

## **AWARENESS AND EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL LIBRARY USAGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**Ojuolape Olubukunola Ogunbawo,**

*Department of Library and Information Science,  
Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences,  
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

**Abdulwahab Olanrewaju Issa,**

*Department of Library and Information Science,  
Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences,  
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

**Evelyn Olakitan Akinboro,**

*University Library,  
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

**Ahmed Usman Abdulsalam**

*Library Department,  
College of Education, Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Tertiary institutions have academic libraries attached to them with the mandate to preserve and provide access to knowledge and information and support the mission of their parent institutions but before getting introduced to the academic library, users must have passed through a primary and secondary school expected to have a school library. The mission and goal of a typical school library is to ensure that students and staff are able to use ideas and information of the school library media center and have equitable access to books, reading space, information, and information technology. This is expected to help prepare students to live and learn in a world of information and their perception of the school library, its image, services and importance, which goes a long way in making them lifelong learners and potential users of other library types. Ironically, one still finds in Nigeria, some primary and secondary schools being run without libraries. This paper therefore discussed the extent of school library awareness and experience and its possible effects on the library usage by undergraduate students. Specifically, it discussed school library awareness and experience as well as library usage among the undergraduate students; and concluded on the extent to which school library awareness and experience are determinants of library usage among undergraduate students*

**KEYWORDS:** awareness, experience, library usage, school library, academic library, undergraduate students

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Libraries are indeed unique learning space that could help improve students' academic performance and success rate. Tertiary or higher education institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of technology and research institutes have academic

libraries attached to them with the mandate to preserve and provide access to knowledge and information and support the mission of their parent institutions, which includes learning, teaching and research. Clarke (as cited in Udoh-Ilomechine, 2008) emphasizes the justification for mounting programmes for user education in university libraries as most students enter college with little or no knowledge of basic library tools, procedures and terminology. Academic library processes can be so complex, that an average user may not easily comprehend. It is therefore very important to explain the workings to a new user in detail, in order to be able to exploit the resources of the library to the fullest.

Before getting introduced to academic libraries, most users must have passed through a primary and secondary school, which may or may not have a school library. A school library is a library within a school, where students, staff, and sometimes, parents of a public or private school have access to a variety of resources. The mission and goal of a typical school library is to ensure that students and staff are able to use ideas and information of the school library media centers. It is also to ensure that all members of the school and community have equitable access to books, reading space, information, and information technology, thus helping to prepare students to live and learn in a world of information.

Cummins (as cited in Adeniji, 2006), views the school library as the heart and soul of the educational system, whose role in any school in Nigeria is invaluable, as the library provides the necessary impetus to all categories of learners in schools from the slowest learners in the kindergarten to the most intelligent seniors in the high school through the provision of print and non-print materials to aid learning. The school library thus, stands as a symbol for the truthful expression of man's knowledge and experiences. The extent to which many young people will be creative, informed, knowledgeable and exhibit the trait of a well cultured individual within their own years will be shaped by the boundaries of the content of the library resources available within the support of the school (Gbadamosi & Omotayo, as cited in Isaac, 2011). Smith (2002) opined that the school library is the backbone of functional education without which academic excellence cannot be achieved. Obviously, both the library and the school are inseparable twins that one ceases to function well without the other. Ironically, one still finds in Nigeria, some primary and secondary schools, which are the first entry points to the world of academics being run without libraries.

It has been found that at least 75% of the undergraduate students become anxious during their initial library research experiences. They were found to describe their initial interaction with the library in terms of fear and anxiety, confusion, overwhelmed by a feeling of being lost, scared, overpowered and helpless (Chimah, Nwajei, & Akom, 2015). Library processes, such as circulating and cataloging of materials, facilitate interlibrary loan, shelve materials, and perform inventory, are also performed in the school library. There is a similarity in the type of collections, information formats, structure, arrangement and services in the school library and the academic library.

