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ABSTRACT

The integration of play and libraries is crucial for effective early childhood education, especially for kindergarten learners. This multiple case studies qualitative research investigates how librarians ignite academic excellence using transformative play-based kindergarten libraries for kindergarteners in public primary schools, considering that play is synonymous with children's learning. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia perspective, the findings reveal a lack of play-based libraries for kindergarteners despite librarians' fair knowledge of suitable strategies. Additionally, librarians lack professional development opportunities, and parental involvement is infrequent. The researcher's recommendations include proactive government measures to establish play-based libraries in primary schools, providing librarians with in-service training for enhanced skills, and fostering a more inviting approach to engage parents in collaborative library projects. Young learners must not be seen as miniature adults when using the library; hence, there is a need to create play-based libraries that jump-start their enthusiasm for the use of the library.

Keywords: Kindergarten learners, Play-based library, Play-based learning, Primary school libraries, In-service training, Play-based library environment, Librarians' strategies

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are a veritable infrastructure in every educational institution. It serves as the powerhouse of knowledge for teaching and learning. Any educational institution without an adequately equipped library is considered unsuitable for academic purposes (Ayaz et al., 2017; Oyetola & Adio, 2020). This is because a well-equipped library in every educational institution supports learners and their teachers alike (Ayaz et al., 2017; Oyetola & Adio, 2020). Since most learning materials are found in the library, the library becomes a discovery laboratory and academic research space for learners. However, observations made during my task as a lecturer supervising student-teachers during their teaching practice (Work and Integrated Learning) show that young learners (aged 5-6 years) in rural areas, townships, and suburbs are bereft of libraries. Additionally, Gbotosho and Adejumo (2019), Itsekor, Jegbefume, and Oyebola (2019) noted that school libraries need to be more comprehensive and spread in Nigeria because young learners are excluded in terms of age-appropriate libraries. This, therefore, confirms the researchers' observation regarding the shortage of libraries in rural areas, suburbs, and townships of Nigeria.

In most countries, kindergarten learners are part of the mainstream of primary school, while in some cases, they are separated from primary school (Gbotosho & Komolafe, 2019). Kindergarten, otherwise known as the nursery or grade R, refers to a group of learners in the transition class before entering the formal primary school classes (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). These learners are at the base of learning foundations and are between the ages of 5-6, and their learning modes are predominantly through play (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). In Nigeria, most public preschools are a part of the mainstream primary school, although they may have different headteachers. For this reason, one may argue that the available primary school libraries in the cities serve the kindergarten learners. However, it is uncertain if the public primary school libraries available for primary school learners in the cities meet the needs of kindergarteners (Nursery/Grade R) within the public primary school domain.

Next, solitude and absolute tranquillity are core values in using the conventional library (McCaffrey & Breen, 2016). However, this value becomes unfriendly to kindergarten learners due to their nature, characteristics, and level of maturation. Kindergarteners, in their nature, cannot use libraries that insist on solitude and absolute tranquillity as library users because it inhibits their active nature to learn (Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015). Therefore, learners at this level require a kind of library that appreciates noise, hence the argument for a play-based library. To assume that kindergartens share the primary school library with learners in the primary classes portrays inconsiderateness to their uniqueness as kindergarten learners and is unrealistic. Invariably, it implies that this set of learners (kindergartens) are denied the right to use libraries that address their

peculiar learning needs.

Libraries serve different purposes to different users; hence, they can be categorised into four significant aspects: academic, special, public, and national libraries (Rubin, 2017). In the education space, an academic library is further categorised into school, college, and university libraries (Alhassan & Abdulsalam, 2013; Rubin, 2017). In comparison, college and university libraries serve students and academic researchers in higher and tertiary learning institutions. The school library caters for primary and secondary school learners (Alhassan & Abdulsalam, 2013; Rubin, 2017). It therefore assumed that the preschool library is subsumed into the school library. Thus, the researcher is of the view that play-based libraries for kindergarten learners emerge from primary school libraries, considering that government and other education stakeholders acknowledge kindergartens as learners at the base of the foundation phase of learning, where cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and psychomotor perspectives of their lives are developed (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004; Honebein & Honebein, 2015). In addition, a play-based library plays a considerable role in fortifying kindergartens' learning experiences, preparing them for a holistic academic journey.

