

The status and role of resource centres in exHouse of Delegates (ExHOD) schools under post apartheid.

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Abstract

The role of school resource centres in promoting educational excellence has been largely ignored in South African post apartheid education. Previous so called advantaged schools that have begun to enroll large percentages of students who are black are now beginning to suffer due to the strict adherence of national norms in terms of funding and staffing. This systematic application of staffing and funding formulae has resulted in the demise of school resource centres in exHouse of Delegate (exHOD) schools. In the past, these schools were endowed with a full complement of resource centre staff. However under post apartheid education, the school resource centre personnel have been redeployed within the school and in some instances to other schools. This redeployment and removal of resource centre staff has led to dire consequences in exHOD schools. The resource centres are closed for most of the day because teacher librarians have been redeployed into main stream teaching of examination subjects. This study thus revealed that the pupils who are black are the worst off in ExHOD schools as they are being denied the opportunity of accessing these resource centers.

Terms:

Ex (HOD) – Ex House of Delegates

Ex (HOA) – Ex House of Assembly

Ex (HOR) – Ex House of Representatives

Prior to 1994, South Africa had a tri-cameral parliamentary system which consisted of three “houses”, namely: Ex (HOD) – Ex House of Delegates; Ex (HOA) – Ex House of Assembly and Ex (HOR) – Ex House of Representatives. These three houses were based along racial lines and were used to provide some form of self determination for the respective race group. For example, affairs of people of Indian decent were administered and managed in Parliament by the HOD. The HOA was at the top, followed by HOR and then by HOD in parliament. People of Indian decent, by virtue of being at the bottom of parliament had the least number of representatives as compared to the other two houses (HOA and HOR). The reason why “Ex” is prefixed to each of these houses is that they were still referred to for a few years (1-2) after 1994 (democracy).

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Introduction

School resource centers have a long and distinguished history within most educational landscapes of the world. According to Murray (1997) the recognition of centers in promoting teaching and learning can be traced as far back as 1597 when an ordinance was passed in Shewsbury, England. The ordinance stated that all schools must include a library centre and gallery furnished with all manner of books, maps, spheres, instruments of astronomy and all other things pertaining to teaching and learning (p 24). Indeed, resource centers as centres of curriculum and learning development have a vital and significant role within the school system in developing and sustaining teaching and learning.

One of the most crucial debates facing the twenty-first century is how to develop and sustain a school system that will prepare teachers and learners for the social and economic upheavals created by technology and globalization. The onslaught of technology and globalization has resulted in fierce competition among societies and economies for supremacy on the world stage. Educational authorities are therefore continuously reviewing and redesigning educational systems in order to cope with the increasing demands of globalization. A number of school reform initiatives have recognized the pivotal role of school resource centers in promoting and sustaining the culture of teaching and learning amongst staff and learners. Johnson (1992) who undertook meta-analysis of various research studies on European school resource centers found that in the last decade, the European educational landscape has begun to invest human, technical, physical and financial resources in establishing and developing school resource centers. Johnson (1992) argues that education can no longer be based on a single teacher or a single textbook trying to dispense knowledge, skills and expertise that children need to know, develop and learn for the rest of their lives (p.341). Hingisel (1996) also supports Johnsons' (1992) view by indicating that teachers need the tools which help children to learn and develop a passion for learning. That is what school resource centers are all about - providing these tools (p.351).

The prevention of a free flow of information and the denial of access to information was one of the cornerstones of apartheid in South Africa. The lack of resource centers and community library centers in communities comprised of people who are black was an attempt to deny those communities information that could be used to better themselves socially, politically and economically. There were various other pieces of legislation such as the Separate Amenities Act, Group Areas Act, the Pass Act which also promoted the apartheid government's plan of denying information to people who are black on the grounds of their race and color. People who are black were not allowed to access information centers such as community libraries and resource centers that were located in communities of people who are white.

