challenges such as inadequate space, outdated materials, and limited access to electronic resources, which impeded effective utilisation. Traditional print resources such as textbooks and past examination papers were the most commonly accessed materials, while the use of digital resources remained low due to limited ICT infrastructure. Perception of the library's value was found to have a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .236$, $p < .01$) with effective utilisation, indicating that while perception matters, structural and institutional factors play a critical role in determining actual usage. The study recommends infrastructural improvements, equitable resource distribution, digital integration, structured library periods, professional development for staff, and a national school library policy to enhance library value and utilisation. Ultimately, school libraries must be repositioned as central to the success of Uganda's competency-based curriculum through improved investment and strategic alignment with educational objectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Considering the pivotal role played by school libraries within the educational system, their existence and utilisation by users are contingent upon how they are perceived. Given the growing emphasis on return on investment, it is worthwhile for school libraries to investigate user perceptions of the value of library services, as these perceptions are a decisive factor in determining the usability of such services. According to Kamal and Othman (2012), students' positive perceptions regarding the role of the school library and library staff are vital for establishing and maintaining a high-quality library program. Users' perception of the value of library services is their judgment of the library in regard to the importance, usefulness, or worth of library services offered to them (Udem et al., 2020). Librarians are now concerned with how library services and resources benefit students' success, teachers, and the overall school aim. (Tetteh & Nyantakyi-Baah, 2019). Noh et al. (2018) noted that libraries had economic, social, and educational values.

Perceptions are shaped during and result from every interaction between an individual and his or her environment (Kamal & Othman, 2012). Perceptions of the value of school library services encompass individuals' perspectives on the significance and utility of the resources and services offered by a

school library. These individuals include students, teachers, and school administrators. The perception entails comprehending the influence of the library on students' performance, its contributions to teaching and learning, and its role in fostering a passion for reading and lifelong learning.

Value creation is an exercise engaged in mostly by businesses in highly competitive industries with the aim of providing customers with a defined notion of value and the reasons to choose their products and services over those of their competitors (Zhang & Chen, 2008). In accordance with Zeithaml (1988), the concept of value can be interpreted in diverse ways. Drawing on four principal definitions identified in an exploratory study, he asserted that value generally entails the customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988). This study specifically focuses on the aspect of value known as use value, aligning with the perspective articulated by Nyantakyi-Baah (2016) in their characterisation of library value. It is posited that usage stands as a fundamental indicator of library performance (Webbmedia Group, 2012), where an increase in library usage, coupled with perceived user benefits, corresponds to an augmented valuation of the library. Oakleaf (2010) observed that value can be ascribed based on the impact of the library on users, encompassing

positive changes resulting from engagement with library resources and facilities.

With the paradigm shift in the Ugandan education system from teacher-centred to learner-centred approach to learning, the library and the school librarian's role become more crucial. The library and librarians are expected to provide facilities like more spaces for study, more personal computers and workstations, online databases, internet facilities, and information literacy instruction. They are also expected to provide guidance and support in the use of the resources and to train the students on how to make effective use of them.

Problem Statement

School libraries are anticipated to play a pivotal role in supporting teaching and learning processes within secondary education. However, Ikoja-Odongo (2009) identified a pervasive cycle of library non-use that is prevalent across Uganda. This cycle is reinforced by a teacher training curriculum that lacks a strong orientation toward library use. Consequently, teachers who have not been exposed to or trained in effective library utilisation deliver a curriculum that does not emphasise the integration of library resources. Due to the absence of a comprehensive national library policy, combined with limited school inspection mechanisms and chronic underfunding, numerous secondary schools in Uganda either lack library facilities entirely or operate libraries that are insufficiently equipped. These libraries often suffer from inadequate reference collections, poorly structured services, limited professional staffing, and substandard organisational systems (Kabanda, 2020). This situation may be partly attributed to the prevailing undervaluation of the role and significance of school libraries in the educational process. It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted in order to shed light on the current status of secondary school library utilisation and the users' perception of school library value in

government-aided secondary schools in Kabale district.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the current state of secondary school library utilisation by users in Kabale District.
- To assess the level of awareness of the value of secondary school libraries in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale District.

Research Questions

- What is the current status of the utilization of school libraries in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale District?
- What is the perception of the value of school libraries by school administrators, teachers, and learners in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale district?