Among the roles libraries play are to provide learning support resources for learners and teaching support materials for teachers (Jamil et al., 2013; Welz, 2017). When libraries are inadequately equipped or unavailable for kindergartens, teachers and learners find it challenging to maximise their teaching and learning opportunities (Okwu & Oporum, 2021). Furthermore, when the available library for kindergarten is not play-based, young learners may be disadvantaged in their learning. Therefore, the researcher must discover what library and library materials are available for the kindergartens in city public primary schools. The researcher will also examine whether such libraries are play-based and how learners utilise such libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several variables contribute to effective teaching and learning. These variables include teachers' quality, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, learners' attitude to learning,

teaching facilities, teachers' pedagogical choices, and the school library (Akbaş et al., 2015;

Ighakpe, 2018). To ensure effective teaching and learning in Nigerian public schools, the government insists on recruiting qualified teachers who are registered with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) into public primary and secondary schools (Ighakpe, 2018). Furthermore, the government engage teachers in competency test and motivates these teachers through adequate remuneration (Ighakpe, 2018). Although the government keeps improving and renovating classroom buildings, most school libraries are yet to receive adequate attention; hence, effective teaching and learning are hampered (Gbotosho & Komolafe, 2019). Considering the vast role school libraries play in the effective teaching and learning of young learners, one expects the school library to be among the top priorities on the government list seeking attention.

The school library is an institution's repository that houses vast academic collections, materials, and resources supporting teaching and learning (Akbaş et al., 2015; Ighakpe, 2018). A typical library provides users equitable access to space, learning materials, and human support resources, such as subject specialists (Okwu & Oporum, 2021; Oyetola & Adio, 2020). A school library helps develop learners' reading culture and a positive attitude towards academic success by encouraging individual and group learning (Ighakpe, 2018). In a global sense, the library promotes lifelong learning, provides access to information and resources to the broader society apart from the immediate school environment, and supports the eradication of illiteracy by providing reading support to users (Okwu & Oporum, 2021; Oyetola, & Adio, 2020). School libraries promote critical thinking, analytic skills and compelling communication, collaboration, and creativity through library programs, such as book clubs, association of readers, and library users' clubs (Akbaş et al., 2015). The implication is that school libraries create opportunities for learners to maximise their potential as they climb the academic ladder. The missing link in this study is to find out how the school library provided such opportunities for kindergarten learners, seeing that these learners maximise their learning through play and considering that play is not a value well appreciated in a conventional library space.

Play has remained a viable means of learning for children over the years. Scholars such as Cohen (2018), Pyle and Danniels (2017), and Fleer (2018) continuously advocate for children's active learning through play and for a child-friendly learning environment. Libraries constitute the child's learning environment (Akbaş et al., 2015), hence the need for children's libraries to be child-friendly and play-based. Unfortunately, most children in sub-Saharan Africa grow up without the opportunity to use a library (Gbotosho & Komolafe, 2019), which is much more child-friendly or play-based. Undoubtedly, libraries for learners aged two to four years exist; they are mainly filled with toys, and libraries for primary ones to six are more formal for their users. However, it is crucial to find out what libraries exist for kindergartens transitioning from their last nursery class into primary one (1).

In the United States of America (USA), public libraries are beginning to incorporate different dimensions into their library space to accommodate the needs of young learners, such as "Every Child Ready to Read" (ECRR)

(Celano et al., 2018; Neuman et al., 2017). This new public library approach has changed people's mindset towards the conventional library. It incorporates play (singing, talking, reading, and writing) and connects it to the child's task (Celano et al., 2018; Neuman et al., 2017). The use of this library in the USA is not presented in an official mood where young library users are expected to keep a straight face and become very serious when using the library. According to Celano, Knapczyk and Neuman (2018) and Neuman, Moland, and Celano (2017), public librarians trained in the ECRR curriculum will most likely incorporate music and small motor movements in public libraries. This will create a playful atmosphere for children and encourage children's use of such libraries.

