

Use of School Libraries by Teachers: the Case of Oman

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This study, which was conducted in the first half of 2005, investigated the nature and extent of use of school libraries by teachers in preparatory and secondary schools in Oman. It evaluated in detail the types of material and the range of services used. It also assessed the extent of teachers' satisfaction with provision.

The results of the survey revealed a low use of school libraries by teachers. School libraries held poor collections, especially of audiovisual materials, journals and electronic resources, and access to the Internet. Teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with library services which appeared poorly developed and tended to be traditional in character.

Introduction

This article reports the results of a survey conducted in the first half of 2005 on the nature and extent of the use of school libraries (preparatory and secondary) by teachers in Oman. It reviews the related literature and presents a detailed account of the results and their implications for the developing of school libraries in the country.

Objectives of the study

This study aims at answering the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of the teachers who use school libraries in Oman?
- How do teachers use school libraries in Oman?
- How do teachers assess the services provided by school libraries in Oman?
- What do teachers suggest to develop the services provided by school libraries in Oman?

Related Studies

An examination of the literature reveals only a few studies on school libraries in Oman, which means

that this topic has not received much attention from either researchers or professionals.

A recent survey conducted by Al-Mufaraji and Davies investigated the nature and extent of the use of libraries by students in preparatory and secondary schools in Oman. It provided a detailed evaluation of the types of material and range of services used. It also assessed the extent of students' satisfaction with the provision of library materials.

The results of the survey showed that the utilisation of school libraries by students was not encouraging. School libraries were generally poorly resourced and they especially lacked Av/Media and journals as well as electronic resources such as CD-ROM and access to the Internet. Library services were also poorly developed and tended to be "traditional" in character. Information technology was not available and information skills programmes were not offered. The researchers concluded that there was much scope for development (Al-Mufaraji and Davies, 2004).

In a study on the use of information technology in Oman, Jabur and Hamyer found that 92% of teachers felt the need for continuing education in the area of information technology, while 87% indicated a shortage in their knowledge and train-

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ing in the field. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended the training of teachers in information technology for the success of basic education in the country (Jabur and Hamyer, 2003).

Another study, conducted by Al-Hinai, focused on the efficiency of resource learning centres (LRCs) in supporting the teaching of social studies in Oman. Al-Hinai addressed the following questions:

- What is the present status of LRCs in the first cycle of basic education schools in the sense of availability of equipments and usage of these educational facilities?
- To what extent do these centres achieve the objectives of the first cycle of basic education?
- Are there significant statistical differences at 0.05 level between junior teachers and senior teachers of social studies with regard to the value of LRCs in supporting the curriculum of social studies in the first cycle of basic education?
- What do teachers recommend to improve the role of LRCs in supporting the curriculum of social studies in the first cycle of basic education?

The most important findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Most of the equipments, instruments and facilities were available in LRCs and some of them were well used while others were rarely used.
- There was correlation at ($\alpha = 0.1$) between the availability of educational facilities and their utilization.
- LRCs played a significant role in facilitating the achievement of the objectives of the social studies curriculum. However, this facilitation differed according to the type of the objective (knowledge, attitude, psychomotor).
- There were no statistical differences at ($\alpha = 0.5$) level among teachers with regard to the objectives of the first cycle of basic education (Al-Hinai, 2002).

In a different study, Al-Habashi examined the existing status of educational services in secondary and preparatory schools in Oman. Their study was based on an analysis of documents, as well as on the responses to a questionnaire survey. The study revealed the frailty of the basic structure of school libraries and the existence of weaknesses and problems which affect the performance of the school library and its ability to support educational objectives. Among the most important findings and conclusions were:

