E-Books in Private School Libraries of Karachi: A Survey

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Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of this study is to know the e-book resources and usage in private school libraries of Karachi.

Designed/methodology/approach: This study is based on a survey, personal observation and informal discussion with librarians. A structured questionnaire was administered online to target population of 100 librarians working in renowned English medium private schools of Karachi. Responses from 53 school librarians received and analyzed statistically.

Research limitation(s): The study is limited to purposively selected private school libraries of Karachi. Hence, public school libraries and small private school libraries are not included.

Key finding(s): This study finds that private schools have well-equipped library with physical collection which is well utilized by their teachers and students. Librarians and students are aware of technology as well. However, e-book collection and usage is limited.

Practical implication(s): Findings of this study may benefit all stakeholders (students, teachers, librarians and management) to plan e-book collection and usage accordingly. School administration should provide resources (i.e. funds, infrastructure and manpower) in this regard. Developing a resource sharing network is also needed. School librarians need to improve their information management and literacy skills through training to better serve their students and teachers.

Contribution to knowledge: This study is pioneer in nature. Findings of this study may also be helpful for similar nature of schools across Pakistan. This study may also be repeated in other schools or areas in Pakistan.

Paper Type: Research.

Keyword(s): E-books; E-book usage; Private school libraries; Karachi, Pakistan.

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Introduction and Related Literature

Current era of smart technology is reshaping user access to library resources without the barriers of time and space. Digital content in different formats (e.g. pdf, docx, html, jpeg, epub, and so on) is gradually replacing print materials in libraries. A book in digital format may have purely textual content for linear reading like fiction, or could be enriched with any type of multimedia material, such as pictures, animations, sounds, videos, games, and so on to provide reader more attention and pleasure of reading (Longa & Mich, 2013). E-books are also available as audio books for special users. E-books in libraries being ecofriendly also provide other advantages over physical books because e-books do not require physical space, shelving, shelf reading and rectification, physical stocktaking, circulation like physical books, fumigation, cleaning, multiple copies, wear and tear, and so on.

E-books are digital versions of traditional printed books that can be read on a variety of devices, e.g. PCs, tablets, smartphones and e-book readers (Reitz, 2019). According to Nicholas and White (2012), students' demand for resources and services that are not limited by time and space is increasing. Guthrie argues that "transition to reliance on scholarly e-books will happen very quickly" (2012, p. 353). Renner predicts that e-books, like e-journals, will be the norm in academia by the year 2020, and Sang-ho reports Korea's initiative to replace all paper textbooks in its schools with digital versions by 2015 (cited in Asunka, 2013, p. 38). Zhao and Abuizam note that "the [US] market share of e-books has increased sharply from 1.5% to over 16% in the past five years" and the CEO of Amazon claimed that "eBooks is now a multi-billion dollar category for the company and was up approximately 70 percent [in 2012] from last year" (2013, p. 87). Studies (e.g. Richardson & Mahmood, 2012) claim that Amazon's kindle is more demanding and user friendly among the e-book readers. Most e-book readers come with thousands of pre-loaded contents, mostly e-books.

School library collection has always been a big challenge for school librarians in Pakistan. Collection mostly consists of physical volumes on popular subjects, e.g. religion, fiction, stories, poetry, English language and literature, and some reference books such as biographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases. Early childhood learning collection comprising toys, flash cards and games can also be found in most private school libraries of Pakistan.

There may be a technology gap between younger and older generation as well. Today's youth is much aware of technology and we see them using smartphones and tablets frequently. Children studying in

English medium private schools especially those which have roots or affiliation in foreign countries are more digitally literate than those studying in local Urdu medium schools. If students are made digitally literate at school level, they become excellent users of e-resources at higher levels. Keeping in view Korea's initiative to replace all school textbooks in print form with e-textbooks, there is a need to look into the situation of Pakistani schools, especially private schools because of their better suitability for this study. According to Haider (2002), school libraries in Pakistan could not obtain researchers' due attention and their focus has mostly been around university libraries which are comparatively better established. Therefore, this may be a pioneering study starting from private school libraries of Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan.

Objective of the Study

The broader objectives of this study are to highlight the status of e-book collections to the library community, to know the existing scenario of e-book usage in private school libraries of Karachi, and to create awareness and motivation of using e-books at the school level. The specific objectives include:

1. To determine the current e-book situation in school libraries.
2. To know the efforts/problems of private school librarians in developing e-book collections.