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Schools where students are black also bore the brunt of denial of resources and libraries due to the unequal funding formulae and the existence of seventeen different education departments. The majority of schools for children who are black did not have resource centers. For those few schools for children who are black that had resource centers; however, these resource centers were generally under resourced and in a very poor state of development. Pakade (1990) argues that most of the resource centers in schools for children who are black were mere storehouses for old and outdated books. Kistan, (1993) a senior lecturer at the University of Durban Westville, found that in one school for students who are black in KwaMashu, an unused toilet was converted into a library to store books.

Having noted the status of school resource centers in communities of people who are black under apartheid, there was a great expectation from the unitary Department of National Education, which was formed in 1994. There was hope that the new Department of National Education would vigorously attempt to develop and promote the establishment of resource centers in schools. Unfortunately, post apartheid education has done very little - if not anything - in terms of developing policies to shape and guide the establishment and promotion of school resource centers. Provincial departments of education are being stifled due to budgetary constraints and as a result, school resource centers are not being given priority. Funding to school resource centers has dwindled and thus most school resource centers are not functioning at an optimum level. Due to staff rationalization policies, school principals are also redeploying resource centre staff into teaching examination subjects. In many instances, school principals are being instructed by subject advisors and superintendents to redeploy teacher librarians out of the school resource centre. In many ex House of Delegates (exHOD) schools (the house of delegates was one of the houses of parliament that was reserved for the administration of the so called people of Indian race group under apartheid), teacher librarians were removed from their posts in school resource centers and have been redeployed within the school to teach in the mainstream, i.e. teacher librarians have been absorbed into the teaching of examination subjects at the expense of managing and administering the school resource centre.

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There is every reason to believe that school resource centers are still being perceived as traditional storehouses of information sources such as books and other printed materials (magazines, newspapers, etc). This perception has given school resource centres a bad image and as a result, resource centres have been marginalized in terms of budgets and staffing. The importance and significance of resource centres has been eroded by both provincial educational authorities and school principals because the educational leaders do not understand and recognize the multi faceted roles with which school resource centers are entrusted.

What is a school resource centre? From a South African perspective, it is imperative that we draw a distinction between the description of a school library and a school resource centre. In the South African context, both these concepts are fundamentally different especially noting that they are in different forms of development mainly because of unequal funding for people who are white and people who are non whites (people who are black, people who of color and people of Indian decent). A school library refers to a collection of books that are housed for safekeeping (Percival and Ellington, 1987:235). A school resource centre is an area, place or building (Oosthuizen, 1992:25) where a number of various sources of information (books, magazines, journals, video cassettes, audio cassettes, transparencies, newspapers, etc.) are stored for safekeeping. A resource centre also provides, assists and facilitates the planning, design and production of a wide range of sources of information for utilization by various clientele of the school population (Percival and Ellington, 1987:242). The school resource centre is central in supporting the application of technology in education (hardware, software) and technology of education (underware: teaching strategies, learning theories, teaching methods, etc). The primary role of the resource centre is to provide the expertise and facilitate the adoption of both technology in education and technology of education. To perform these roles, the school resource centre must be adequately staffed by amongst others a qualified or experienced librarian, curriculum development specialist and clerical staff to support the administration and management of the centre. The number of staff will depend largely on the size of the resource centre and the number of individuals that it services.

Based on the above analysis, this study investigated the status and role of school resource centers under post apartheid education. Only resource centers from schools administered by the Ex House of Delegates (HOD) were included in this study. The primary reason for including only ExHOD schools in this study was due to the fact that the majority of ExHOD schools have a very large enrollment of pupils who are black.

According to Hart (2001:03), the key events in the development of school libraries in South Africa can be identified as follows:

- The legacy of the apartheid past
- Two government sponsored surveys in 1997 and 1999 that have audited school facilities nationally – and found huge disparities between sectors and between Provinces
- Educational legislation since 1994 - the result of and cause of rapid change throughout our education systems
- The *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* – brought in by the Department of Education in 1998 in an attempt to redistribute recurrent non-personnel expenditure to the most needy schools.
- *Curriculum 2005* – the new outcomes-based curriculum being phased in from 1997. After much controversy and debate, late last year the Minister of Education appointed a review committee to investigate problems in its implementation.
- The *National Policy Framework for School Library Standards* – produced after wide consultation in 1998 by the Department of Education's Directorate for Educational Technology and Distance Education whose responsibility it is to develop school library policy.

