



# Observations of school library impact at two rural Ugandan schools

Observations of  
school library  
impact

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research is to explore connections between the presence of a library at two schools in rural Uganda and certain student academic engagement indicators, such as scholastic performance, reading habits, study habits, and library use patterns. The study is not intended to demonstrate strong correlations between these items, rather, it is a limited exploration of certain questions meant to inform further enquiry in the area. Five specific questions guided the research: Do students with a school library read more? Do students make good use of the library? Do students recognize the importance of having the library? Do students use the library materials for other than class-related work? Are there any noticeable differences between the grades of students with the library at their school, and those without?

**Design/methodology/approach** – Researchers gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from two different schools in the Masaka District, one school with a library, the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, and one without, Masaka High School. Researchers also gathered important library-use information from a third school, Sseke Secondary School, to supplement the quantitative data gathered from the other two schools. Grade and class rank information was collected for 85 students, 6 focus groups were conducted, 85 questionnaires were distributed and collected from students, 5 school administrators and 3 library staff were interviewed, and approximately 10 hours of observation was done.

**Findings** – Findings indicate that there are several areas where the presence of a school library has an impact, including students' reading habits, use of materials for non-school-related activities, and academic performance. The school libraries visited are both successful examples of how important the rural school library can be to the development of a reading culture. Implications of the findings are discussed in detail.

**Research limitations/implications** – Future research efforts might include a multi-school, longitudinal study on the impact of rural libraries specifically on student achievement. Many studies have been conducted on this topic in the West, but no significant studies so far in Sub-Saharan Africa, where hard evidence is needed in order to demonstrate the importance of the rural school library to student learning.

**Originality/value** – The study itself is unique in that the data hail from a two-year study conducted at local schools/libraries in rural Uganda, using a broad methodology which included reviewing qualitative and quantitative data. It will provide information that can be used by others to support the need for the establishment of rural school libraries in underdeveloped regions, and provision of reading materials, which are otherwise scarce, for students and teachers.

**Keywords** School libraries, Reading, Students, Performance levels, Uganda, Sub Saharan Africa

**Paper type** Research paper



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During the summers of 2004 and 2005, researchers from the Hunter College Libraries in New York City traveled to rural Uganda to study the impact of a small, one-room library in the remote village of Kitengesa. The research was divided into two distinct phases. The first phase focused on library use by the community, and the second phase focused primarily on library use by teachers and students. Researchers decided to expand the second phase of the study to include other local schools, in order to explore connections between the presence of a library and certain student academic engagement indicators, such as scholastic performance, reading habits, and library use patterns. The latter is the topic for this article.

### **Background**

The initial phase of the research began at the Kitengesa Community Library, located in a small village about three miles away from the Ugandan town of Masaka. Most villagers are without running water or electricity, and make a living by small-scale farming. The library was constructed in 2001 on the grounds of a local secondary school in the area by a professor from Hunter College, her husband (a former resident of the village), and the headmaster of the secondary school, funded primarily by a United Nations One Percent for Development Fund grant. The library was built to serve the needs of the students and teachers, as well as provide service to village members. The library has a small collection of 1,739 books, and roughly 500 members. The students of the secondary school are automatically members of the library, and community members pay \$1 per year for library use and borrowing privileges.

This portion of the study focused specifically on which community members used the library, how they used the library materials, how often they visited the library, the makeup of the library's collection, and the overall impact of the library on the surrounding community (Dent and Yannotta, 2005, p. 43). The researchers noted several implications for meeting the needs of the library users, including the importance of the informal literacy instruction practices that go on in the library; provision of a collection relevant to students and teachers, the two largest groups of library users; supporting the growing "reading culture" that has in large part been stimulated by the library's presence; and paying attention to the differences in reading habits among boys and girls. The findings were based on data collected from many hours of observation, focus groups, home visits, individual interviews, and a review and evaluation of the library's collection (Dent and Yannotta, 2005, p. 52).

The 2004 study was significant on several levels. First, it examined the impact of having access to reading materials. Free universal primary education was established in Uganda in 1997, and though many of the residents learned how to read while in primary school, lack of access to reading materials prevents many from continuing to exercise their literacy skills. Parry (2004) cites the inability of libraries to provide reading materials to the "newly literate" as a major roadblock in the fight against illiteracy in developing countries.

Second, the research highlighted the support provided by the library to teachers. Local teachers use the Kitengesa Community Library for as many as nine hours per week to prepare for their classes (Dent and Yannotta, 2005, p. 50). In addition, they read library materials to increase their subject expertise, to prepare homework assignments (text books are very expensive, and many students share just a few books per class), to help study for their own continuing education, and also to provide in-class exercises for

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students. Teachers also use library material to provide examples in subjects such as mathematics, and utilize supplemental material such as maps and charts for classes such as Geography and Accounting.

These findings prompted the researchers to continue the study the following year, and in 2005, they returned to Kitengesa to examine more closely library use by teachers and the impact on students. It was at this time that the study was expanded to include other local schools and libraries, each located in areas that might be classified as rural (unpaved roads, minimal or no electricity), as opposed to more urbanized areas such as the capital of Kampala and Entebbe.