An ideal kindergarten library must be positioned to promote twenty-first-century skills among its users. These skills include communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. The USA program "Every Child Ready to Read" (ECRR) is suitably achieving this feat in young learners through their public library spaces (Celano et al., 2018). It is, therefore, crucial that sections of the public school library accommodate the peculiarity of kindergarten users just as the conventional library accommodates the distinctiveness of its users in various fields. The play-based kindergarten libraries provide age-appropriate infrastructures, literature, computers and internet services, and media that support early literacy among young learners (Wilson-Scorgie, 2022). Programs such as library storytime, craft and construction time, and parents' orientation about their children's early literacy are among the services rendered in child-friendly libraries (Campana et al., 2016; Wilson-Scorgie, 2022).

School librarians can afford young learners varied opportunities to utilise the school libraries through their library services (Celano et al., 2018). As mentioned earlier, the school library is integral to the effective teaching and learning of young learners; hence, programs supporting teaching and learning within the library space remain indispensable (Neuman et al., 2017). However, inadequately equipped libraries pose a challenge to effective teaching and learning. For instance, in Southern Nigeria, research revealed that libraries lacked current books and information materials, their environment was inadequate and unattractive, the number of professional staff was inadequate, the libraries lacked resources, poor funding, and insufficient reading chairs and tables (Lulu-Pokubo & Akanwa, 2019).

Similarly, Diyaolu and Ologunde (2019) evaluated library services within a few chosen primary schools under the State Universal Basic Education Board. They found that the library lacked sufficient facilities and resources, and unfortunately, there was minimal effort from the government and school authorities to address these pressing concerns. Moreover, The decline in service quality directly resulted from the lack of qualified library personnel. Furthermore, the challenges experienced by the libraries were exacerbated by insufficient funding and a general lack of awareness among users about the available library services. Additionally, the indifferent attitude of people towards the library further compounded the problems. The findings from the study of Diyaolu and Ologunde (2019) implied that Nigeria's libraries need urgent attention as poor learners' performance can be traced to inadequately equipped libraries. Nevertheless, the result also shows that libraries are in place in South West Nigerian primary schools, though poorly resourced.

Engaging kindergarten learners in a play-based library setting is essential to create a positive and enjoyable learning experience. Play-based learning allows children to explore and discover new concepts through hands-on activities and imaginative play. Creating a welcoming library environment is crucial in designing kindergarten library space as it makes it inviting and child-friendly (Hassinger-Das et al., 2020) and uses bright colours, comfortable seating, and age-appropriate furniture. Arranging books and educational materials in accessible and visually appealing ways attracts children to use the library (Hassinger-Das et al., 2020). According to Campana (2016), incorporating interactive learning stations by setting up different play-based learning stations throughout the library helps to engage kindergarteners in learning.

Vilas (2023) noted that libraries' play-stations could include puzzles, building blocks, arts and crafts materials, sensory bins, and imaginative play areas like a dress-up corner or puppet theatre. Another means of engaging kindergartens in a play-based library is by using storytelling and interactive reading sessions to capture the children's imagination (Campana, 2016). Young learners must be engaged using expressive voices and sound effects, encouraging them to participate in the story by asking questions or acting out parts of the narrative. Organise themed activities or events based on popular children's books or educational topics. For example, you could have a "Dinosaur Day" with dinosaur-themed books, puzzles, and games or a "Space Adventure" day with space-themed crafts and activities.

Applying a wide range of educational toys, games, and materials that promote playful learning is invaluable in a kindergarten play-based library. These materials include educational apps, learning games, and interactive toys that align with kindergarten curriculum objectives. Integrating age-appropriate educational technology, such as interactive tablets or learning apps, enhances their learning experience while ensuring that screen time is limited and balanced with other play-based activities (Vilas, 2023). Next, a child-led exploration allows children to take the lead in their learning by encouraging exploration and curiosity (Vilas, 2023) and the provision of open-ended materials that will enable kindergartens to experiment and discover at their own pace. Children can create their

storybooks, draw illustrations for their favourite stories, or make crafts related to the books they read when arts and crafts are integrated into the library activities (An et al., 2023). Sensory activities that stimulate different senses and enhance learning, such as touch, smell, and sound, are incredibly engaging for young learners in the kindergarten play-based library (Lunga et al., 2022).