Research Hypotheses

Ho: Perception of the school library value has no significant effect on the utilisation of school library services in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale district

Hi, The perception of the school library value has a significant effect on the utilisation of library services in government-aided schools in Kabale district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, extensive studies observed that school principals had limited awareness and understanding of the roles and values of school libraries and librarians. Most consider the role of school libraries as book warehouses, and perceive the role of librarians as bookkeepers and circulators (Merga, 2019a; Wimolsittichai, 2018). School librarians are generally perceived as existing on the periphery of the educational experience in schools.

Consequently, most librarians operate in isolation with no collaboration from other units in the school system (Merga, 2019b).

Tenopir (2011), while discussing ways of measuring the value of library products and services, identified three types of value, which include, first, Implicit value, where the focus is put on downloads or usage logs. This approach assumes that because the library is used, it has value. This, however, does not show purpose, satisfaction, or outcome. Secondly, explicit value focuses on the impact or the outcome of research, teaching, and learning, and thirdly, derived value relates to the cost and benefits of library resources, which is also referred to as Return on Investment (ROI). He further observed that most libraries have demonstrated implicit value for some time using usage statistics. A study conducted by Tetteh and Nyantakyi-Baah (2019) employed explicit approaches to measure the value of library resources, services, and the physical environment. In addition, Tenopir, (2011) noted that the value of a library should not only focus on implicit value where the focus is put on downloads or usage logs but also on the explicit and derived values where impact on research, teaching, and learning, and the cost benefits of library resources are assessed.

According to Udem et al. (2020), the necessity to measure users' perception of library service quality and value arises from the need to justify the library's existence in the 21st century; decision-making; attraction of more funds for library use, and the satisfaction of users' needs, amongst others. Nevertheless, De Jager and Nassimbeni (2012) contend that for something to be deemed valuable, it must possess certain characteristics, such as being important or significant. Conversely, items considered trivial are ascribed less value. Therefore, if school library services are perceived as inconsequential by users, their value diminishes. The literature review underscores the complexity of measuring value, given its predominantly subjective

nature. The utility of library services is contingent upon the diverse information needs of users, making it pertinent to employ a method that solicits information directly from library user groups in the respective institutions, allowing users to articulate the usefulness of library services in their own terms.

Several studies have established the link between the perception of the value of the school library and student achievement. For instance, Todd (2017) conducted a study in Australia, which revealed that students who regarded the school library as a valuable resource were more inclined to attain higher academic accomplishments compared to those who did not hold this perception.

According to Ogunbawo et al. (2020), the school library, serving as the initial point of contact with library resources, assumes a significant role in the educational process. One prominent deficiency that exists pertains to the limited interaction between library staff and library users. They further note that a consequence of this lack of familiarity with the library is the elevated levels of anxiety experienced by non-users. A substantial portion of students transitioning from secondary education to higher levels may possess limited awareness and understanding of the library's functions and the roles of librarians. Thus, it is imperative that a school library not only entices students to utilise its resources but also facilitates the acquisition of pertinent experiences in library usage. Furthermore, students' comprehension of library operations may be impeded by their prior experiences within school libraries.

A study conducted by Mahmood et al. (2021) in Pakistan revealed that both students and teachers perceived the school library as a crucial resource for their academic achievements and personal development. However, in a study conducted by Shannon (2012), it was observed that a significant proportion of school administrators lacked a comprehensive appreciation for the value of the

school librarian, let alone the school library. This lack of understanding can be attributed to the absence of substantive coverage of the librarian's role within their administrative training programs. Moreover, Shannon's findings suggest that, among administrators, there is a prevailing emphasis on the interpersonal competencies exhibited by school librarians, deeming them more crucial than their proficiency in resource acquisition for the library or their expertise.

The perception of the value of school library services carries considerable significance as it can influence the allocation of funds, garner support, and facilitate advocacy for school libraries. When individuals acknowledge the indispensable role that libraries play in supporting student learning and academic success, they are more inclined to provide the requisite resources and support to ensure that school libraries receive adequate funding, staffing, and equipment to cater to the needs of students and the school community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

A convergent parallel mixed research design was employed, whereby the study data was collected concurrently. This is a type of mixed methods design where the researcher integrates or combines quantitative and qualitative data to offer a more thorough analysis of the research problem. It enabled the researcher to gather quantitative data from the users (students and teachers) of the secondary school libraries and qualitative data from other stakeholders of the secondary school libraries, who included the teaching staff, top administrators (the headteacher, deputy headteacher, director of studies), and library staff.