### **Regional context for the study**

A brief overview of select economic, education and literacy statistics for Uganda is necessary to provide a context for this research. Uganda has a total population of more than 27 million people. The adult literacy rate for males is 79 percent, for females it is 59 percent. As of 2004, the life expectancy was age 48 (UNICEF, 2004). Seventy-eight percent of males in the relevant age group attend primary school, and 79 percent of females. For secondary school attendance, that number drops dramatically. Only 14 percent of males in the relevant age group attend secondary school, and 15 percent of females (UNICEF, 2004). According to the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics (2006), there were 1969 secondary school teachers in Uganda in 2004, and 37,313 secondary schools. These figures are important in that this is the school group targeted for this study.

There are many other factors that have an impact on schooling, education and learning in Uganda. Lifespan and overall quality of life are affected by the number of residents living with HIV (530,000), and by other illnesses such as malaria. As of 2003, 940,000 children ages 0-17 years were orphaned by AIDS (UNICEF, 2004). Living conditions are also an important consideration - as of 2004, only 12 percent of the population was urbanized. Thirty-nine percent of those living in rural areas have access to adequate sanitation facilities, and 52 percent access to improved drinking water (UNICEF, 2004).

Agriculture and related areas are the main ways people earn a living. Most of Uganda is rural, and crops, such as coffee (which accounts for 19 percent of Uganda's exports), tobacco, cotton, tea, sugarcane, potatoes and bananas, are abundant (US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, 2006).

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to explore connections between the presence of a library and certain student academic engagement indicators, such as scholastic performance, reading habits, and library use patterns. The study is not intended to demonstrate strong correlations between these items, rather, it is a limited exploration of certain issues meant to inform further enquiry in the area. Specifically, the researchers wanted to answer five questions:

- (1) Do students with a school library read more?
- (2) Do students make good use of the library?
- (3) Do students recognize the importance of having the library?
- (4) Do students use the library materials for other than class-related work?

- (5) Are there any noticeable differences between the grades of students with the library at their school, and those without?

To accomplish this, researchers visited two different schools in the Masaka District, Uganda, and collected information on student rank and student grades, gathered feedback from focus groups and surveys, and conducted extensive observation. Information from the library at a third school was also used for the sake of comparison. There are several reasons why this study is important:

- it may provide some insight into library impact on rural schools and communities in terms of literacy and development of a reading culture;
- it may be of value to librarians, educators, scholars and others who are concerned with literacy and access to reading materials in developing areas; and
- it will provide information that can be used by others in rural areas to support the need for the establishment of school libraries and provision of reading materials for students and teachers.

#### **A review of the professional literature**

Ugandan school and public libraries and their impact cannot fairly be compared to the same in the West. There are glaring inadequacies related to financial support, management, collections, space, training, and staff that have been presented by researchers such as Banjo (1998) and Rosenberg (1994). Sturges (2001, p. 38) addresses the shortcomings of the public library system in former African British colonies, stating (with regard to Uganda), “since the 1970s the national library services have failed to attract significant numbers of users and have mostly stagnated from the lack of funds”.

There are also cultural differences linked to the emerging reading culture, which is developing slowly. Although literacy rates have increased over the past 10 years, there are still many in Uganda for whom reading is not part of daily life, nor is access to or use of a library. These cultural, economic and developmental differences must therefore be kept in mind during the following review and discussion about rural school libraries and their impact.

#### *The role of rural school libraries*

International organizations have publicly acknowledged the importance of the school library in rural areas, especially in developing countries. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) recently published a School Library Manifesto, which stated, in part, that “The school library is essential to every long-term strategy for literacy, education, information provision and economic, social and cultural development . . . It has been demonstrated that, when librarians and teachers work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills” (IFLA, 2000, p. 1). The manifesto also detailed core school library service goals as follows: “Developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives; and offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment” (IFLA, 2000, p. 12).

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School libraries in Uganda operate within an environment where the struggle to eradicate illiteracy is ongoing. In Uganda, the adult literacy rate is close to 70 percent, and the literacy rate for young adults is approaching 80 percent (UNESCO, 2004). There are libraries on the continent of Africa, however, IFLA estimates that there are only about 5.5 million registered library users on the continent out of a population of 27 million (compared with 77 million users in North America) (IFLA, 2003, p. 14). An even larger problem has to do with access to reading materials. The public libraries in Africa, especially those in the Sub-Saharan region, are based on a Western model with outdated and irrelevant collections, mostly in English. Furthermore, these collections are print-based, and ignore the oral culture and practices of many African countries. In their work, "The Quiet Struggle: Information and Libraries for the People of Africa," authors Sturges and Neill (1998, p. 146) state that "the public library was an implant which African governments have virtually never financed to levels at which it could function effectively. . . Its resources are generally pathetic and not at all nourishing for the minds of the few adult users".