Play-based learning should be flexible and adaptable to meet the interests and needs of the children. It is essential to observe and listen to the children's preferences and adjust the activities accordingly to keep them engaged and motivated to learn. This study will determine if play-based libraries exist for kindergarten learners in public pre-primary schools in cities of South East Nigeria, particularly in Owerri municipal.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reggio Emilia in Italy is known as the cradle city of the Reggio Emilia learning approach (Edwards & Gandini, 2018; Arseven, 2014). This approach to learning emphasises a child-centred and play-based approach, which aligns well with the concept of a kindergarten play-based library. According to McNally and Slutsky (2017), the curriculum must be driven by the interests and curiosities of the children. In the context of a play-based library, this means allowing children to explore topics of their choice while providing resources and materials that support their investigations. An emergent curriculum could give rise to an emergent play-based library for kindergarten learners, as seen in the USA program "Every Child Ready to Read" (ECRR). Next, learning occurs through long-term projects based on the children's interests. For instance, engaging children in extended play scenarios in a play-based library, such as creating their own stories or building structures with blocks or other materials. Project-based learning in a kindergarten play-based library would foster **4C's** (collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity) among kindergarten learners. These 4C's are unique core skills in the twenty-first century.

According to Reggio Emilia, the third teacher is the physical environment; hence, it should be adequately prepared to allow the child to harness its gains for learning (Edwards & Gandini, 2018; Arseven, 2014). Creating a rich and inviting space that encourages exploration, discovery, and independent thinking is important. In a play-based library, organising books and resources in an accessible and visually appealing way, providing comfortable reading nooks, and incorporating hands-on materials and manipulatives are valuable strategies to motivate kindergartens to use the library. Furthermore, when teachers and learners document their learning processes through photographs, videos, artwork, and written observations in the play-based library, it helps them to reflect and revisit their experiences and involve parents and the broader community in their learning journeys. The Reggio Emilia approach underscores the significance of collaboration between children, teachers, and parents. As seen in the USA program "Every Child Ready to Read" (ECRR), a play-based library encourages children to collaborate on projects or invite parents to participate in storytelling sessions or book-sharing activities. By incorporating the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach into a play-based library, children can engage in meaningful and self-directed learning experiences, develop their creativity, and foster a love for reading and learning.

Research methods

The researcher employed a systematic approach to conduct the study for this research. The procedure involved different strategies and techniques in data collection, interpretation and analysis, as stated in the subsequent paragraphs below.

Research objectives

What resources are available for kindergartens in public primary school libraries?
How do you engage kindergartens to learn in a play-based library?

Research approach and design

The researcher adopted the qualitative research approach for the study because it enabled the researcher to understand the research phenomenon more deeply (Hennink et al., 2020). The research design used for the study was a multiple case study. The research design was chosen because the study aimed to examine some selected city (urban) primary school libraries to see if they accommodate kindergarten learners who are play-based oriented (Hennink et al., 2020).

Research site

The research site was situated in public primary schools in Owerri municipality. As noted earlier, anecdotal evidence from the researcher's observation shows that most primary schools in rural areas lack school libraries. This, therefore, informed the researcher's choice to situate the research in the city where kindergarten school

libraries are expected to exist.