Just as the primary and post primary institutions provide the foundation and background for learning for the pupils/students before going to tertiary institutions, the school library should also perform the function of providing foundation and background knowledge on the use of library, its structure, arrangement and services. The school library can thus be described as the first possible contact by students with the library and their perception of the school library, its image,

services and importance, going a long way in making them lifelong learners and potential users of other library types. It is based on this submission that this paper discussed the relationship existing between the awareness and experience of a school library with the usage of the university library by the undergraduate students.

## **The Review**

### *School Library Awareness among Undergraduate Students*

The primary concern of the library, right from inception has been the communication of knowledge, ideas and thoughts from one person, group of persons or generation to the other, provide access to important, relevant and well organized information. According to Edeama (2015), a library is an organized collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. The roles of libraries have been changing over times becoming more faceted and multifarious (Abdulsalami, Okezie & Agbo, 2013). In the 21st century, libraries are performing pivotal roles in disseminating and sharing the culture of knowledge.

Today's advanced information technology is enabling libraries to accomplish diverse task in the library on a large scale. The modern library is not only a collection of textbooks or information books. It includes other types of media like reference materials, books relating to school curriculum, general books not relating to a specific subject area, periodicals, newspapers, audio-visual materials, government publications and electronically stored and retrievable materials. These resources enable libraries to play a crucial role in the success of lifelong education of communities and society in general.

The library is the powerhouse of the school and it is an integral part of the school system. In spite of the value of libraries in schools, it is an acceptable fact that there are very few schools with libraries. Students are less aware of the roles and benefits of a school library or services offered by the library as a result of the absence of a school library in the school. Despite several research findings on the importance of the school library in the educational system in Nigeria, most schools still lack the presences of a standard school library. Smith (2002) opined that the school library is the backbone of functional education without which academic excellence cannot be achieved. Both the library and the school are inseparable twins that one ceases to function well without the other. The school on its own cannot achieve the laudable goals of Nigeria education without the library (Gbadamosi & Omotayo, as cited in Isaac, 2011).

In spite of the uses of the school library, there is gross neglect of it in Nigeria, due to some factors such as lack of finance, professional librarian, up-to-date facilities/resources, poor accommodation and non ICT integrated libraries (Adebanwo, 2011; Adeyemi, 2010; Owate & Okpa, 2013; Udo-Ilomechine, 2008). In Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly, the problems of illiteracy and the scarcity of learning resources gravely limit the opportunities people have to learn and to transmit their circumstances (Tella & Akande, 2007). According to Makotsi (2005), the challenge is fundamental. He explained further that children and adults need access to a wide range of reading materials to help them acquire and maintain fluent reading skills, broaden horizons, and think independently and critically.

Scholastic (2016) suggests that having a qualified school librarian, a well-developed library collection, and collaboration and co-teaching between the teacher librarian and teaching staff all

elevate student learning. The role of school librarians goes beyond every day ordinary library routine of stamping books, charging and discharging of books, they are saddled with the responsibility of understanding and nurturing students and their reading, guiding them to navigate the maze of books and impact them with the core skills they need to improve the quality of their study. Based on the importance of libraries, it is necessary to create more awareness on libraries and library services in schools as this will go a long way to increase the development and use of school libraries in Nigeria.

#### *School Library Experience among the Undergraduate Students*

The library users are the focal point of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century library and information services, as the library primarily exist to satisfy the user (Aina, 2004). According to Nwalo (2003), the library user is undisputedly, the most important person in any library setting. Aina (2004) views the term "user" to include all those who avail themselves of the services offered by a library. According to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (2009), a good library service should provide a positive experience for its clients and help deliver: Key policy objectives, by providing a positive future for children and young people; Strong, safe and sustainable communities; Equality, community cohesion and social justice; Health improvements and well-being. The type of services provided in different Library depends very much on the kind of library and the client group or groups it serves.

According to the IFLA report (2003), a school library is a library associated or connected with a school and used by the students, teachers and staff of that school. The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society (Edeama, 2015). The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops their imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens. The school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. The school library is thus, an important part of the kindergarten, primary and secondary school system without which students may not thrive academically and may find research difficult at the tertiary level thus putting the quality of education in schools at jeopardy.