The dire lack of public libraries places even more pressure on school libraries to provide reading materials for students. School libraries have the potential to play an important role in Africa and elsewhere in the world because they can introduce a culture of reading to children very early, and provide access to reading materials within a familiar context. A number of scholars have addressed the need for the creation and support of school libraries in the developing world. Magara and Nyumba (2004, p. 315) specifically cite the need for school libraries in order to support "child-centered" teaching and develop a "culture of reading". The authors also refer to Ijari (1994), who suggested that libraries can help promote reading amongst young adults, eradicate illiteracy, and promote a deeper understanding of classroom content. Sturges and Neill (1998, p. 154) state "It is not just the swiftly growing number of young people that calls for a more positive response to the library and information needs of children; there are also compelling arguments within Africa's educational system which call for a greater library involvement". More than 30 years ago, De Perez (1971) made one of the most compelling arguments for creating school libraries. The author stated that providing school libraries "is one of the most effective means to renovate education", because school libraries are valid for all levels of education, they have functioned well in other countries with varying types of educational systems, they make more materials available to teachers and students than can normally be provided by the school, and at a much cheaper cost, and they encounter less resistance than other methods of educational reform such as curriculum change (De Perez, 1971, p. 38).

As education in many parts of the world becomes increasingly student-centered, students are required to know how to problem-solve, work in teams, and use available resources effectively. Librarians and teachers in Uganda are not necessarily equals in status or education (some who are referred to as librarians have not had formal academic training as such), but the researchers observed a willingness of both groups to work together to enhance student learning. Arko-Cobbah (2004, p. 264) advances this idea, suggesting "teachers and librarians become motivators and facilitators in the learning process", thus supporting students as they develop these skills. Educators agree that the rural school library should play an important role in the curriculum. Though school library characteristics vary, the ability of library materials to supplement and support classroom learning and teaching is key.

*Library impact on student performance*

This section is meant to provide background information on the history of the school library impact study. Although none of these studies were conducted in Africa, this literature review may highlight ways that educators on the continent might begin to gauge the value of school libraries to their students.

During the 1950s, many school libraries were set up in schools across the United States, and numerous studies on the impact of school libraries on student performance followed (Oberg, 2001, p. 11). These studies, conducted in diverse settings all around the United States, examined the correlation between library use and student performance, and surveyed a range of students, from elementary age to high school. As early as 1963, scholars attempted to examine in depth the relationship between school library use and academic achievement (Oberg, 2001, p. 11). Gaver (1963) surveyed 271 schools in 13 states, and found that students' scores on exams were higher in schools that had libraries and librarians. In their 1963 study, Hastings and Tanner (1963) found that students who had library instruction did better in English than did those who had no instruction, and in 1967, Thorne (1967) compared junior high school students in schools with libraries to those without over a period of two years. The findings indicated that those with library services scored better over time on their reading comprehension exams.

In 2000, the Library Research Service of the Colorado State Library conducted the second of two library-impact studies of schools in Colorado (Lance, 2000). The goal of the study was to examine ways of measuring the impact of certain predictors on academic achievement. The findings showed that students in middle schools with libraries had 18 percent higher achievement test scores than their counterparts without libraries. Several additional studies in Alaska, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Iowa and Michigan, indicated that there were a number of key library factors that played a role in higher achievement, including collections, staffing, and collaboration between librarians and teachers. The first Colorado study in 1988-89 surveyed 221 elementary and secondary schools, and found that, for instance, the size of library staff and the size of its collection was a main predictor of reading scores (Lance *et al.*, 1992). This quantitative study looked at a number of factors that might impact student achievement – community, school and library. The community and library factors were the two that were found to be consistent predictors of test scores for all grades surveyed, and students with libraries tended to have better test scores (Lance *et al.*, 1992).

In a 2002-2003 research study conducted of 39 schools across the state of Ohio, researchers asked “how do school libraries help students with their learning in and away from school?” (Todd and Kuhlthau, 2005). Ninety-nine percent of students responding to a survey (a total of 13,050 students) indicated that the library “had helped them in some way with their learning in and out of school” (Todd and Kuhlthau, 2005, p. 68). More than half of the students in the study said the library was instrumental in helping them get better grades on assignments (Todd and Kuhlthau, 2005, p. 82). Eighty-two percent said the library aided them in studying at home. In a 1994 study, qualitative methods such as questionnaires, surveys and focus groups were used to gather data at three secondary schools in the state of South Carolina. The researchers found that building collections oriented towards the curriculum, providing comfortable areas for browsing and reading, and student access to the library before and after school were each identified as key factors in supporting student performance (Gehlken, 1994).

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In addition to providing support for academics, the literature suggests that libraries also help students with personal development. Durrance (2003, p. 306) identified several “affective” outcomes, including increased self-confidence, self-sufficiency, an increased sense of responsibility, and a broadened worldview – each associated in some way with the overall positive impact of the library.

While there have been no major studies on the relationship between libraries and academic achievement in sub-Saharan Africa, Bristow (1992, p. 75) provides anecdotal evidence that access to books and other reading material as part of the curriculum enhances student learning. In addition, a small study conducted in Uganda by a library studies bachelor’s degree student at a university in Kampala examined a local school and the impact of the library on student performance (Lutaaya, 1999). The study found that there were significant differences between the numbers of students with a school library who passed their O-levels when compared with those who did not have a library. In 1998, 77 percent of students at the school with the library passed their O-levels, compared with 60 percent of students without the library. The author found similar results for 1995 (63 percent compared with 10 percent), 1996 (81 percent compared with 21 percent) and 1997 (68 percent compared with 35 percent). The author goes on to conclude that the library had some degree of impact on student performance.

The reading habits of children in rural areas also have an impact on performance. According to a study carried out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, children from deprived backgrounds performed better on tests than those from more affluent homes if they enjoyed reading books, newspapers and comics in their spare time (OECD [PISA report], 2000). The study, which included over 31 countries, found that encouraging children to read for pleasure could compensate for social problems that might normally affect their academic performance.