Research sampling technique and participants

In the multiple case study, the researcher employed the simple random sampling technique to select five (5) primary schools in Owerri municipality council out of twenty- seven (27), while the most senior librarians in the sampled schools automatically served as the study participants. Simple random sampling was adopted to avoid giving any preference to the schools in terms of which schools should be selected for the study. In doing this, the names of all the twenty-seven (27) schools were written on separate sheets. It was then folded and shuffled in a container from where five (5) schools were randomly selected. Should the research be quantitative, the sample size may be seen as small. However, the sample size is adequate because it is qualitative research, allowing for depth and quality data on the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Table 1: Participants biodata

| Participants/ School | Gender | Qualification | Specialisation | Years of Experience | Position |
|-------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| SLP 1 School A | Males | Master's Degree (M.Ed.) | Library and Information Studies. | 13 years | School librarian |
| SLP 2 School B | Female | First Degree (B.Ed.) | Education Management | 20 years plus | School librarian |
| SLP 3 School C | Female | First Degree (B.Sc.) | Health Education | 26 years in service. | School librarian |
| SLP 4 School D | Female | First Degree (BA. ED) | English and Social Studies | 23 years, but six (6) years as a librarian. | School librarian |
| SLP 5 School E | Female | First Degree (BA. ED) | English and Literary Studies | 21 years | Assistant HM/Library Attendant |

Data collection method

Semi-structured interviews and photovoice were used for data collection for the study. The interviews were audio-recorded to capture the data accurately. Whereas the interview explored the participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs concerning kindergarten play-based libraries, the photovoice gave a vivid picture of the state of the school libraries as to whether they conform to play-based libraries for kindergartens.

Data analysis procedure

The researcher employed thematic data analysis to make meaning from the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This was done by transcribing the audio-recorded interview and the researcher familiarising himself with the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Next, the data collected were sorted, categorised, and coded into themes. The themes were further refined and prepared for reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2016). On the other hand, the photovoice was analysed using the researcher's interpretation and cross-comparison of participants' views about play-based school libraries viz a vis available literature on play-based school libraries (Tsang, 2020).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the research was guaranteed through member checking, meaning that the researcher allowed the participants to cross-check if their responses were captured correctly after transcribing the data collected from them. It was further triangulated using photo voice, participants' responses, and existing works of literature to ensure trustworthiness, appropriateness, credibility, and validity.

Ethics consideration

The confidentiality of participants in the study was ensured by concealing their identities using coded pseudonyms such as SLP1, SLP2, SLP3, SLP4, and SLP5. The code represents school library participants 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The names of the participating schools were also concealed using School A, B, C, D and E. After

thorough explanations, the school headteachers approved the use of their school for research purposes, and the sampled research participants gave their written consent to participate in the research. The research participants were also informed that they were at liberty to disengage from the study should they desire to do so, and there would be no consequences for doing such at any stage of the research. The School of Early Childhood Care and Primary Education ethics committee, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, granted ethical permission to conduct the study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This research is not associated with any conflicting or competing interests and has not received funding from public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agencies.

Discussion of findings

In this section, a systematic examination of the collected data was undertaken. The results were presented clearly, and recommendations were made following the study's findings.

Theme 1: Resources available in the play-based library

Five (5) sub-themes emerged from theme 1: participants' description of a play-based library, in-service training previously organised, creating a play-based library environment, integrating technology and digital resources and parents' involvement in a play-based school library. For triangulation purposes, the researcher employed photovoice to vividly describe the libraries available for kindergarten learners while relating the picture to the participants' responses.

Sub-theme 1.1: Participants' description of a play-based library



Figure 1: Photovoice School A (image created by author)

From the photo analysis of School A, it is evident that the library, which is 12 x 8 feet space, has some seats, good plastic reading desks, some regular desks, and a damaged roof, but no bookshelves. Whereas this library may be considered a below-averagely resourced primary school library for primary school learners, the library does not diptych a model play-based library for kindergarten learners. According to Wilson-Scorgie (2022), play-based kindergarten libraries offer young learners age-appropriate facilities, reading materials, computer and internet access, and media resources to promote early literacy. Although the library has some age-appropriate reading desks, there are no age-appropriate computers, internet access, electricity, or reading materials. This, however, corroborates the response of SLP1, who mentioned that in their school, "There is nothing like a play-based library". It, therefore, implies that the School A library is not play-based compliant.



Figure 2: Photovoice School B (image created by author)

The School B library measures 15 x 15 feet. The library has age-inappropriate desks and bookshelves, it accommodates two staff members and is also used as a packing store, as drums and other items can be seen in the photo. SLP 2 mentioned, "The school library was vandalised. The books and equipment are packed here, which is safer". School B had no conventional or play-based library at the time of this research because their

existing library was vandalised, according to SLP2.