Panagrahi and Panda (1996) explains that once the child has been taught to read and develop a love for books, he can explore for himself the wealth of human experience and knowledge. They further stated that "children missing the opportunity of getting in touch with books at this stage find it difficult to acquire reading habits in their later years. This raises the question as to whether the school library gets the right dose of attention it requires or if the school administration, parents and governing bodies are aware of the roles and importance of the school library. Users experience with the library plays a pivotal role in their continuous use of the library in the future. According to Ugah (2008) the use of library services has a high degree of dependence on the accessibility of information sources. With the right resources, school libraries can facilitate cross-communication and enhance collaboration between students, teachers, administrators, and families (Scholastic, 2016). Students when given the opportunity to engage in independent self-selected reading, the level of their literacy development increases (Krashen, Lee & McQuillan, 2010).

According to Issa (2003), there has come to be in today's world, a full realization of the fact that information remains the prime commodity of the present age. Libraries provide access to reading

materials through which school children and youths can gain and improve their skills. Libraries help introduce the use of reading for information, pleasure, passing examinations, and personal growth through lifelong learning. Cribb and Holt (2012) note in most of the comments concerning students' experiences about library use in which students indicated that they were reliant on the Internet and their own personal library and books, rather than the school library. Some students suggested that the library should provide additional training to teach students how to make the most of library resources. Students whose schools had libraries stated that no one provided them guidance and support on accessing and using information resources while at school. A school library with its resources will only be useful if explored by the staff and students it is meant to serve. Okiy (2010) and Iyoro (2004) stressed that availability of resources encouraged the use of library services.

Jones, Hartman and Taylor (2006) posit that the need for library staff to be more user-friendly and open to providing support to children and young people and also the need for the same standards of care to be applied to all users of the library, whether young or old. Library anxiety is also a barrier to students' effective and efficient use of the library. Library anxiety leads to students avoiding the library, being reluctant to ask for help and reduces the overall effectiveness of library instruction classes (Foley, 2010). Users especially youths can easily be discouraged from using the library by the type of reception given by library staff.

#### *Academic Library Usage by the Undergraduate Students*

Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes (Akporhonor, 2005). Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprises of students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Academic libraries have undergone a role transition from "information repositories" to "learning enterprises" (Oakleaf, 2010).

Despite the changes, upgrade and regular reviews of library services, academic libraries are at a crossroads in time. While there is a growing perception that the physical library is no longer essential to the educational experience since students increasingly rely on technology for learning and communication (Gardner & Eng, 2005), the library continues to flourish with student activity (Steelcase, 2010). Iyoro (2004), in his study identifies accessibility as one of the pre-requisites of information use by undergraduates. Ugah (2008) opined that the more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used and readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access.

The study on undergraduate information seeking behavior in University of Botswana, revealed that though the library was very well equipped, well-furnished and highly organized, undergraduates using it were very few (Tella, 2009). Research has also shown that there is a declining trend in library usage all over the globe and hence an increase of library non-users. This global phenomenon has been observed to include university and college libraries. This could be suggestive of increased usage of networked electronic resources or availability of alternative sources of information (Toner, 2008).

Some have identified a handful of reasons that students choose to utilize resources other than the library to gather information. College students typically use search engines such as Google because the information is readily accessible (Campbell, 2006). Students prefer information that is simple and easy to understand, and they prefer a self-serve method. There is a lack of seamlessness in services at the library that prevents some potential patrons from using the library (Becker, 2009). Information today, in any format, can be accessed anywhere and anytime on campus (Steelcase, 2010).

According to Wells and Scepaniski (2010), there is a decline in the usage of traditional library services at the university level and suggests that students are looking elsewhere for information resources. They explained further that students may come in the library to study, to socialize but are not using library materials, or library services, at anything like the rate they did even ten years ago, stating that the 21st Century has virtually turned everything virtual and the technology progression continues to change how students access information, and it is imperative that the interior environment in university libraries reflects this shift. Weber and Flatley (2008) noted that it was obvious that the students saw the library as an important place for studying, meetings, and group projects while most students did not use the library for personal research interests or leisure activities.