While the cultural and educational context for each of these studies is very different, their review does provide a cursory look at the significance of school library impact in a number of settings. The implications for schools in underdeveloped areas are many, and if students are to benefit fully from learning, access to books and other resources should be the norm, not the exception, as is currently the case in many rural areas.

## Methodology

Researchers gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from two different schools in the Masaka District, one school with a library, the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, and one without, Masaka High School. A third school, Sseke Secondary School, also participated in the study – this school has a well-utilized library, and researchers gathered important library use information to supplement the quantitative data gathered from the other two schools.

Grades from non-standardized tests and class rank information was collected for 85 students, 6 focus groups were conducted, 85 questionnaires were distributed and collected from students, 5 school administrators and 3 library staff were interviewed, and approximately 10 hours of observation was carried out.

The selection of students was random, with attention being paid to gender and class groupings (senior 1 through senior 4). The age range of students in each class tends to vary, on average, students in S1 range from 13 years to 16 years; S2 from 15 years to 17 years; S3 from 16 years to 18 years; and S4 from 17 years to as old as 20 years.

Table I provides descriptive statistics for the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, Masaka High School, and Sseke Secondary School. Table II highlights the key features of the Kitengesa Community Library and the Sseke Secondary School Library.

At the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, 42 students answered a 20-question survey, and three teachers participated in focus groups during the summer of 2005. During the summer of 2004, 5 boys, 8 girls and 8 teachers participated in separate focus groups. The librarian at the Kitengesa Community Library was interviewed in 2004 and 2005. In addition, library circulation information that was kept in a Microsoft Access database was collected and reviewed, and the information from handwritten library visitation logs (completed each time a student used the library, indicating the reason for their visit) was entered into the same database, and reviewed for the participants of the study. At the school level, student grades for 42 students were collected and recorded for the 2005 spring term, and the headmaster was also interviewed.

At Masaka High School, 45 students answered a 14-question survey, 3 teachers, 5 boys, and 5 girls participated in separate focus groups. Student grades for 45 students were collected and recorded for the 2005 spring term. The school's headmaster was also interviewed extensively.

	Kitengesa	Masaka	Sseke
Number of students	205	300	520
Number of teachers	11	17	24
Number of boy students	86	180	310
Number of girl students	119	120	210
Grades taught	Senior 1-Senior 4	Senior 1-Senior 6	Senior 1-Senior 6
Subjects taught	English, Math, Biology, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Agriculture, History, Luganda, Commerce, Accounts, Christian Religious Education, Computers, Islamic Religious Education, Fine Art and Political Education	English, Math, Biology, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Agriculture, History, Luganda, Commerce, Christian Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education, Fine Arts	English, Math, Biology, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Agriculture, History, Luganda, Commerce, Accounts, Christian Religious Education, Computers, Islamic Religious Education, Fine Art and Political Education

**Table I.**  
Descriptive statistics –  
Kitengesa  
Comprehensive  
Secondary School,  
Masaka High School,  
Sseke Secondary School

	Kitengesa	Sseke
Number of hours open per week	77	45
Number of librarians	2	1
Collection size	1739	530
Number of members	503	All students are library users
Seating capacity	24	30
Electricity	Yes, provided by solar-powered ceiling bulbs	Yes
Open evening hours (after 5 pm)	Yes	No
Open weekends	Yes	No

**Table II.**  
Library statistics –  
Kitengesa Community  
Library and Sseke  
Secondary School Library

At Sseke Secondary School, 5 boys, 5 girls, and 4 teachers participated in focus groups. The school's headmaster was also interviewed. The only information gathered from Sseke was qualitative in nature, as there was no student grade information available for review. This included information about their collections, staff, day-to-day operation, user population and reader habits. Researchers reviewed handwritten library circulation logs, and interviewed the librarian and head administrator. The researchers also observed classes and library activities at each of these schools.

### Articulation of findings

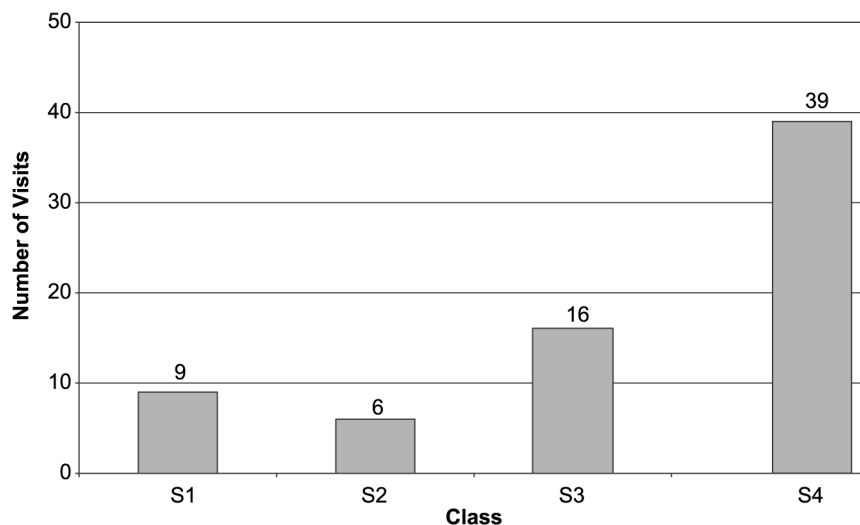
#### *Do students make good use of the library?*

Yes. Older students at Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School visit the library more often, whereas younger students seem to check out more items but spend less overall time in the library. S4 students had on average 39 library visits between January 2005 and July 2005, compared to S1 students, who had on average 9 library visits. S3 students had 16 average visits and S2 students 6 visits (see Figure 1).