Figure 3: Photovoice School C (image created by author)

The library space for School C measures 6 x 8 feet. The library doubles as a book store and packing space. It also serves as an office. Apart from the books on the table that are unkempt, there is nothing that signifies that the School C library is functional. Evidence from the pictures of School C shows that the library does not conform to the basic standards of a conventional library, nor does it fit into a play-based library. When SLP3 was asked to describe what a play-based library looks like, she responded, "No idea, that's something I don't know". Akbaş et al. (2015) avow that school libraries foster critical thinking, analytical abilities, and the development of effective communication, teamwork, and creativity through library initiatives like book clubs, reader associations, and library user groups. Therefore, integrating play into libraries helps reposition a conventional school library into a play-based library.



Figure 4: Photovoice School D (image created by author)

School D Library space is about 8 x 12 feet. There are seats, desks, and bookshelves, and it doubles as a parking store. Although some observable library features are in the photo, no evidence characterises the library as play-based. SLP4 noted:

Here in our school, we only have a conventional library where we allow only pupils from primary three and above to use the library. There's no provision for a library for the lower basic classes and the nursery classes.

The views of SLP4 contrast with the opinion of Celano et al. (2018), who avow that public libraries in the United States of America (USA) incorporate various aspects into their library environments, such as play (singing, conversing, reading, and writing) and link it to the child's activities. It is, therefore, evident that the School D library is not play-based.



Figure 5: Photovoice School E (image created by author)

School E library space is 8 x 8 feet and doubles as the headmistress' office. There are no reading seats, and only bookshelves are present. The pictures in School E corroborate the submissions of SLP5, who said, "Mmmm, we only have a few books for the kindergarten. You know those at that level can only scrabble, draw, and paint; they cannot write their name". The SLP5 statement implies that there is no adequate provision for library use for kindergarten learners, hence the minimal resources.

Sub-theme 1.2: Inservice training previously organised

At different times and locations, when participants were asked if they had any form of in-service training to improve their practice in the administration of their school library, all the librarians noted that they had never had any opportunity to attend workshops or training to upskill their knowledge about the current practices in the use and administration of school library since they started serving in their various positions as school librarians. As indicated by research conducted by Celano, Knapczyk, and Neuman (2018), along with Neuman, Moland, and

Celano (2017), public librarians who have received training in the ECRR curriculum are more inclined to integrate music and fine motor activities within public library settings.

Sub-theme 1.3: creating a play-based library environment

Concerning the establishment of a play-based library environment for kindergarten learners, SLP1 articulated that:

In kindergarten, what they understand is mainly visual and not searching for books to read. If given the opportunity, I will equip this session with kindergarten computers to help them see things for themselves". SLP1 further noted, "Conventional libraries will not work for the kindergartens because of their age. They will not at this time know how to read. So, their interest can only be captured in the play-based library". SLP1 added, "I will consider the size of the environment or building to see if it can accommodate a play-based library".

In her view, SLP2 noted that in creating a play-based library environment, "There should be a space where the children can play around, structure, equipment such as slide, jingle over, swing, etc." whereas SLP2 made a valid assertion of having a structure and space where children can play around, however, the inclusion of equipment such as slides, jingle over and swing and not equipment to be considered in a play-based library. Wilson- Scorgie (2022) asserts that kindergarten libraries focused on play offer suitable facilities, reading materials, computer and internet access, and media resources that facilitate the development of early literacy skills among young students.

SLP3, in her response, held that in creating a play-based library environment, you need to "Bring a table and place those toys on the table, then teach them individually or two children at a time". This response, however, shows that the understanding of SLP3 in creating a play-based library environment is inadequate; thus, in her earliest response, she expressed her inability to describe a play-based library due to her lack of knowledge about what one entails. Similarly, SLP4, in her response, argued, "I don't think it will be possible to create a library for lower basic because most of them sleep in the classroom, so what are they coming to do in the library?" while SLP5 has no idea of what it takes to create a play-based library environment for kindergartens.