According to Tella (2009), undergraduate information seeking behavior shows most students do not use the library effectively showing poor information seeking habits. Fadekemi and Samuel (2009) cited Osundina, whose study noted that the problem of Nigerian students is not the question of wanting to use the college library, but whether or not the university library can provide for their needs, and whether there is access to what is provided. This assertion was agreed to in later studies by Iyoro (2004) and Popoola (2008). Users may be aware of the virtual services offered by the library and since they prefer ease of accessibility they may choose not to visit the library since they have access to the services of the library without any physical contact. It is necessary to ask the question on whether users are aware of virtual services offered by the library and what are their possible experience and also if there a drastic decline in library patronage or users do not just go to the physical library anymore but rather make use of the library virtually.

#### *School Library Awareness and Experience in Library Usage among Undergraduate Students*

Before becoming an undergraduate in the university, it is a perquisite to have gone through a pre-primary, primary and post primary education in which one is expected to have been in contact one way or the other with a library. Burton and Chadwick (2000) found in their study that students will use resources that are easy to find, available and easy to understand. Cameron (2004) also found out that students will initially use only resources that they are familiar with. Undergraduate students' school library awareness and experience should be able to bridge the gap by familiarizing these students to an extent with the availability and use of services, resources and facilities of a library.

Students enter college with little or no knowledge of basic library tools, procedures or terminology thus the justification for mounting programmes for user education in university libraries. As new students entering universities do not know how to deal with new environment, they need careful and special guides which help them to deal with various sources of information independently. The library processes can be so complex that an average user may not easily



comprehend most especially in an academic library. It is therefore very importance to explain the workings to a new user in detail in order to be able to exploit the resource of the library to the fullest.

Many academic libraries have large collections of books, journals hardcopy and electronic, as well as sophisticated searching tools available both to students and faculty. Many new college students are surprised by the size of academic libraries. New students quickly discover that their high school library in no way compares to an academic library. Many students come to college having used only digital resources and expect that to be the case in college meanwhile much of the information they will need for college level research will probably still be in paper format. Students tend to overlook the fact that library resources are more comprehensive and scholarly than the information on the internet (Waldman, 2003).

This could be as a result of poor background knowledge of what the library holds and represents. The presence of libraries in schools, intimate students with library resources, processes and services. The mission and goal of a typical school library is to ensure that students and staff are able to use ideas and information of the school library media center and ensure that all members of the school and community have equitable access to books, reading space, information, and to information technology, thus, help prepare students to live and learn in a world of information. Undergraduate students become anxious during their initial library research experiences. They were found to describe their initial interaction with the library in terms of fear and anxiety, confusion, overwhelmed by a feeling of being lost, scared, overpowered and helpless. Multiple cases of library anxiety have been witnessed by librarians not only on first years but also by students who have been on the campus for longer periods. Students have been seen to wander in the library clearly not knowing where to get relevant materials or assistance. When students are confronted with having to use the library, many become anxious to the extent that they will look for alternatives as they are not able to approach the problem logically and efficiently, thereby hindering the effective use of library resources (Chimah, Nwajei & Akom, 2015).

Leading reasons for infrequent or non-use of resources have been identified to include the lack of awareness, perceived lack of relevance, lack of time, distance, lack of skills in the use of electronic resources, having personal books and/or borrowing books from friends, access to the internet from home as well as borrowing from other libraries, no need and denied use (Toner, 2008; O'Dell & Preston, 2013). But where students are aware of the services provided by the library through their school library they would probably be able to overcome some of the above stated ordeal.

The school library and school librarian play a key role in positively imbibing the desire to continuously make use of the library in students. The absence of libraries and qualified library professionals in most high-schools means that most students enter the university without any knowledge of basic library skills. Transitions from secondary schools to university are challenging to some students. Students are also known to become easily overwhelmed by the size of the library. This leads to keeping off from the library. Negative perceptions are known to be influenced by the size of the library collection before launching any search. This heightens library anxiety while enhancing the feelings of discomfort in the library (Nicholas et al., 2015; Ansari, 2009).