Methodology

According to (Naz, 2018), there are around 20 thousand private schools in Karachi with 3.2 million student enrollment and eight thousand of such schools are not registered with government of Sindh. A selection criteria was devised and 100 registered, renowned English medium schools of Karachi were purposively selected through Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_schools_in_Karachi#Private_Sect or_Schools> on the basis of level (at least up to matriculation or equivalent), and number of enrolled students (at least 600). A structured questionnaire after expert review was administered online using google docs to selected school librarians in February 2018; 53 of them responded. Data was analyzed using frequency counts. Besides questionnaire, the principal researcher also visited some of the libraries to personally observe the phenomena, hence, this study also includes findings/statements based on such observation and informal discussion with librarians.

Findings of the Study

Findings of this study have been appended in four tables.

E-book infrastructure

Data about e-book infrastructure, i.e. availability of computer, internet, and e-books, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. School Libraries' Infrastructure for E-Books (n=53)

Infrastructure	Yes	No
Availability of computers in library	53 (100%)	00 (0%)
Availability of internet connectivity	48 (90.56%)	05 (09.44%)
Availability of e-books	39 (73.58%)	14 (26.42%)

Number of e-books

Number of e-books shown in Table 2 are those downloaded free of cost from internet in pdf and doc/docx formats.

Table 2. Number of E-books in School Libraries (n=53)

Number of unique e-books	Number of responses	Percentage
No collection	14 libraries	26.41
Up to 100 e-books	09 libraries	16.98
101-500 e-books	21 libraries	39.62
501-1000 e-books	05 libraries	09.43
1000+ e-books	04 libraries	07.56

Librarians' skills about e-books

Two subject statements measured on a five-Point Likert scale (strongly agree=SA, agree=A, unsure=U, disagree=D, strongly disagree=SD) are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Librarians' Skills about E-books (n=53)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
I possess skills to independently search and download free e-books from various sites	23 (43.39%)	21 (39.62%)	04 (07.55%)	02 (03.77%)	03 (05.66%)

I possess skills to manage e-book collection in library	14 (26.41%)	13 (24.53%)	10 (18.87%)	08 (15.09%)	08 (15.09%)

Miscellaneous items

Miscellaneous items measured on a five-Point Likert scale are shown in Table 4. Most of these items are aimed to determine the problems librarians are facing with regard to e-book collection development and usage.

Table 4. Miscellaneous Items (n=53)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
I motivate students to use e-books	16 (30.19%)	17 (32.07%)	09 (16.98%)	05 (09.43%)	04 (07.55%)
I intend to purchase/subscribe priced e-books for library	21 (39.62%)	15 (28.30%)	11 (20.75%)	03 (05.66%)	03 (05.66%)
School management supports development of e-books collection	11 (20.75%)	08 (15.09%)	10 (18.87%)	14 (26.41%)	10 (18.87%)
School teachers give assignments to students based on e-books	07 (13.21%)	09 (16.98%)	17 (32.07%)	12 (22.64%)	08 (15.09%)
School management is willing to earmark sufficient funds to acquire e-books	07 (13.21%)	05 (09.43%)	15 (28.30%)	10 (18.87%)	16 (30.19%)
I intend to make more computers available to increase usage of digital collection	14 (26.41%)	13 (24.53%)	12 (22.64%)	10 (18.87%	04 (07.55%)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings of the study present a scenario that has both positive and negative points. Although, all surveyed libraries have computers but some of them do not have internet facility and e-books. Most of libraries

surveyed own sufficient e-book collection to start with, however, 14 libraries seem uninterested to build such collection. Some of the schools even do not have professional librarians, they hire semi or paraprofessional or even non-professional staff to run their libraries. Shortage of library staff was also observed. Majority of librarians possess necessary skills to search, download, and manage e-books independently. It is likely that librarians uninspired by e-books may not motivate students to use them. Majority of school management and teachers also seem to be uninterested in e-book collection and usage; this might be owing to well-built physical library collection or habituation of using print material or generation gap.

There might be unawareness about comparative advantages of e-books on the part of school management that hinders them to provide resources (i.e. funds, infrastructure and professional and trained manpower) in this regard. If these schools form a consortia, e-resources especially e-books can easily be shared free of cost. School librarians need to improve their information management and literacy skills through continuing professional development opportunities to better serve their community. Library organizations like Pakistan Library Association can play a vital role in initiating such training programs on regular basis for unskilled librarians.

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