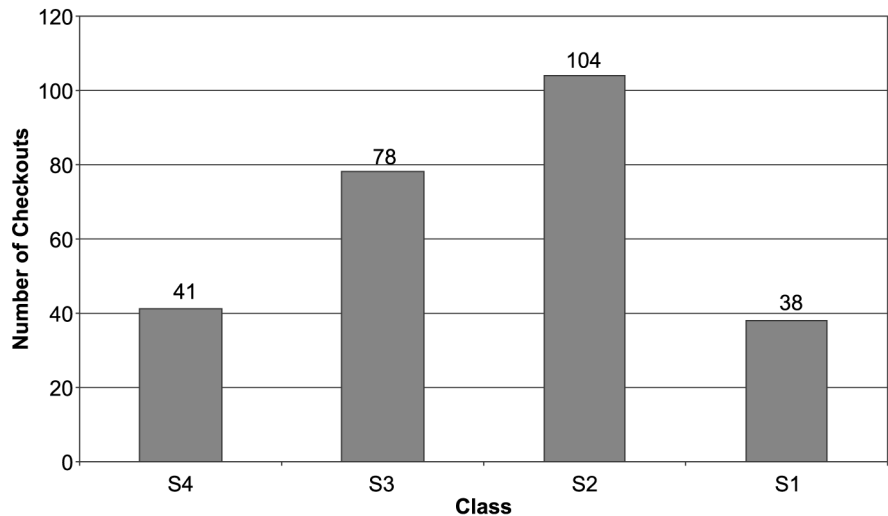
The student with the greatest number of library visits is an S4 student. S1 students checked out 38 items, S2 students 104 items, S3 students checked out 78 items, and S4 students checked out 41 items (see Figure 2).

Library logs that recorded students' reasons for visiting the library suggest that the older students were using the library to complete class assignments during class times.

Criteria developed by Williams and Wavell (2001, p. 124) support findings in this area. The authors discuss four items that are relevant to evaluating library impact on learning: evidence of motivation, evidence of progression, evidence of independence, and evidence of interaction. Evidence of impact in each of these areas was seen while observing students at the Kitengesa Community Library. Evidence of motivation – “pupil enjoyment, participation, absorption in the task set” was perhaps the most observable – students enjoyed their time in the library, participated in various library activities and expressed enthusiasm about using the library. Williams and Wavell (2001, p.124) identify evidence of progression as “awareness of or ability to use a



**Figure 1.**  
Kitengesa Community  
Library average library  
visit by class



**Figure 2.**  
Kitengesa Community  
Library total checkouts by  
class January 2005-July  
2005

specific skill associated with the finding of information and sometimes the use and presentation of information”. Students at Kitengesa were seen looking for and locating library materials on the shelves on their own, as well as making their own decisions about which materials to use for homework assignments. Evidence of independence is defined by Williams and Wavell (2001, p. 126) as students “who appeared to have mastered a skill and were seen to have the confidence and competence to proceed and progress unaided, either in a class session or in their own time”. This indicator was most evident in those students who were observed over time, and who were able to use the library on their own, find their own materials, and ask the librarians for help when they needed to. Evidence of interaction involves peer cooperation by students and discussion with other students about assignments and homework. This indicator was observed during group work sessions when students worked collaboratively on assignments and homework using library materials.

At Sseke Library, students also make good use of the library. Check-out logs indicate robust circulation, especially of those texts linked to specific classes. Students study in small groups, and on their own, during school hours and breaks between classes. Student feedback gathered during focus groups indicated that students were excited about visiting the library and using its materials (evidence of motivation), had learned how to utilize particular library resources over time (evidence of progression), and were very comfortable using library resources on their own (evidence of independence).

*Do students use the library for other than school work?*

Yes. Students reported during focus groups and surveys that they often gather in the Kitengesa Community Library to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as informal discussion groups, literacy instruction, and game nights. Leisure reading is another major draw, many students simply come to the library to sit and read their favorite books, comics and newspapers. For instance, many of the

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students that participated in the study from the S2 class indicated that they read quite a bit during their leisure time, a possible explanation for their high check-out rate. There is also a social aspect, students gather with friends to engage in conversation and discussion. The library also acts as an ad-hoc “office hours” space for teachers. Teachers have no offices, and can often be found in the library between classes, evenings and weekends. Students often find a visit to the library leads to more interaction with their teachers.

At the Sseke Library, students did not use the library for purposes other than school-related work. This is mainly due to the fact that the Sseke Library is only open during school hours, and not on weekends. Students are encouraged to use the library only for schoolwork.