Population

The study population consisted of 2507 students of S3, S4, and S6 of five government-aided secondary

schools in Kabale district. These included 990 learners of St Mary's College, Rushoroza, 478 learners of Kabale Secondary School, 498 Learners of Kigezi High School, 342 learners of Kamuganguzi Janan Luwum Secondary School, and 200 learners of Rwesasi Secondary School. These classes were preferred due to their prolonged stay in the schools, and hence the assumption that they had

Sampling

The study used stratified sampling to select student participants, aiming to minimise variability by grouping them according to class level (S.3, S.4, and S.6) and gender (male and female). Systematic random sampling was applied to select learners, using an interval of five from each class. This approach helped eliminate selection bias, ensuring that every student had a known probability and equal chance of being chosen. Purposive sampling was also employed to select key informants who included top administration, class teachers, and librarians, as they were considered well-positioned to provide information regarding the research questions.

Sample Size Determination

The study included a sample of 345 students from a population of 2507 respondents across five schools involved in the study. These were selected from the senior three, four, and six classes. To obtain the sample size, the population of each school was established and then the sample size calculated by applying Yamane's formula which states that $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ where n stands for the sample size, N is the population and e is the sampling error from the total population of the chosen classes with a margin error of 5%. Further, the sample size for each school was determined using the probability proportional to size (PPS) using the following formula: $n_n = (n/N) N_n$, where n_n is the sub-sample size for each school, n is the sample size, N is the

population size, and N_n is the population size for each school as follows;

Kigezi High School

$$n = N$$

$$\frac{n}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n stands for the sample size, N is the population, and is the sampling error from the total population of the chosen classes, with a margin of error of 5%.

$$n = 2507$$

$$\frac{n}{1 + 2507(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 2507$$

$$1 + 2507 * 0.0025$$

$$n = 345 \text{ students}$$

Since school enrollments were not uniform, stratified random sampling with proportionate allocation was applied to ensure representative samples from each of the five secondary schools. A mathematical formula was used to determine each school's proportionate sample size:

$$\frac{N_i \times n}{N} = P_s$$

$$N$$

Where N_i = population of a single school, n = total desired sample size (345 students), N = total student population across all schools, and P_s = proportionate sample for each school. Upon application of the aforementioned proportionate sampling formula, the resulting distribution of the sample across the selected secondary schools was as follows: St. Mary's College Rushoroza contributed 136 respondents; Kigezi High School, 69 respondents; Kabale Secondary School, 65

respondents; Kamuganguzi Janan Luwum Memorial School, 47 respondents; and Rwesasi Secondary School, 28 respondents. This allocation reflects the proportionate representation of each school relative to its enrollment within the total study population.

Data Collection Methods

The questionnaire survey and interview methods were employed to elicit responses from students and key informant interviewers, respectively. These methods of data collection were employed with library users because they were literate and were able to complete the questionnaire with basic guidance from the researcher. Additionally, the questionnaire survey was helpful in gathering data in a limited period of time.

Data Quality Control

To ensure the rigour and reliability of the questionnaire, a comprehensive multi-phase validation process was undertaken. Initially, content validity was established through a review by subject matter experts, who evaluated the extent to which the instrument adequately captured the intended constructs. The questionnaire was pretested to assess content, construct, and concurrent validity prior to its formal administration. A pilot study involving 40 participants from two schools not included in the main study was conducted, leading to the refinement of certain items based on the findings. Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to evaluate the internal consistency of the instrument. The analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.805, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming the overall reliability of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis and Presentation

SPSS v.26 was employed to analyse quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires and were then presented in the form of descriptive and

correlational statistical methods. Qualitative data were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), which involves systematic coding and categorising data into themes and subthemes of text data to allow researchers to understand social reality based on the original meanings expressed by key informants (Saldana, 2013)

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations played a central role throughout all phases of this research, including participant recruitment, data collection, and dissemination of findings. Consistent with guidelines from Welman et al. (2005) and Bless et al. (2006), the study prioritised the dignity, safety, and rights of participants by adhering to established ethical protocols. Ethical clearance was secured from the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC), and permissions were obtained from five participating secondary schools.