- Within the library world recent high-level moves to bridge the gaps between a school and public library governance structures. Each sector falls underneath a different Ministry and a committee on school and public library cooperation has been set up to investigate ways of removing hindrances. It is too early to report as a report has not received final approval by government.
- Increasing concerns over the poor reading abilities of South African learners – 2001 has been declared by the Minister the *Year of the Reader*.
- The Department of Education's *TELI (Technology Enhanced Learning Initiative) Policy Framework* in 1996. Government is clearly looking to information and communications technologies (ICT) to overcome backlogs and to bridge the gaps between so-called information-poor and information-rich schools. This isn't the venue to cover all of these issues in detail.; therefore, the most significant issues will be highlighted and some strategies will be suggested to improve the present rather depressing situation.

Hart (2001) sums up succinctly the initiatives influencing school library development in South Africa since post apartheid. Perhaps the most significant of the above influences must surely relate to "Curriculum 2005". Curriculum 2005 was an initiative aimed at curriculum transformation. Within this transformation there was also the introduction of "outcomes based Education" (OBE) which was seen to be the savior in terms of a new philosophy towards teaching and learning. It is especially disappointing as the new outcomes-based curriculum should have laid a more stable foundation for libraries. The ethos and approaches to OBE learning and teaching imply the sort of education where libraries thrive. However, according to Hart (2001), this was not to be as there were no policy changes to library implementation. The policies that emerged were not systemic and were more piece meal and "just in time". Most importantly, information-handling skills have been listed as a key cross-field outcome within the OBE framework and accordingly, an Information Skills Learning Program has been developed as part of the learning area titled "Language, Literacy & Communication".

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Objective of the study

The primary intent of this study was to investigate the status of resource centers in exHouse of Delegate schools under post apartheid education. The study thus examined whether post apartheid education has influenced the status and role of resource centers in exHOD (for people of Indian descent) schools, which now have a large percentage of pupils who are black enrolled.

Method:

A questionnaire with both open and closed-ended questions was administered in this study. All the questions included in the questionnaire were based on theories and analyses gathered from an in-depth literature review on the role and significance of school resource centres. Informal and unstructured interviews with school principals were also conducted.

Research Group

The research group consisted of teachers, principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments, teacher librarians, library assistants and library clerks from primary and secondary schools located in Phoenix.

Table 1. provides the composition of the sample size and the number of schools and educators included in the study.

Total number of schools in Phoenix		Sample size of Schools included in the study		Sample size of Educators included in the study	
Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
36	22	16	11	160	110
N = 58		N = 27		N = 270	

Table 1: Sample size of Schools (primary and secondary) and Educators

Phoenix, the largest Indian settlement outside India, is situated approximately 23km northwest of Durban in KwaZulu Natal. It is occupied predominantly by people who are low to middle income earners. The EX - House of Delegates (ExHOD), previously administered all the schools in Phoenix.

The Ex HOD (for Indians) was one of three “administration houses” in the tricameral parliamentary system of the pre apartheid era. The other two “administration houses” were the House of Assembly (for people who are white) and House of Representatives (for people of color). Phoenix is surrounded by a number of townships populated by people who are black. KwaMashu is located along the western border of Phoenix, Inanda to the North, Bambhai to the west and Amountana to the east. After 1990 there was an influx of pupils who were black from the surrounding townships into schools located in Phoenix. In schools such as Foresthaven Secondary and Sastri Park Secondary the pupil ratio between students who are black and students who are Indian is as high as 60:40.

Results and Analysis:

1. In your opinion which of the following does your school have?

Many terminologies are being constantly bandied around regarding school resource centers. The more common terms are libraries, media centers, centre for teaching and learning, resource centres, etc. These terms are being used interchangeably, yet they are far from being the same. Each of the terms mentioned above has different connotations and as such we need to distinguish between them. Thus it was felt that the above question be included so as to gage the perception of educators on the various terminologies.

Figure 1: What does your school have....?