According to Mills and Bannister (2001), the images of a librarian and the library have been identified to influence information seeking behavior. Factors such as students' temperament and preferred learning styles might influence information seeking behavior as well as the pressure for information. Based on previous experience with other types of libraries, most students entering into the college or university tend to have or not have the desire to make use of the academic library.

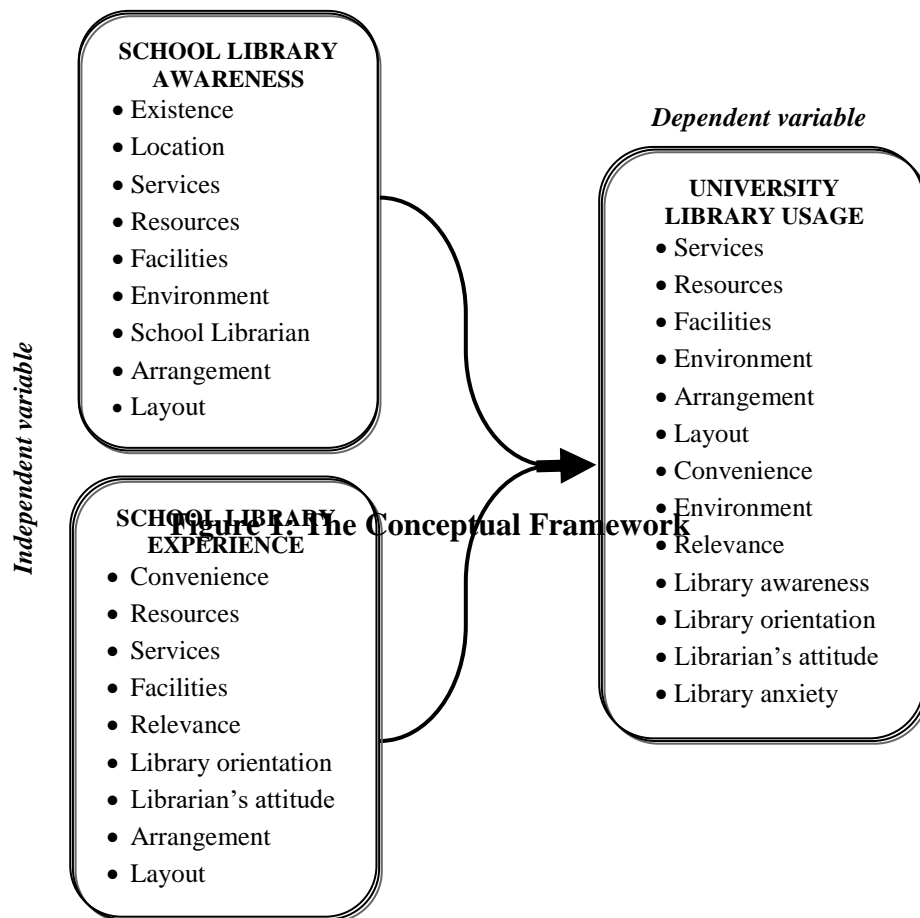
The school library, being the first possible contact with the library, has a major role to play. Lack of interaction between the library staff and the users is one of the major gaps that exist. The lack of confidence about knowing how to begin research; and the lack of knowledge about how to navigate the library accompanied by feelings of inadequacy; and fear of asking for assistance are major hurdles faced by many university students. The greater the levels of unfamiliarity with the library, greater levels of anxiety among non-users are bred. Most students leaving the secondary school are not even aware to the point of understanding the roles and functions of the library or librarians. A school library should attract student to want to make use of the library as well as acquire cognate experience on the use of library. Student's understanding of the library can be hampered as a result of their school library experience.

According to Abdullahi (1998), most of the Nigerian students who enter universities have never used the library effectively during their primary and secondary schools. He suggests that teaching of basic instruction on skills like orientation on the library, rules and regulations for using the library, proper use and handling of books arrangement of books in the library among other things as panaceas.