- School library services in Oman cover less than a third of public education schools. Within this group the secondary schools receive the greatest attention, followed by the preparatory schools, whilst primary schools receive very little attention comprising, as they do, only 1.4% of the total of libraries available in schools.
- There is a shortage of specialised librarians to cover the needs of all school libraries.
- The book collections are not up to the required standard; they require development both in terms of the quantity of material available and qualitatively with regard to the range of topics covered. Each student is allocated only two books; these may be repeated titles or volumes of the same title, whilst a reasonable rate might be 6–7 titles per student.
- The school library relies heavily upon printed materials in the form of books, whilst the attention given to non-printed materials, such as audio-visual material, is very low. Consequently, the library is viewed as ineffective within the teaching and learning processes.
- The collections available in school libraries are not sufficiently well utilised and are unable to fulfil the requirements of the enriching and reinforcing of the educational curricula.
- The absence of an independent budget for the library in each school, and the lack of sufficient financial allocation for the library from the profits of the co-operative society within each school, restricts the library's capacity to carry out the education and curricula activities required.
- Lending books is the only service provided by school libraries and this is insufficient. The total rate of borrowing amongst students stands at 6 books per day, whilst the rate is one book per day for teachers (Al-Habashi et al, 1996).

Al-Suwaidan carried out in 1996 the first comprehensive study of school libraries in the Gulf State Countries; namely the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. He analysed all aspects of school libraries and assessed the reasons for their shortcomings and under-achievements. In This study, supported by the Arab Bureau of Education of the Gulf States, he observed that school libraries in the Gulf State Countries generally lacked the basics to enable them offer adequate services. Moreover, libraries did not exist in half the schools. There was a lack of professional librarians, especially in primary schools. Where librarians were available, a large number were not involved on a full-time basis in library work, as they were also functioning as teacher support and administrators. The libraries

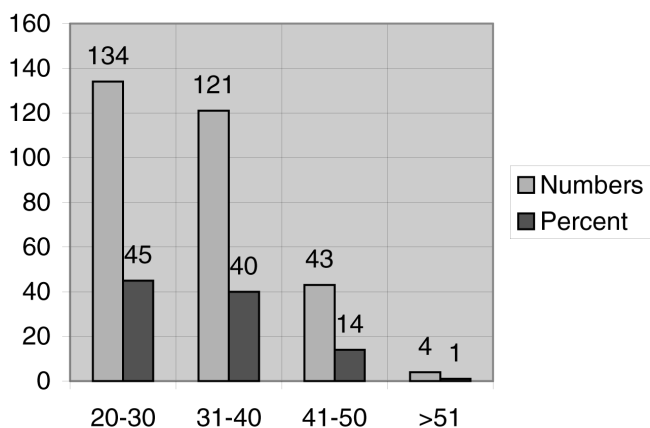


Figure 1: Age distribution

were structured and operated in an old-fashioned manner. The book collections were regarded as extremely poor, and did not meet the needs of students or teachers in terms of curriculum reports. Emphasis on collection building was being given to books rather than audio-visual materials. The selection and acquisition of materials was not normally based on a systematic and scientific approach that would help in achieving consistency with curriculum needs and students capabilities. He also noted an overall scarcity of funding and space for libraries, and thus concluded that services were poor (Al-Suwaidan, 1996).

Adul-Shafi examined the situation of school libraries in Oman from the aspects of organisation, administration and human and financial obstacles. He also aimed to investigate the extent to which the school library contributed towards the educational and teaching processes within Omani schools, and to subsequently introduce detailed and specific suggestions to develop school libraries in Oman.

Abdul-Shafi’s study revealed several problems such as:

- The lack of an administrative organisation which ensures the linkage of the libraries of all public education schools.
- The absence of any library legislation which determines the administrative procedures and technical systems by which school libraries operate.
- The lack of uniform standards set for school libraries which define the minimum human and financial resources that must be provided for a school library at each of the different education levels (Abdul-Shafi, 1987).