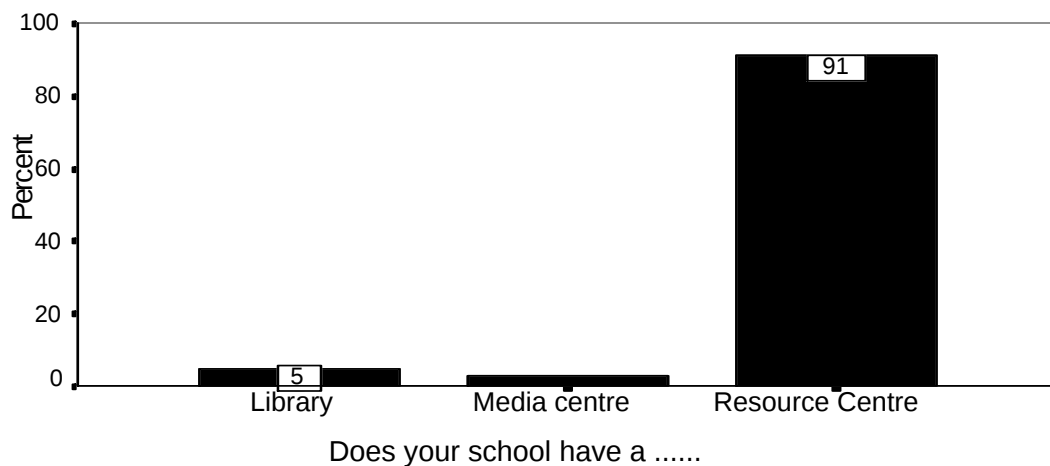


Figure 1. Indicates that 91% of the respondents felt their school had a resource centre; 4% stated their school had a media centre; and, 5% indicated their school had a library. All exHOD schools can be classified as having school resource centres and not school libraries.

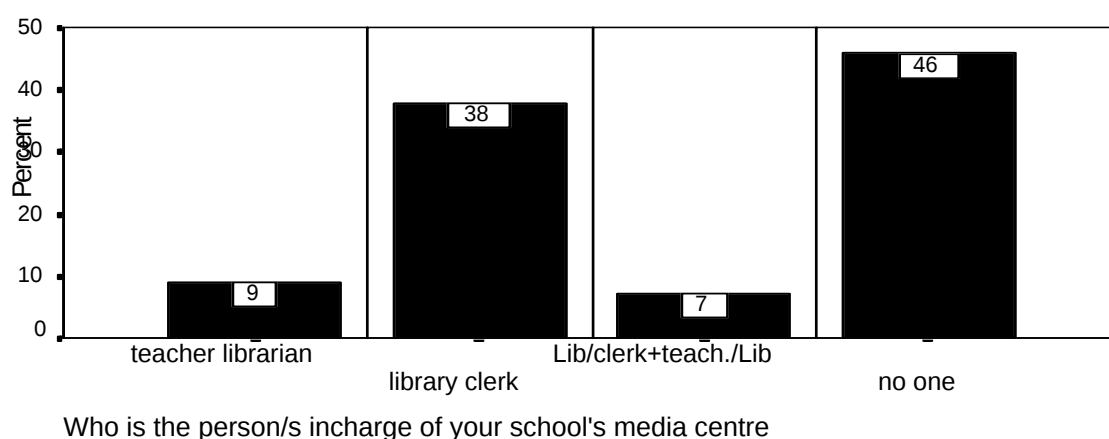
It was most encouraging to note the majority of the respondents were able to distinguish between a school library, school resource centre and school media centre. The term library is somewhat off-putting and suggests a mere storehouse for books. In this regard, it was disappointing to note that 5% of the respondents still felt that their school had a library. ExHOD schools, as pointed out earlier, do not have libraries but resource centres. According to Beswick, (1972) most of the school libraries has now fully metamorphised into resource centres and beyond such as media centers, centers for teaching and learning. The term 'resource centre' implies a multi functional role where it provides and undertakes much more than the simple issue of a library -- loaning and storing of books. Together with the functions of the library, the resource centre also provides services and facilities for materials development, curriculum development, media design and production, audiovisual production and also facilitates resource-based learning.