Participants were briefed through informed consent forms detailing the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time (Babbie, 2016). Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld by avoiding the collection of personal identifiers and using codes for both individuals and institutions. Interview recordings were conducted only with prior consent, and all data were securely stored.

RESULTS

Gender of Respondents

The study sought to ascertain if there was any gender bias in respondents' membership and therefore collected gender related demographic data and analysed the distribution of respondents as per Table 1

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	178	52.2
Female	163	47.8
Total	341	100.0

Table 1 shows that 52.2% were males, whereas 47.8% were females. Although there were more males than females who participated in this study, both genders were fairly represented in this study, depicting progress in ensuring gender parity in the education sector.

Current Status of School Library Utilisation

The study was interested in establishing the patterns of library utilisation, the reasons for library utilisation, the information resources available in the school, and the means of accessing library

resources. Findings from this section formed the basis for the rest of the study.

Frequency of School Library Visits

The question of the frequency of library visits was considered central for the study because it played a role in indicating whether respondents constructed their perception of the library based on their own experiences gained through making use of the library or shaped by what they had been told by others. It further helps library managers in the planning of activities to serve the information needs of users. The details are shown in the following table.

Table 2: Frequency of School Library Visits

Statement	Frequency	Percent
Once a month	9	2.6
Once a week	7	2.1
Two to three times a week	83	24.3
Everyday	242	71.0
Total	341	100.0

Table 2 indicates that 9(2.6%) of respondents visited the school library once a month, 7(2.1%) visited the school library once a week, 83(24.3%) visited the school library twice to thrice a week, and 242(71%) use the school library every day. From the study findings, the majority of respondents (students) use the school library every day. This is because the students utilise the library during their free periods. Interview data from SS 3 was found to have library periods timetabled for different classes to utilise the library each day. It was further revealed that the introduction of the competency-based curriculum has further compelled the schools to the utilization of the school library resources, especially the textbooks, since it is learner-centred, requiring learners to do their research on different subjects.

Despite the study findings indicating that the majority (71%) visited the school libraries every day, key informant interviews and observation revealed that this was predominant in the urban-based schools. Interviews with library staff and head teachers in the rural areas revealed that the learners were not visiting the libraries frequently due to limited space. It was reported that student representatives would be sent to pick the relevant textbooks to be used in class and would return them afterwards. In fact, for a rural school like SS5, the utilisation of information resources within the school library was practically impossible due to the limited space and lack of furniture for learners to sit on. There were few seats available in the form of stools without tables, which did not favour the prolonged usage for long hours of study.

During interviews, the teachers were asked how often the students visited the library. They mentioned that the students visited the school libraries during their free time (when their subjects were not on the timetable) and at night, since all the other time was allocated to lessons for various subjects. It was revealed that the utilisation of the school library was contingent on the learners' free periods. In an interview with one teacher at SS3, he responded that;

"There are no specific periods allocated to library use, but rather it is incorporated as part of different lessons. This is especially true for the new curriculum, which is learner-centred and requires students to explore concepts on their own. For every lesson, students go to the library, pick the relevant books, and later return them after the lesson."

In addition, one of the teachers in SS1 stated that;

"For the new curriculum, students are required to pick books from the library, which they bring to class and return them after the class".

This was attributed to the fact that the time allocated to library use was limited and could barely accommodate the many subjects offered, which did not leave room for prolonged library visits.

Availability and Utilisation of Information Resources in School Libraries

Respondents were asked about the information resources available in their libraries. These were also considered key in providing insights into the

current status of school library utilisation. The results are presented in Table 3

Table 3: Information Resources Utilised in the Library

	No		Yes	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Text books	3	0.9%	338	99.1%
Reference books (e.g., dictionaries)	21	6.2%	320	93.8%
Newspapers/ magazines	13	3.8%	328	96.2%
Electronic information materials	268	78.6%	73	21.4%
Past paper questions	12	3.5%	329	96.5%
Novels/ fiction	17	5.0%	324	95.0%
Others	293	85.9%	48	14.1%

Table 3 reveals that textbooks were the most frequently utilised resource (99.1%), followed by past examination papers (96.5%), newspapers (96.2%), novels (95.0%), and reference books (93.8%). In stark contrast, electronic resources were reported as being accessed by only 21.4% of respondents. These findings underscore the predominant reliance on traditional, print-based materials, suggesting not only entrenched study habits among learners and a curricular emphasis on physical resources but also possible infrastructural and technological constraints that hinder the integration of digital content.