Aman, in his overview of libraries in the Middle

Table 1 Respondents’ distribution by gender

Gender	No. of Respondents	%
Male	161	53
Female	141	47
Total	302	100

Table 2 Academic qualification of respondents

Type of Qualification	N	%
Master’s	7	2
BA/BSc	267	88
Diploma	26	9
Others	2	1
Total	302	100

East, also described the existing situation of school libraries. Even in the Arab oil-producing countries libraries have poor, outdated collections and have almost no current reference books. Furthermore, library hours are not convenient to use, since the library closes early in the day (Aman, 1994).

Methodology

Data were collected using a questionnaire that had been pre-tested with teachers from both preparatory and secondary levels in Oman. 24 schools, all with school libraries, were selected in order to represent the eight administrative regions in the country. The schools included 12 secondary level and 12 preparatory level educational institutions. A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed to teachers and 302 were returned, making a very high response rate of 84%.

The responses showed the following characteristics of the population of the study: 45% of the teachers were aged between 20–31, followed by those between 31–40 (40%). This shows that most teachers (85%) were in the middle-aged category (Figure 1).

With regard to gender, table 1 revealed that 161 (53%) of teachers were male and 141 (47%) were female.

The results (Table 2) also showed that most respondents (88%, N=302) held either a BA or BSc degree, followed by those with a diploma (9%). There was a small number of respondents whose education was at the Master’s level (2%). It was found statistically that there were no significant differences between qualification and gender.

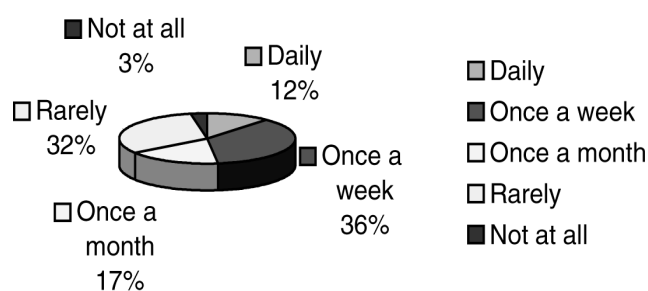


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who used the library

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was used to process the data by frequency and percentage and to obtain correlation and statistical measures such as chi-squared tests.

Results of the study

Library use

In order to know how frequently a teacher used the school library, respondents were asked to indicate their use on a five point Likert type scale ranging from "daily" to "not at all". The data in Figure 2 showed that the majority of respondents (36%, N=302) were using the library once a week and about 96 of the respondents 32% were using the library rarely. The results also showed that 17% used the library once a month, whilst 12% used the library daily. It was found that only 9 respondents (3%) never used the library at all.

The survey also indicated that there were significant differences in the frequency of library use between male teachers and female teachers. It showed that more male teachers used the library daily and once a week, whilst more female teachers used the library once a month and rarely ($P < .0008$).

Teachers were asked to indicate the main reasons for using the library. Several possible reasons in terms of materials and/or activities were given to them so they could select the appropriate ones. Also, they were requested to indicate if they had other reasons for using the library.

In terms of materials, the results (Table 3) showed that most respondents (86%, N = 293) were there to read books, followed by those who were reading journals and newspapers (38%). The number of respondents who used audio-visual materials and those who were checking the catalogue was very

Table 3 Percentage of teachers who used the library for each resource in terms of materials N=293

In Terms of Materials	N	%
Reading books	253	86
Reading journals & newspapers	112	38
Using audio-visuals	48	16
Checking the catalogue	32	11
Class visit	1	Less than 1%

Table 4 Percentage of teachers who used the library for each activity

In Terms of Activities	N = 293	%
Looking for information	214	73
For teaching	98	33
For studying	37	13
For borrowing	127	43
For homework	6	Less than 1%

small (16% and 11%). It was very surprising that only one respondent (N=293) was involved in a class visit.

As shown in Table 4, the major reason for using the library in terms of activities by teachers (73%, N = 293) was looking for information, followed by borrowing books (43%). The results also showed that most teachers (100%, 87% and 67%) never used the library for homework, studying or teaching.