Thus the resource centre is the heart of the school system where teaching and learning are fully supported in terms of providing technology in education and technology of education. Technology in education refers to all the hardware (teaching equipments, gadgets, machinery) and software (charts, transparencies, audio-tapes, slides, video-tapes, etc.) while technology of education refers to teaching methods, strategies and approaches (group learning, resource based learning, project learning, outcomes based education, etc.).

2. Who is in charge of your school resource centre?

Figure 2. reveals that 46% of the respondents indicated that no one was in charge of their school resource centre; 38% indicated that a part time library clerk was in charge; 9% of the respondents indicated that a teacher librarian was in charge; and, 7% indicated that a teacher librarian together with a library clerk was in charge of their school resource centre. It was rather disturbing to note that nearly half (46%) of all the respondents indicated that no one was in charge of their school resource centre. With thousands of rands of valuable equipment, book and non-book resources being housed in the resource centre, it is very difficult to understand the rationale for no one being in-charge of these resource centers.

Figure 2. Who is in charge of your school resource centre?



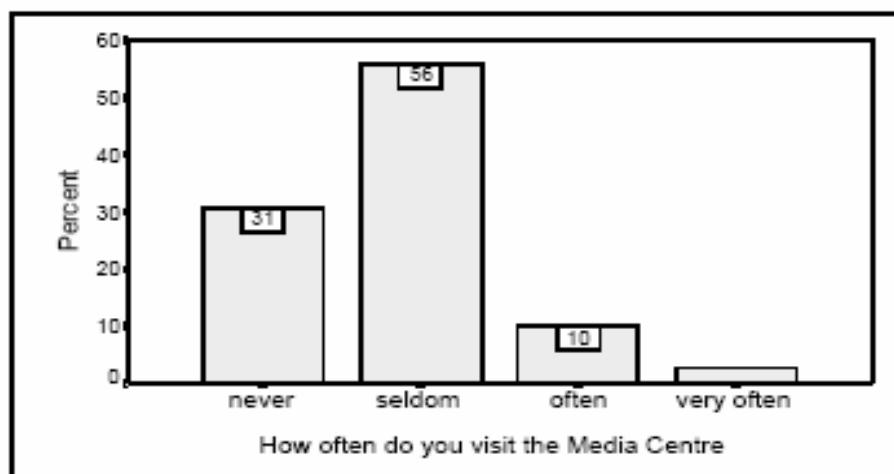
Informal interviews were conducted with many principals of the schools included in this study. They indicated in no uncertain terms that they were forced to make redundant the post of their librarians and thereby redeploy them into main stream teaching of the school examination curriculum. The principals further indicated that this move was necessary as many educators opted for voluntary severance packages (VSPs) that were offered by the National Department of Education.. Principals also indicated that requests for additional staff, which was precipitated by increased enrollment of pupils who are pupils at their schools, fell on deaf ears and thus they had to work with skeleton staff.

All of the principals indicated that they had to give preference to examination subjects and thus school librarians were absorbed into main stream teaching. Some principals indicated that they had to forego the services of a library clerk. Library clerks were redeployed to other schools for administrative duties. The commonly held view amongst most principals was their school's resource centre could not do without a full time librarian; however, they had no alternative. A small percentage of principals also indicated that no teacher from their school staff was willing to take charge of the resource centre as they were unwilling to carry both a full load of 45 teaching periods and taking charge of the resource centre at the same time. Indeed it would be too cumbersome if not unreasonable to expect an individual to carry such a burden.

The rationalization policies of the provincial department of education together with apathy amongst school principals have left many school resource centres without any managers and viz.; resource centers are closed for most or part of the school day, resulting in under-utilization. It is sad to note that the potential of resource centres in promoting and enhancing teaching and learning is not being recognized. We have pupils from disadvantaged communities that did not enjoy access to school resources centres. Yet when the same pupils enroll at schools where resources centres are available, they are still unable to take advantage of it due to rationalization.

3. How often do you visit your school resource centre?

Figure 3. How often do you visit your school resource centre?



“We have pupils from disadvantaged communities that did not enjoy access to school resources centres. Yet when the same pupils enroll at schools where resources centres are available, they are still unable to take advantage of it due to rationalization.”