While the responses indicate that most school libraries provide essential information materials, qualitative data reveal that the quantity of resources is insufficient relative to the growing student populations. This discrepancy between resource availability and student demand was further corroborated through interviews with school librarians, who confirmed that their collections were largely limited to curriculum-focused print materials, with minimal inclusion of general reading resources.

Resource acquisition mechanisms also varied across education levels and schools. Materials for lower secondary (Senior One to Senior Three) were predominantly supplied by the government,

whereas those for upper secondary (Senior Four and Five) were primarily procured through school-level budgets. The most commonly available resources included textbooks, reference books (such as atlases and dictionaries), and novels. However, newspapers were generally not acquired in rural-based schools due to financial constraints that hindered regular acquisition. Moreover, it was observed that information resources for the lower secondary levels were relatively current and in good physical condition, largely due to recent governmental efforts to support the implementation of the competency-based curriculum. In contrast, the materials available at the upper secondary level were often outdated and, in several cases, deteriorated. Particularly acute were shortages of science textbooks at the advanced level, which were both expensive and insufficient in quantity to meet the student demand. This highlights a significant gap in equitable resource distribution and points to the urgent need for targeted investment in updated and diversified learning materials, including digital content.

This pattern was reinforced during an interview with a Top Administrator (TA1) in SS1, who reported that the library collection was largely limited to textbooks aligned with the curriculum, newspapers, past papers, maps, and a few magazines. These findings suggest that most school libraries operate with a minimalistic approach to

resource provision, offering little to support independent inquiry or broader academic development beyond classroom instruction.

Further, it emerged that although information resources were present in rural school libraries, their volume was not proportionate to the student population, nor were they consistently aligned with the subjects taught. Significant shortages were reported in subjects under the competency-based curriculum, and interviews with key informants indicated that government-supplied textbooks were often distributed arbitrarily, without regard for individual school requests or curricular needs. This has led to mismatches between supply and demand,

with surplus materials in some subject areas and acute shortages in others, particularly in subjects not officially supported by government provision programs.

Moreover, the study found that electronic resources were entirely absent from the school libraries surveyed. Even among the traditional resources, availability varied significantly between institutions. Despite general perceptions that relevant materials were present, none of the schools had integrated digital information resources into their libraries. This technological gap further marginalises students who might benefit from access to modern, digital research tools.

Table 4: Purpose for Visiting the Library

	No		Yes	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Borrowing textbooks	83	24.3%	258	75.7%
Get assistance with my research	96	28.2%	245	71.8%
Use the computer/ internet	313	91.8%	28	8.2%
Do homework	193	56.6%	148	43.4%
To read my notes	74	21.7%	267	78.3%
To prepare for exams and tests	85	24.9%	256	75.1%
For leisure	301	88.3%	40	11.7%

Table 4 above presents responses regarding the learners' reasons for visiting the school libraries. Findings reveal that the majority of the students visited the school libraries to read their notes (78.3%), followed by borrowing textbooks (75.7%). The third reason for learners to visit the library was preparing for exams, followed by 75.1% getting assistance with research, and also to do their homework, as indicated by 43.4%. 11.7 % indicated that they visit the school library for leisure, while the minority who constituted 8.2 % indicated that they visited the school libraries to use computers and the internet. The findings suggest that the primary reasons for students visiting school libraries are academic in nature, with reading notes, borrowing textbooks, and preparing for exams being the dominant reasons. The relatively low percentages for research assistance, leisure, and

digital resource use indicate areas where library services could be improved to better support diverse student needs. Although school libraries are essential for providing access to study materials and serving as quiet study environments, their potential to support digital literacy, research skills, and recreational reading is underutilised.

Responses from key informant interviews with teachers on the factors that influence their decisions to use the library revealed diverse responses ranging from encouraging the learners to develop critical thinking and research skills since the learners were likely to emulate their actions, to wishing to keep up-to-date with changing trends in their various subjects of specialisation. In an interview with CT4, he had this to say;

The desire to encourage learners to improve their critical thinking ability, conduct research, and also for reference, inspires me to encourage learners to make use of the library. As a teacher, I am aware that we are living in a changing world; therefore, I have to encourage my students to read widely to broaden their understanding of what is covered in class."