A Chi-square test showed significant differences in the reasons using the library between male and female teachers. It was found out, in terms of materials, that male teachers were more likely to read journals and newspapers than female counterparts ($P < .0003$). However, female teachers were more likely to use audio-visual materials than male teachers ($P < .05$). The survey also revealed that there was no significant difference in terms of gender for the reasons of reading books and checking the catalogue. In terms of activities, it was found out that more female than male teachers were likely to look for information in the library ($P < .0001$, N=293), while male teachers were more inclined to borrow books than females ($P < .05$).

Library resources

The results (Table 5) showed that books were the most frequently used resources by teachers (52%), followed by newspapers (28%). The results also showed that journals, newspapers and books were used more occasionally by teachers. However, the

Table 5 Percentage of teachers who used the library in terms of materials

Type of materials	% V. frequently	% frequently	% occasion--ally	% Not at all
Books	3	52	39	6
Journals/ Magazines	0.0	15	60	25
Newspapers	0.0	28	41	31
Av/Media	0.0	4	26	70

Table 6 Percentage of teachers satisfied with their library resources

Type of Resources	% V. frequently	% frequently	% occasion--ally	% Not at all
Books	0.0	50	45	5
Journals/ Magazines	0.0	1	35	64
Newspapers	0.0	21	43	36
Av/Media	0.0	0.0	19	81

Table 7 Assessment of library services by teachers (N=302)

Type of services	% V. good	% Good	% Poor	% Not at all
Borrowing	1	62	33	4
Av/Media	0.0	1	29	70
Information inquiries	0.0	34	46	20

Av/Media resources were used less than any other resources, (70% of respondents never used Av/Media and 26% used them only occasionally.)

The survey indicated that there were some significant differences in using the library resources among the genders. It was found out that male users were more likely to use books ($P < .005$), and newspapers ($P < .0001$) than females. However, there was no significant difference between the genders in using other library resources such as journals and Av/Media.

Teachers were asked to specify if they were satisfied with the library materials. As shown in Table 6, 151 respondents (50%, $N=302$) said they were frequently satisfied with their books, while 135 respondents (45%) were satisfied only occasionally. It was also found that 81% of respondents were not satisfied at all with Av/Media, 64% were not satisfied with journals and 36% were not satisfied with newspapers. The results of the test showed that, for all of the four

libraries materials tested, there were no significant differences between the genders regarding their satisfaction with the library materials.

Respondents were then asked if their libraries had all the information that they needed, and if not they were asked to indicate what was missing. 287 teachers (95%, $N=302$) indicated that their libraries had a total lack of resources. Most of them (85%) stated that books, references, atlases and dictionaries, as well as Av/Media and journals in different areas, especially in sciences and Arabic literature, were needed. They also noted that most books were old and did not meet the needs of the teaching curriculum.

Library services

Teachers were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with specific library services on a four-point Likert type scale ranging from "very good" to "not at all". The results (Table 7) showed that 62% ($N=302$) of respondents indicated that the borrowing service was good, followed by 34% who mentioned that information inquiries were also good. Most respondents (99%, and 66%) either rated the Av/Media and the information inquiries as poor or did not rate them at all. The survey indicated that male teachers were more satisfied with borrowing services ($P < .005$) and information inquiries ($P < .005$) than females. The respondents were then asked to state (Q.8) what additional services were needed. The majority of teachers (85%) stated that information technology and Av/Media were the most necessary additional services needed and that these should be available in the library.

To discover factors that might hinder access to, and use of, library materials, teachers were also asked to indicate how frequently they encountered problems. Six different problems focusing on both availability of, and accessibility to, information in their school libraries were identified based on interviews conducted with a sample of these teachers..