Figure 3 shows that the majority (87%) of the respondents never (31%) or seldom (56%) visit their school resource centre. It is rather unfortunate to note the high percentage of respondents who do not or never visit their school resource centre.

It must be mentioned that schools administered by the previous exHOD all have resource centres. Although not state of the art, these school resources centers are all adequately resourced. Basic teaching equipment and electronic gadgets such as the tape recorder, video player, overhead projectors, television, slide maker and camera, etc. are all valuable in terms of lesson planning, preparation and instruction in the classroom. Resource centres under the exHOD received annual budgets and have thus over the years built up a fairly good book and non-book stock. Although the resource centres have a reasonably good stock of equipment, book and non-book resources, it is most worrying to note that such a large percentage of educators never or seldom visit their school resource centre.

All stakeholders within the school system would have to mobilize in terms of garnering support to adequately staff these school resource centres. It is paramount that school resource centres are open throughout the school day. Pupils, teachers and all other personnel within the school must have access to the school resource centre at all times of the school day.

4. Reasons for never or seldom visits to the school resource centre

Figure 4: Reasons for never or seldom visits to the school resource centre

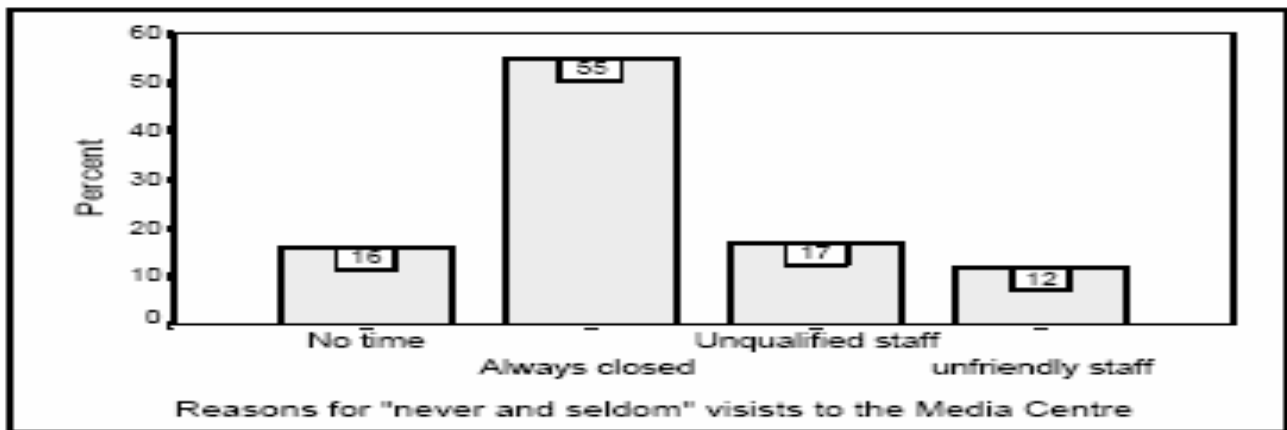


Figure 4 shows that 55% of the respondents did not or seldom visited the school resource centre due to it being always closed; 16% indicated that they had no time to visit the resource centers as it was closed in the mornings prior to the beginning of the school day and in the afternoon after school closes; and, 17% of the respondents indicated that they do not or seldom visit their school resource centre because unqualified staff are unable to assist them.

There can be no justifiable reason for school resource centres being closed for most part of the school day. As was mentioned earlier, exHOD school libraries are adequately resourced. They house thousands of rands of valuable and scarce resources. Crippling rationalization policies and budgetary constraints have rendered severe shortages of resources in most schools. It is thus most absurd to note that important and significant physical plants such as school libraries are being closed and not functioning at an optimum level. It must also be pointed out that these school resource centres are already established and require only the presence of staff to administer and manage them. School governing bodies and other stakeholders must begin to sit down and fashion ways to provide staff to the school resource centres. School resource centres have multi faceted roles as far as promoting teaching and learning are concerned. The provincial department of education should also shoulder blame for the current status quo of school resource centres in exHOD schools. It is rather confusing to note the stance of our provincial department of education. After all, they should understand that these schools are catering to a large extent access to pupils who have been disadvantaged. The unilateral decision of removing all teacher librarians out of their post has to be carried out systemically. A needs analysis and survey would have clearly indicated that those previously advantaged schools which now have a large intake of pupils who are black ought to be allowed the services of a full time teacher librarian. Pupils from communities with large percentages of people who are black who bore the brunt of apartheid policies should be given every opportunity to benefit from scarce resources which appear to be found in exHOD schools, namely resource centres.