Teachers in all the schools revealed that they used the school libraries to get books to meet the curriculum demands. It was established that the competency-based curriculum textbooks were supplied strictly by the government and therefore

were not available from other sources. Therefore, they had to rely on books in the school libraries in order to meet the teaching and learning requirements of the curriculum. This implies that the teachers were inclined to use the school libraries because they were the only source of information resources that could be employed to teach. The above findings are in line with Jamogha et al. (2021), whose study earlier revealed that most of the respondents utilise the school libraries for the purpose of attending to assignments, class work, general study, personal development, formulation of notes, and preparation for examinations.

Table 5: Means of Accessing Information about Resources Available in the Library

	No		Yes	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Through current awareness services such as noticeboards	164	48.1%	177	51.9%
Through the library computers	304	89.1%	37	10.9%
Others	316	92.7%	25	7.3%

Source: Field data, 2023

The study sought to understand how library users accessed information about the available information resources. A significant majority (89.1%) of students indicated that they don't use library computers to know about resources, with only 10.9% doing so. This reflects limited access to library computers and a lack of familiarity with using them for resource searches. The data indicates that current awareness services are the most popular and effective methods for accessing resources. However, there is significant room for improvement by introducing other tools, like the index and library computers, to increase access to information about library materials. From the researcher's observations and interaction during key informant interviews with librarians, the predominant method of informing the users about available information resources was through face-to-face interaction,

where the users visit the library and inquire about the information resource needed, which is then given to the user if it is available.

Perception of School Library Value

The perceptions of the users on the value of their school libraries were assessed from various dimensions, such as their contribution to their education, cultivating self-study and reading habits, provision of spaces to study, learn, and research, among other dimensions. Their responses were computed by making an aggregate of responses given by respondents on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5= strongly agree (SA), 4= agree (A), 3= Neutral (N), 2= disagree (D), 1= strongly disagree (SD).

Table 6: Perceptions on School Library Value

Statement	Mean (μ)	SD (δ)
The library has great value in my education	4.6	0.6
The library has improved my academic performance	4.4	0.7
The library encourages me to develop the habit of self-study	4.3	0.9
The library nurtures my reading habits	3.9	1.1
The library is a no-go area/place for me	1.9	1.2
The library is a place for social interaction	1.9	1.1
The library provides premises and spaces to study, learn, and research	4.3	0.8
Library information resources are very important to me	4.3	0.8
The library provides books and reading materials	4.5	0.7
The library provides me with the platform to verify information from teachers	3.9	1.0

Source: *Field data (2023).*

Note: **5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Not sure, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree,**

μ = mean δ = standard deviation

F = frequency

The results in Table 6 show a summary of the responses on the users' perception of the school library's value. Ten (10) question items were considered for this purpose. It provides a detailed insight into how respondents perceive the value of school libraries. The study findings indicate a high perceived academic value of the library. This is reflected in statements concerning the library's role in supporting education and academic success received the highest ratings. For instance, the statement about the library having great value on education ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 0.6$) and the library providing books and reading materials ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.7$) received the highest mean scores. This suggests that respondents strongly acknowledge the library as a crucial academic support service. The low standard deviations (SDs) indicate a high level of agreement among participants. Similarly, the library has improved my academic performance ($M = 4.4$), and the library provides premises and spaces to study, learn, and research ($M = 4.3$), showing strong consensus that the library contributes meaningfully to student achievement and academic engagement.

The findings further indicate the role of the school library in the development and promotion of independent learning habits. This is reflected in agreement with statements such as the library encourages me to develop the habit of self-study ($M = 4.3$) and library information resources are very important to me ($M = 4.3$), which highlight the library as a space for personal academic growth. These findings align with the goals of the competence-based curriculum to cultivate critical thinking, independent inquiry, and information literacy. Further, the statement about the library nurturing my reading habits and providing a platform to verify information from teachers (both $M = 3.9$) was rated slightly lower but still above average, suggesting moderate to strong agreement with these roles. The relatively higher standard deviations (SDs between 1.0 and 1.1) imply some variability in responses, possibly due to differing levels of library usage or awareness.