The results showed that 54% of respondents faced the first problem: "did not find the material required" more frequently and 52% noted that although they frequently found the materials these were out of date. 32% of respondents had frequently faced the problem of not gaining access to the materials. The survey also showed that among

Table 8 Percentage of encountering problems by teachers

Type of Problem	V. frequently	fre- quently	occasion- ally	Not at all
Did not find the materials required	21	33	39	7
Found the material, but it was out of date **	12	40	36	12
The materials were being used by others	7	26	51	16
Had difficulty using the catalogue *	3	18	31	48
The catalogue was out of date	2	20	33	45
Assistance from library staff *	2	3	14	81

* Shows statistically significant differences at .05 level

** Shows statistically significant differences at 0.003 level

respondents, 48% had not faced any difficulties in using the library catalogue. However, many respondents indicated that their libraries had no catalogue. Most respondents (81%) stated that they did not face problems regarding obtaining assistance from the library staff. As shown in Table 8, all respondents (39%, 36%, 51%, 31%, 33% and 14%) had occasionally faced all these problems. The results showed that three of these problems were not significant among the genders, whereas others problems showed significant differences between male and female teachers, as shown in Table 8. It was found that female users faced the problem of "found the material, but it was out of date" more frequently than male teachers ($P < .0076$). However, male teachers faced problems of "had difficulty using the catalogue" ($P < .05$) and "assistance from the library staff" more frequently ($P < .05$) than females.

Library technology

Teachers were asked whether and how they used information technology. All respondents (100%, $N = 302$) had no access to computing facilities within their school libraries. Roughly 14% of respondents used information technology and 12% had PCs at home. The results (Table 9) also showed that 8% of teachers used computer games,

Table 9 Percentage of teachers who used information technology $N = 302$

Type of Information Technology	N	%
Personal computer	35	12
CD-ROM	8	3
Internet	1	0.3
Fax	11	4
E-mail	6	2
Computer games	23	8

Table 10 Percentage of respondents for Each type of orientation programme ($N = 283$)

Type of Orientation Programme	N	%
Learning skills	174	61
Effective use of the library	72	25
Use of information technology	27	10
Writing research report	10	4

4% used fax, 3% were using CD-ROM, and only one teacher used the Internet. Statistics showed that female teachers used information technology more than male teachers ($P < .05$).

Library education

Library orientation support can have a significant impact on the benefits derived from a library. Teachers were asked to state whether their libraries provided orientation programmes. The results showed that the majority of respondents (73%, $N = 302$) indicated that their libraries had not provided any orientation programmes. They were also asked to specify if the current orientation programmes provided by their library covered what they personally needed. 280 teachers (93%, $N = 302$) argued that there was no orientation programmes at all or if there was any, the content was inappropriate. Statistics showed significant differences between female and male teachers ($P < .024$).

Teachers were then given four types of orientation programme (see Table 10) and were asked to select the programme they would like to see in their library. More than half of respondents (61%, $N = 283$) made their first choice "learning skills", followed by "effective use of the library" (25%). However, the use of information technology became the third choice (10%), and the last choice was writing reports (4%). The survey also shows that there is a significant difference between male and female teachers in selecting types of orientation programmes ($P < .023$).

Discussion

The results of this study revealed, in general, a low use of libraries by teachers in preparatory and secondary schools in Oman. Indeed, only 36% of teachers claimed to have used the school library once a week and about 32% used these information centers rarely. The results also showed that 17% used the library once a month, while 12% used the library daily. This situation may be attributed to a number of reasons such as:

- The shortage of library resources: print, audiovisual and electronic materials.
- The outdated library materials.
- The lack of matching between the library collections and the teaching curriculum.
- The lack of motivation among teachers to use information centres.

These factors that hinder the use of school libraries have been identified by a number of authors such as Abdul Al-Shafi (1987), Al-Habashy (1996), Al-Suwidan (1996), Aman (1994) and Hashim (1994).