Sub-theme 1.4: Integrating technology and digital resources

Concerning how librarians could integrate technology and digital resources into a play-based library, SLP3, SLP4, and SLP5 indicated that they had no idea. Responding to the question, SLP1 mentioned, "Getting a laptop meant for their age, that is, the children's tablets that have games and cartoons, that most of them will be operating by themselves". However, SLP2 alluded, "We will bring in computers such as children's tablets". Incorporating suitable educational technology, like interactive tablets or learning apps, enriches kindergartens' educational journey while ensuring that screen time is kept in check and balanced with other play-based activities (Vilas, 2023).

Sub-theme 1.5: Parents' involvement in a play-based school library

In their responses, SLP1, SLP3, SLP4 and SLP5 alluded that they do not involve parents to assist in their libraries. SLP5, in particular, complained, "Most parents are traders who are more concerned with their business and less concerned about their children's education, so I don't bother involving them". Similarly, SLP3 avowed, "I have not involved their parents, as some parents think that the teacher wants them to spend more money after the ones they have paid. In contrast, SLP2 stated;

The parents are informed on what is needed in the library on the Parents Teachers' Association (PTA) meeting platform. Yes, we ask them to always help at home, check their exercise books and see what they are doing in the library, though some parents don't have much time because of their tight schedules.

Nevertheless, Campana et al. (2016) and Wilson-Scorgie (2022) maintain that services provided in child-friendly libraries include activities like library storytime, arts and crafts sessions, and parental orientation on their children's early literacy. The need to involve parents in their children's learning remains critical in their educational journey.

Theme 2: Learning strategies in a play-based library

Four themes emerged from theme 2. They include play-based library activity, learners' inclusiveness in play-based libraries, learners' collaboration and social interaction, and strategies to encourage reading and curiosity. The sub-themes gave a lucid understanding of how the librarians facilitate learning in a play-based library.

Sub-theme 2.1: Play-based library activity

The librarians were asked what activities they would introduce into a play-based library if given the opportunity. In response to the question, SLP1 stated, "I will introduce some toys, educative cartoons, and little jokes in their books. Yes, storytelling, drama, debate or other interaction involving them can be integrated". SLP5 said she would introduce songs like "One Two Buckle My Shoe, so you see them buckling their shoe ... because at their level, they want something that will make them creative and active and would like to be touching things and

playing with them". Whereas SLP2 and SLP3 indicated they would provide toys and objects to identify shapes, SLP4 said she has no idea what learning strategies to adopt in a play-based library.

When arts and crafts become part of library activities, children can craft their own storybooks, draw illustrations for their beloved tales, or create crafts inspired by the books they read, as observed in the research by An et al. (2023). Additionally, sensory activities that activate various senses, including touch, smell, and sound, prove highly captivating for young learners in a play-centred kindergarten library, as identified by Lunga et al. (2022).

Sub-theme 2.2: Learners' inclusiveness in play-based libraries

Questioning how Learners' inclusiveness in a play-based library can be actualised, SLP2 noted, "All the children are to be involved, even the poor learners, by encouraging, teaching and allowing them to participate in the classroom activity". Similarly, SLP3 maintained that learner inclusiveness involves "Making sure every child participates in the play-way method". SLP5 corroborated by saying:

So, you have to engage all the learners in an activity that will keep them busy. While giving slow learners attention to meet the task, the average learners will try to learn from what the fast learners are doing. The fast learners want to outdo others because they are getting it right.

However, SLP1 and SLP4 could not respond to the question, indicating they do not know learners' inclusiveness in a play-based library.

Sub-theme 2.3: Learners' collaboration & social interaction

All the participants agreed that to foster collaboration and social interactions among learners, they engage learners in teamwork by assigning tasks to learners in groups. SLP5 notably stated, "For collaboration and interaction, I will pick the average ones, the middle ones, the gifted, and the slow learners and make them work together as a team". However, SLP4 was indifferent to learners' collaboration and social interaction because she could not answer the question. School libraries foster critical thinking, analytical aptitude, effective communication, teamwork, and creativity through initiatives like book clubs, reader associations, and library user groups, as Akbaş et al. (2015) highlighted.