However, the study findings indicate a limited perception of the library as a social and avoidance space. The lowest ratings were given to statements describing the library as a non-academic or undesirable space. Statements depicting the library

as a no-go area/place ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.2$) and the library is a place for social interaction ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.1$) indicate a strong disagreement with the notion that the library is either irrelevant or primarily used for non-academic purposes. These

low means and relatively higher standard deviations may reflect that while a minority might use the library for non-academic reasons or avoid it, the vast majority use it for academic purposes.

Table 7: Correlation between Perception of the Value of the Libraries and Effective School Library Utilisation

		Effective SLU	Perception of school library value
Effective SLU	Pearson Correlation	1	.236**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	341	341
Perceive the library value	Pearson Correlation	.236**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	341	341

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 shows that the Pearson correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant, weak positive correlation between students' perception of the school library's value and their effective utilisation of the library ($r = .236$, $p < .01$, $N = 341$). This suggests that students who view the library as valuable tend to make more effective use of its resources, although the strength of the relationship is modest.

The hypothesis test based on Pearson correlation results confirmed a statistically significant relationship between students' perception of the school library's value and their effective utilization of the library ($r = .236$, $p < .01$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, indicating that students who perceive the library as valuable are more likely to use it effectively.

DISCUSSION

Current Status of School Library Utilisation

The study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents visited the school library every day, though this was predominant in urban schools. The study further revealed an inclination of school library utilisation primarily for academic purposes,

with a heavy reliance on print information resources, which were found inadequate and misaligned with curriculum needs, especially for A-level and rural-based schools, respectively.

These findings align with previous studies, such as Kabanda (2020), who observed that the lack of adequate print resources undermined the potential of libraries to contribute to academic performance. The study also noted a general lack of awareness among students regarding the adequacy of available library resources. Similarly, Nakigudde (2021) in her investigation of library services in Entebbe Municipality concluded that the majority of schools lacked up-to-date publications, especially for the old curriculum, which had not undergone recent revision. She also noted that government donations were restricted to compulsory subjects, often excluding humanities such as literature, history, and religious education, thereby limiting students' access to a well-rounded collection of academic resources.

Additionally, the current study reveals that despite global trends toward digital learning, the integration of electronic information resources in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale District remains non-existent. Interviews with librarians indicated

that while a few schools possessed computers, these were primarily reserved for computer lessons rather than library functions. The limited availability of ICT infrastructure, inadequate funding, and the perception that students lack access to personal digital devices were all cited as barriers to adopting electronic resources. Consequently, schools remain reliant on traditional print collections. These findings echo those of Omah and Urhiewhu (2016), who reported a similar overdependence on physical teaching aids in Nigerian secondary schools due to infrastructural and economic constraints.

The findings highlight a critical overreliance on traditional print materials in secondary school libraries, with minimal investment in or access to digital resources. While the physical materials available serve essential curricular needs, their insufficiency both in quantity and scope undermines the broader objectives of equitable access to information and quality education. There is, therefore, an urgent need for policy interventions aimed at improving resource acquisition strategies, expanding digital infrastructure, and ensuring that school libraries are adequately equipped to meet the diverse learning needs of 21st-century learners.

Perception of School Library Value

The findings indicate that users strongly perceive the school library as a valuable academic support service, particularly in enhancing education, providing learning resources, and contributing to academic performance. Previous studies have established similar findings. For instance, Mahmood et al. (2021) observed that both students and teachers perceived the school library as a crucial resource for their academic achievements and personal development. Adekunle et al. (2018) also noted that effective school libraries provide additional reading opportunities for students, which in turn improve reading skills, knowledge, and writing and clarity of expression, hence supporting

students' performance in all other curriculum subjects.

The findings highlight the growing academic value of school libraries, particularly for lower secondary students engaging in self-directed research under the competence-based curriculum, aligning with Vuzo (2023), who emphasised libraries' role in promoting independent and extensive reading beyond the classroom.

The educational value of the school library is further reinforced by its provision of diverse information resources deemed essential for learners. Observations and interactions with librarians revealed that all five participating schools maintained collections comprising textbooks, pamphlets, newspapers, novels, and magazines, serving both academic and recreational purposes. These findings align with those of Ternenge and Agipu (2019), who reported that students regard library resources as vital for information access, learning, and study support.