*Do students recognize the importance of the library?*

Yes. Students from both Kitengesa and Sseke focus groups expressed that the library was very important to them, and articulated this in a variety of ways. Their feedback was very similar to that gathered by Todd and Kuhlthau (2005, p. 83), where the authors presented nine “conceptions of help”, gleaned from the written feedback of students surveyed for their study:

- (1) the school library saves me time with doing my school work;
- (2) the school library enables me to complete my work on time;
- (3) the school library helps me by providing a study environment for me to work;
- (4) the school library helps me take the stress out of learning;
- (5) the school library helps me do my work more efficiently;
- (6) the school library helps me think about the world around me;
- (7) the school library helps me know my strengths and weaknesses with information use;
- (8) the school library provides me with a safe environment for ideas investigation; and
- (9) the school library helps me set my goals and plan for things.

Students at both schools reported that the library provides a comfortable space for them to work, provides them a place to investigate new ideas, and that access to the library helps them to work more efficiently. Students at the Sseke Secondary School reported that the majority of their classes have some library-related component for which they must visit the library frequently and use library materials not easily attained elsewhere. They also reported that the library helps take some of the stress out of learning because they can use the library’s textbooks and not have to worry about buying their own (which most students cannot afford), and that the library supports their efforts to learn about more about the world. Students from Kitengesa said the library allows them to investigate further information given to them in class by their teachers, and in some cases, to verify the accuracy of this information for themselves. The students also indicated that they understood that not every school has a library, and that having one is something special.

*Are there any noticeable differences between the grades of students with the library at their school, and those without?*

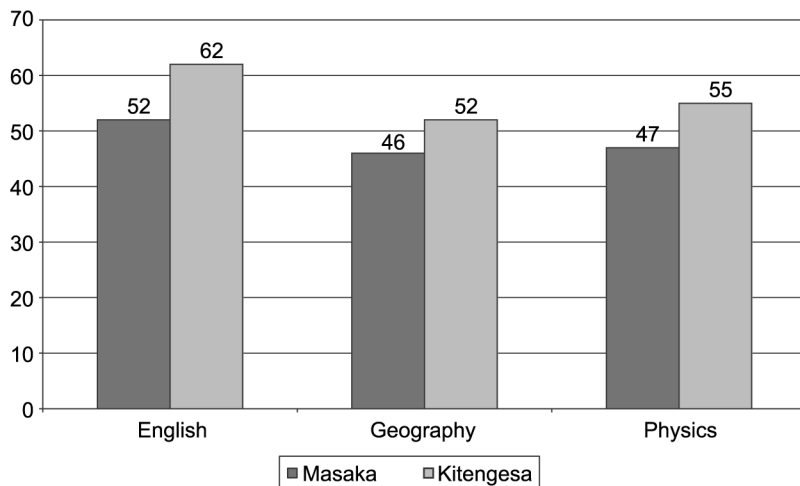
Yes. The analysis suggests that students at Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School had higher overall averages than their counterparts at Masaka High School, which does not have a library. While attributing the differences in the grades to the presence of a library would be premature, there is certainly enough information to warrant further investigation.

The students take on average 13 subjects (see Table I for subjects taught), and the overall grades for the students range from 0 to 75. Although the highest possible average is 100, most students' averages are between 40 and 65 (the headmasters at both schools explained that the students' grades tend to be low for a variety of reasons, including disruption of studies due to inability to pay school fees, which was the most significant). For this study, the subjects of English, Physics and Geography were chosen for review. At Masaka High School, the average grade in English (across all four classes, S1 through S4) was 52, Geography 46, and Physics 47 (see Figure 3).

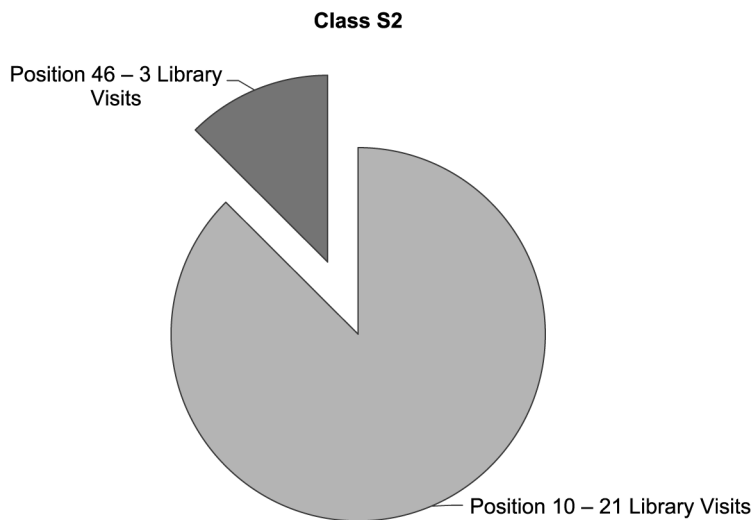
At Kitengesa, the average grade in English was some 10 points higher at 62, Geography 6 points higher at 52, and Physics 8 points higher at 55 (see Figure 3).

The data also revealed that Kitengesa students who visited the library more often had higher class positions than those who did not visit the library as much; this was a pattern that was repeated across all four classes. In S2 for instance, the student ranked 10th out of 49 students visited the library 21 times between January 2005 and July 2005. On the other hand, the student ranked 46th had only 3 library visits. In S3, the student ranked 8th out of 34 visited the library 71 times, compared to the student ranked 33rd, who did not visit the library at all. The students in S4 all had a substantial number of library visits. The student in the 5th position out of 39 visited the library 83 times, and the student in the 32nd position visited the library 16 times (see Figure 4).