Therefore, the library is looked at as a place where one can read a book (86% of respondents) or a newspaper (38%) but seldom as a place where students can find information that complements the subject matter of the course they are taking. This situation will probably change if teachers adopt the 21st century view of education. In this case, they should put more emphasis, in teaching, on learning how to learn, how to ask questions, to be open and to evaluate new concepts, have access to information and be aware that what is "known" may change. Furthermore, they will encourage autonomy and independent learning and will develop student responsibility for learning, confidence, and self reliance (Ferguson, 1986).

The survey also indicated that there were significant differences in the frequency of library use between male teachers and female teachers. It showed that more male teachers used the library daily and once a week, whilst more female teachers used the library once a month and rarely. These differences could be explained by the fact that, unlike male teachers who since childhood have more freedom to go out and therefore to frequent such places as the library, female teachers tend to spend more time at home helping their

mothers in cooking, tidying rooms and washing clothes. Consequently, when females grow up in such a culture they seem to lack the habit of using some facilities like the library.

The survey revealed dissatisfaction, among teachers, with both collections and services. Thus, 95% of respondents indicated that their libraries had a total lack of resources. Therefore, books, reference tools, atlases, and dictionaries, as well as audiovisual materials and journals were needed. It was also felt that books were old and did not meet the needs of the teaching curriculum. This high level of dissatisfaction with the library resources among teachers seems to be the result of the level of book provision which is still not particularly high. This is supported by the statistical information provided by the Oman Government School Library Section at the Ministry of Education which indicates that the number of books and other materials held by school libraries is still very low. These statistics revealed that there is less than one book (0.97) per student.

A brief comparison between the Omani and British situation may be useful in this regard. The findings of a survey conducted by the Library Association showed that the stock ratio per pupil was about 12. The stock replacement had reached 42%, in some British library schools (Tilke, 1998). In Oman, the stock replacement figures tend to be low. This is because the School Library Section is centrally responsible for supplying books to school libraries, and in fact, there is no stock replacement at all. The School Library Section tends to concentrate on the supply of books for new school libraries (Al-Mufaraji and Davies, 2004).

The situation regarding the level of teacher satisfaction with the Library services is not different from that related to book provision. With the exception of the borrowing service, teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with such information services as audiovisual materials and information inquiries. This phenomenon may be attributed to the lack of interest of the School Library Section in the acquisition of audiovisual materials. Therefore, audiovisual materials are still poorly represented in the collection of school libraries in Oman. The dissatisfaction of teachers with the obtaining of assistance from school libraries staff, this could be the corollary of the lack of professionals among the staff of these information centres. However, the situation has been changing during the last

References

few years with the graduation of more than 300 students from the Department of Library and Information Science at Sultan Qaboos University.

The problem encountered by teachers in libraries tended to be associated with the extent of the collections and/or the quality of the services. This was reflected by the type of problems specified in this regard, such as "not finding the materials required", "outdated materials", "difficulty of using the catalogue" and "lack of assistance from the library staff".

The results of this research reported a very limited use of information technology available in school libraries by teachers in Oman. This finding may be the corollary of the non integration of information technology in the teaching curriculum and the widespread of information illiteracy among the respondents. However, the situation has been changing in the last few years. The Ministry of Education has been making noticeable efforts in providing school libraries with personal computers, CD-ROMs and Internet connection. The same ministry has been organising workshops on the use of information technology for the benefit of teachers.

Conclusion

This study has given a clear picture of the use of school libraries in Oman by teachers which seems to be disappointing. The utilisation of school libraries in this country can be enhanced if such problems as the lack of adequate resources especially the modern formats like audiovisual materials and electronic resources such as CD-ROMs and the Internet are dealt with seriously. It is evident that the poor services need a lot of work in order to be improved. The importance of training teachers in order to take full advantage of information technology has become vital for this category of users. In order to motivate teachers to use school libraries resources, the Ministry of Education can link up the promotion of teachers to computer and information literacy.

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