The findings suggest that the school library plays a significant role in promoting independent learning, self-study, and information literacy. These findings resonate with those of Lulu-Pokubo and Akanwa, (2017) who demonstrated a positive relationship between the students' utilization of school libraries and their study habits and noted that school libraries contribute significantly to the development of self-study habits by providing resources, a conducive environment, guidance, and opportunities for independent exploration and research. The findings further agree with Udoh and Akwang (2023), who noted that school libraries have the potential to shape the reading habits of students through various interventions such as restructuring their systems and ensuring that attractive resources are provided to students, and reviving reading, writing, speaking, and debating clubs in the schools. With the introduction of the competence-based secondary curriculum, self-study habits are central if the

students are to realize its goals and objectives. Hence, secondary school libraries can be leveraged to offer opportunities for students to cultivate those habits if they are conducive, well-equipped, and facilitated to meet the different information needs of learners in government-aided secondary schools.

The study findings suggest that the library is not widely viewed as a place for social interaction or as an escape space. Earlier studies indicate deviations from the above findings. For instance, Adekunle et al. (2018) revealed that the majority of the students did not use school libraries regularly due to their low perception of the school libraries. This implies that the absence of use could suggest that the library is a no-go place for them. The findings suggest that school libraries are often perceived as formal, quiet spaces intended strictly for academic work. These findings contradict those of Canbulut and Dede (2025), who noted that libraries provide a unique environment where both academic and social lives converge, offering opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful social interactions, develop their sense of self, and establish ties with others. Altenburger (2021) found that libraries can successfully balance academic focus with opportunities for social engagement. Despite this, in exam-driven education systems like Uganda's, schools tend to resist the idea of libraries serving social functions, instead reinforcing their role as solely academic environments.

CONCLUSION

Although students and teachers recognise the educational value of school libraries, particularly in enhancing academic performance, supporting the competence-based curriculum, and promoting self-directed learning, the actual usage patterns vary significantly across schools. The frequency of library visits was notably high in urban schools. However, this level of access was not mirrored in rural schools due to infrastructural limitations such as inadequate space, lack of furniture, and

insufficient resources, which significantly hindered effective library utilisation.

The study established that while school libraries in government-aided secondary schools in Kabale District are being utilised particularly for academic purposes reflects a positive attitude toward libraries as spaces for learning and academic development, their full potential remains underexploited. However, low engagement with digital resources and leisure reading indicated a narrow conceptualisation of library use, influenced by curricular pressures and resource constraints. Teachers' perspectives confirmed the centrality of the library in implementing the competency-based curriculum, as they relied heavily on the limited available materials to support their teaching.

Heavy reliance on traditional print materials, with minimal presence and use of electronic resources. Although most libraries provided core curriculum-aligned materials, the quantity and diversity were not sufficient to meet the needs of the student population, particularly in rural schools and for upper secondary classes. Furthermore, digital resources were virtually absent across all surveyed schools, revealing a significant technological gap and a missed opportunity to integrate 21st-century learning tools into the education system.

The perception of value was generally positive, with high mean scores on statements related to the library's impact on education, academic performance, and the development of self-study habits. However, there was minimal perception of the library as a space for social interaction or leisure.

A Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a statistically significant but weak positive relationship between perception of library value and effective utilisation ($r = .236, p < .01, N = 341$). This suggests that while a positive perception contributes to increased school library utilisation, it is not the sole determinant. External factors such as resource

availability, infrastructure, teacher support, and institutional policy also significantly affect library use.

Recommendations

Enhance library infrastructure and resource availability: Schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, should prioritise the improvement of library infrastructure, especially in rural areas, by addressing issues such as space, lighting, and furniture. Additionally, the consistent provision of up-to-date, curriculum-aligned learning materials is essential to support effective teaching and learning.

Promote digital access and integration: To bridge the digital divide, schools should accelerate the adoption of ICT infrastructure, including internet-enabled computers and digital resources. This will enhance students' digital literacy and expand access to diverse academic content, making libraries more relevant in a modern learning environment.

Institutionalise structured library use and build capacity. Schools should integrate regular library periods into the timetable to ensure consistent student access. At the same time, teachers and librarians need continuous professional development to effectively support information literacy, guide research, and incorporate library resources into classroom instruction.

Strengthen Library Policy, Visibility, and Curriculum Alignment: A national school library policy is crucial to standardise services, staffing, and funding across schools. Raising awareness through targeted communication strategies can boost usage, while repositioning libraries to support the competency-based curriculum will foster critical thinking, collaboration, and independent learning.

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