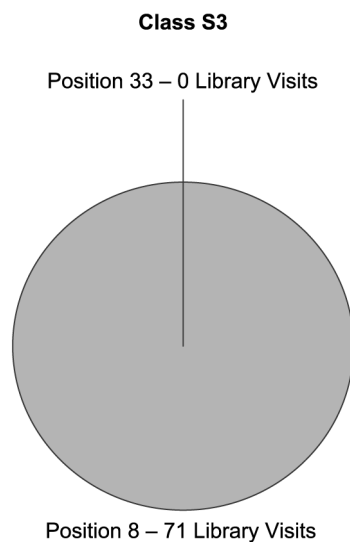
Examining more closely the links between performance and library use might inform future classroom instructional efforts, support collaboration between teachers and the librarians, and motivate students to continue their use of library resources and services (see Figures 5 and 6).



**Figure 3.**  
Average grades by subject  
for Masaka High School  
and Kitengesa  
Comprehensive (S1-S4  
combined)



**Figure 4.**  
Kitengesa Comprehensive  
frequency of library visits  
by class



**Figure 5.**

*Do students with a library read more?*

Reading habits of students at Kitengesa and Masaka schools were very similar. The number of hours spent reading non-school materials is an important factor in gauging reading habits. Kitengesa students in S1 spend 10.1 hours per week reading non-school materials, S2 students spend an average of 16.8 hours per week, S3 students spend 6.5 hours per week, and S4 students 16 hours per week. In comparison, students in the S1 class at Masaka High School indicated they spend 11.3 hours reading non-school

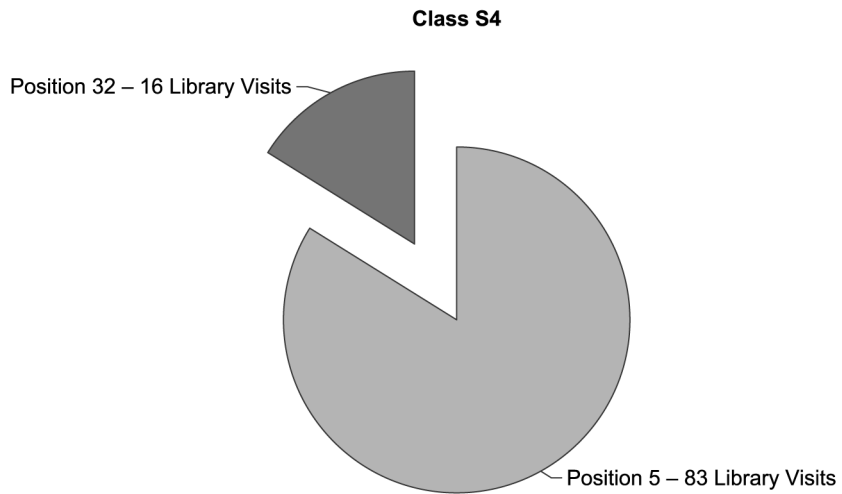


Figure 6.

related materials, S2 students spend 19 hours per week, S3 students spend 9.3 hours reading materials not for class, and S4 students spend 11.6 hours (see Figure 7).

At both Kitengesa Comprehensive and Masaka High School, the majority of boys and girls taking a 20-question survey reported that they had reading materials at home. The majority of the survey takers also reported that they read in their free time. At Kitengesa, 100 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys reported that they read to others in their family. At Masaka High School, 78 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys reported that they read to others in their family. Ninety-four percent of girls and 100 percent of boys at Kitengesa study and/or read at home in the evenings, 91 percent of girls and 81 percent of boys at Masaka High School do so. One hundred percent of girls and 90 percent of boys reported that they have reading materials at home, and 58 percent said they read newspapers in their free time. Sixty percent of students in S2 at Masaka High School reported they were reading newspapers in their free time, and 93

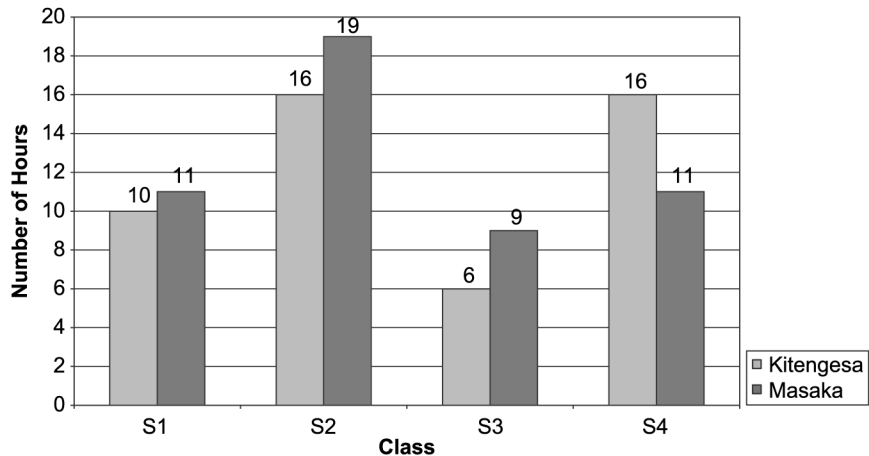


Figure 7.  
Number of hours spent reading non-school materials (Kitengesa Comprehensive and Masaka High Schools)

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percent reported they had reading materials at home. Some of these figures may seem high, and there is the possibility that students overestimated the amount of reading they do outside the classroom. However, researcher observation over the entire course of the study does bear out the fact that many students spend a significant portion of their time reading, once school is over. The data is also in keeping with results from a survey conducted by Sturges and Neill (1998, p. 151), in which 91 percent of children said they read for pleasure. The authors go on to suggest that “the trend of population growth alone is reason to believe that a reading society is in the process of emerging in Africa”.