Considering the declining trend in library usage in school, university and college libraries, this paper upon identifying reasons for the decline in respect of school and academic library usage stresses the importance of school library as a foundation for student toward being self-motivated and equipped with the right attitude and basic information seeking skills needed to make effective use of the university library even before library orientation programmes at their university library. This is supported by Toner (2008) and O'Dell and Preston (2013). Although there are literatures on school library experience and academic library use (Arua & Chinaka, 2011; Lonsdale 2003) but none of the literature directly focused on the awareness and experience of school library or the effect on university library use, thus the gap that this study fills.



## Conceptual Framework



This framework explains how school library awareness and experience could be a determinant of university library usage among undergraduate students with the inclination that it would influence them positively or negatively towards academic library use, with the expectation that students would have gone through the school library before becoming undergraduates from which they would have gathered some experience on the use of library.

The framework depicts how through the school library, certain contributing factors such as the existence, location, services, resources, facility, environment, convenience of use, relevance, library orientation, school librarian, librarian's attitude, arrangement and layout creates some level of library awareness and experience in an individual. The acquired school library awareness and experience individually or combined influences or motivates an individual positively or negatively and this is reflected in their attitude towards the library, their information seeking behavior and their use of the library in the future (university library).

Creating a customer driven library requires a complete reassessment of library priorities and achieving these priorities will in turn require a complete reassessment of staff and resources. By focusing on the needs of their customers, libraries can create an environment that is not only physically inviting but also intellectually stimulating. Libraries that are prospering are reportedly deliberately evolving rapidly to keep pace with their universities and societies (Connaway et al., 2011). Other factors that have been identified to influence library use are the perceptions that

users have on the library and its staff. Users would need to be persuaded on the relevance of the library to the achievement of their goals (Wilcox & Chia, 2013). Image has been identified as a direct motivator or de-motivator in the use or non-use of the library. It influences how clients will respond to services provided: whether they will use them fully, or partially discriminating between certain services, or will simply not use the particular service. According to Mills and Bannister (2001), the images of a librarian and the library have been identified to influence information seeking behavior.

Thus, school library awareness and experience (as indicated in the framework) tend to influence the attitude and information seeking behavior of students towards the library use by instilling certain attitudes and behavior in students consciously or unconsciously. This may lead to positive or negative attitude towards the use of the school library or other library types in the future. This reflects in the use or non-use of the university library by students who eventually becomes undergraduates, as students tend to abandon the library for alternative sources of information due to uncertainty, lack of awareness and experience with the library.

The implication of this paper is to strengthen the need to create more awareness on the importance of the school libraries as the mere existence of the school library is not enough as this paper has revealed the effect that school library awareness and experience could have on undergraduates, especially their perspectives on the roles of the library on their academic pursuits as students and their continuous use of the library in the future. It is also to strengthen the school library association's drive to ensure that all primary and secondary institutions have a library attached to them. There was also the conceptual implication of the paper, bringing to the fore the possible factors that could account for the use or non-use of libraries by undergraduate students given their previous awareness and experience with libraries in their primary and secondary schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper highlighted the extent of school library awareness and experience and its possible effects on the library usage of undergraduate students. From its submissions, it concluded that the awareness and experience gained from the school library exposure were capable of assisting the students to become better users of the academic libraries and vice-versa. This implied that both awareness and experience from previous encounters with the school libraries could serve as an influence on the future use of the university libraries by such students. It therefore follows that some of the explanations for non-use of academic libraries can be mitigated through prior awareness, experience and use of standard school libraries at both the primary and secondary school levels. Students, who are aware that school library information resources are accessible with less efforts tend to be more experienced on the use of the library later in their educational pursuits. Thus, the paper has been able to provide an insight into some critical underlying issues that could be responsible for adequate library usage for a well-rounded education by the undergraduate students, which constitutes a major contribution to knowledge in this particular area.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the facts highlighted in this paper, the following are recommended:

- i. Every school should be mandated to have a standard school library as this is the first possible contact of students with a library, its resources, processes and services.
- ii. Library professionals should be hired to man the libraries as they play a key role in positively imbibing the desire to continuously make use of the library in the students.
- iii. Pupils should be encouraged to interact with the library and librarians in both primary and post primary institutions as this may help reduce library anxiety and increase their confidence that they will access needed information with sufficient ease.

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