Sub-theme 2.4: Strategies to encourage reading and curiosity

To promote interest in reading among kindergartens, SLP1 alluded

So, at the assembly ground, I always instruct and remind them to always come to the library at their leisure, during break time when they are less busy. I encourage them that they can only do well in examinations when they form the habit of reading, which can only be formed when they use the library regularly.

SLP2 mentioned, "We use the play-way method to attract their attention to read in the library". Meanwhile, SLP3 opined;

I formed a library club and instructed them to have their writing materials. I also raised a leader among them. I teach them whenever they visit the library, and at the end, I evaluate them and reinforce those who did well with gifts to enable them. To some, mostly these days. When they come to the library to return the borrowed book, I will always tell them to summarise it, after which I give my input.

Similarly, SLP5 asserts,

I can engage them by getting kindergarten books that the children can use to scrabble, draw, paint and even point at the pictures and tell me what they saw. I was encouraging them to buy textbooks, then a primary three learner said to me that she didn't have money to buy a book, so I gave her one book to read a passage and told her that when she returns tomorrow, she would tell me what she read, but she replied saying I don't know how to read.

Having a school library contributes to cultivating a reading culture among learners. It fosters a favourable outlook on academic achievement, as it fosters individual and collaborative learning, as Ighakpe (2018) noted. Additionally, the library advocates for lifelong learning, grants access to information and resources to the broader community beyond the immediate school setting, and contributes to the fight against illiteracy by delivering reading assistance to its patrons, as evidenced by the works of Okwu and Oporum (2021) and Oyetola and Adio (2020).

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to determine what resources are available for kindergartens in public primary school libraries and how librarians engage kindergartens to learn in a play-based library. Data collected through interviews and photos were analysed using thematic data analysis procedures. Two (2) significant themes and nine (9) sub-themes emerged from the analysis.

The analysis results reveal a shortage of age-appropriate materials for kindergarten students. Some of the purposively selected libraries were repurposed as storage spaces and staff offices instead of being play-based compliant. Concerning professional development, it was evident that none of the librarians had attended any specialised in-service training tailored for school librarians to improve their skills. Predictably, most of the participating librarians had a limited understanding of how to establish a play-based library environment for

kindergarteners. However, it was evident that all participating librarians could effectively promote collaboration and social interaction among kindergarten students in a play-based library.

Additionally, the analysis indicates that most participating librarians lack the knowledge to integrate technology and digital resources into a play-based library effectively. Librarians infrequently engage parents in collaborating with them for their children's library involvement due to parents' busy schedules and limited concern for their children's academic progress. Notably, most participating librarians are competent in implementing play-based activities within play-centred libraries. While some demonstrate the ability to create an inclusive play-based library environment for all learners, others struggle with this aspect. Nevertheless, the data analysis confirms that most participating librarians can formulate strategies to foster a love for reading and curiosity among kindergarten learners who use play-based libraries.

As a result, it is recommended that the government take several measures to enhance early childhood education. Firstly, the government should establish play-based libraries explicitly designed for kindergarten learners and ensure that all existing primary school librarians receive high-quality in-service training to equip them with the necessary skills to serve as kindergarten librarians. Secondly, the government should comprehensively overhaul the current primary school libraries to make them suitable for pre-primary and primary school learners. Additionally, the government should allocate resources such as laptops, palmtops, projectors and projector stand, ensure electricity and internet access, provide ample reading and writing materials, furnish age-appropriate seating and reading desks, and create a child-friendly learning environment for kindergarteners. Lastly, school management should implement a parent-friendly approach to actively involve parents in their children's library usage.

CONCLUSION

It is firmly established that kindergarten learners primarily acquire knowledge through play. The conventional library may not be well-suited for these learners, as some of them are restless, highly active, and have short attention spans, even though they can benefit from library services. Creating a play-based library represents an innovative approach to bridging the gap that has consistently prevented kindergarteners from fully utilising library resources.

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