Students’ reading habits are a critical consideration in the ongoing effort to support development of a reading culture in Africa, and in the case of this project the impact of the library may be greater for younger students. These younger students often have more leisure time compared to older ones, who normally have many chores and responsibilities to attend to both before and after school.

### **Implications**

There are several implications from this study, both for schools with libraries and those without. The establishment of rural school libraries is a lofty goal that might not be attainable in many areas, however, it is a goal that is worth pursuing. Zondi (1982, p. 14) suggests that the school library is “an essential teaching aid” and “a vital necessity” in rural schools where teachers have to do without so many other basic resources such as maps, lab space and equipment, and audio-visual materials. In areas where financial resources are scarce, one strategy for the development of more rural school libraries might be for teachers and school administrators to foster partnerships with community libraries that already exist in some places (examples include the Village Reading Rooms in Botswana, the Osu initiated libraries in Ghana, and the system of resources run by “barefoot librarians” in Tanzania.)

For those schools fortunate enough to have libraries, no matter how small, a more aggressive promotion of library books is needed at every class level. In the Lance (2000) study, one of the keys to improved student performance was collaboration between librarians and teachers. At Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, teachers do work with the librarians on occasion, but there are many opportunities for collaboration especially in subjects such as Geography, where students frequently use the library’s atlases and maps for homework and class assignments. Students are the heaviest users of the library, and a more concentrated effort to include library work in class curricula across all 13 disciplines taught at the school would be greatly beneficial to the students. It would also provide teachers with additional materials from which to plan their lessons. At Sseke, teachers and the librarian could integrate use of library materials more broadly into the curriculum, and provide in-library tutoring sessions, for instance.

Replication of successful library programs would also benefit students. In order to do this, a longitudinal evaluation of specific library activities might be required. Olen (1995, p. 72) supports this, suggesting that frequency of library visits is not the only factor that needs to be measured in such a study, the kind of activities held in the library also need to be examined. At Kitengesa Community Library, literacy instruction, group study sessions and informal student discussion groups (most focused on discussion of issues related to adolescence, and published in the local

publications, “Young Talk” and “Straight Talk”) are activities that currently take place on a semi-regular basis, and students might benefit from making these types of activities more routine. At Sseke Secondary School, most library activities are related to class assignments, and certainly some of the extracurricular activities taking place at Kitengesa Community Library might work there as well. The library at Sseke might also consider instituting programs linked to school work, such as formal led study groups.

Finally, the libraries at Kitengesa and Sseke can be places that support the establishment of a reading culture. Encouraging students to read during their leisure time, and providing space and materials to do so is key. Development of these habits, especially for younger students, has been shown to impact their academic performance. The amount of leisure reading reported by students at all three schools in this study is indicative of development of a reading culture. In order for libraries to continue to support this trend, the collections at these libraries must be relevant and have materials that students and other users enjoy reading, including a variety of stimulating materials in the native language. Olen (1995, p. 13) advances this idea, saying “pupils will not be motivated to use school libraries which are stocked with books that are not in their mother tongue”. This is a necessary consideration, especially for rural libraries where reading material is scarce, and perhaps one key to the development of a more widespread reading culture. As one student library user at Kitengesa Secondary School stated, “It is a fine thing, that there are books here are in Luganda – my language – and in English too. I can read more because I understand more!”.

Although the aforementioned recommendations specifically reference the school libraries at Kitengesa and Sseke, they are general enough to apply to rural school library initiatives regardless of geographic location.

### **Future research**

Future research efforts might focus exclusively on the impact of rural libraries on student performance in the region studied, or similar areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. The professional literature reveals a number of significant studies on the subject, some of the best known are from the United States, including large studies in Colorado (Lance, 2000), Ohio (Todd and Kuhlthau, 2004) and Alaska (Lance *et al.*, 1999). These studies demonstrated a strong correlation between better student performance, the presence of the library, and use of library materials by students and teachers. In addition to these quantitative findings, Todd and Kuhlthau (2005, p. 82) indicated that students’ comments gathered during their study “expressed a clear, albeit simple relationship between what the library had done for them and getting a good grade”. There have been far fewer studies about the impact of libraries in rural areas elsewhere in the world, and no large-scale impact studies published on school libraries in Sub-saharan Africa. A longitudinal study might track students’ performance and library use over time at rural schools in the Masaka district, or expand to include other similar regions. Such a study might highlight distinct correlations between student performance and library use, and be of great value to librarians, educators, scholars and others who are concerned with literacy and access to reading materials in developing areas. In addition, the data could be used to support the need for the establishment of school libraries and provision of reading materials for students and teachers.

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