“It is...most absurd to note that important and significant physical plants such as school libraries are being closed and not functioning at an optimum level.”

5. Is your school resource centre functioning at its optimum level?

In our survey, 86.5% of the respondents felt their schools' resource centre is not functioning at its optimum level; while only 13.5% indicated that their schools' resource centre is functioning at its optimum level. It was rather unfortunate to note the high percentage of respondents who felt that their schools' resource centre was not functioning at an optimal level. Unfortunate, in the sense that one cannot imagine why such valuable facilities located in schools are not being put into efficient use. Once again the issue of leadership and management comes into the forefront. It is apparent that school principals and managers of budgets do not understand the relevance and importance of school libraries. One cannot simply rely on the state or government. Perhaps school principals should find other innovative ways of manning school libraries in so far as staffing and personnel is concerned.

6. What are some of the reasons for your schools' resource centre not functioning at its optimum level?

Figure 5. Reasons for the school resource centre not functioning at its optimum level.

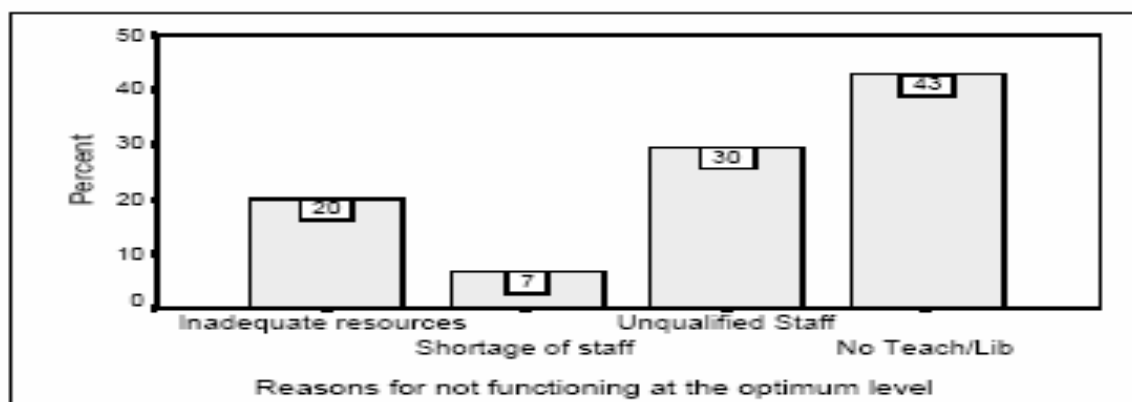


Figure 5 shows that 43% of the respondents attributed the failure of the optimum functioning of their school's resource centre to the non presence of a teacher librarian in managing and administering the resource centre; 30% of the respondents indicated that the presence of unqualified staff did not allow for the optimum functioning of their school's resource centre; and, only 20% of the respondents indicated that their school's resource centre was not functioning at its optimum level as a result of inadequate resources.

Indeed there is no doubt that if school resource centres are to function at an optimum level and service all clientele, then full time teacher librarians will have to be redeployed to manage and administer school resource centres. Every effort should be made to secure the services of teacher librarians. School clerical staff should be encouraged to participate in In Service Education and Training (INSET) programs. The University of Durban Westville, M.L. Sultan Technikon, Natal Technikon, UNISA, Technikon S.A., etc. provide valuable part time courses where school personnel could enroll for developing expertise and skills in the management and administration of school resource centres.

Conclusion

The role and functions of school resource centres are fundamental in promoting and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Resource centres are not luxuries school systems can ill afford. As we approach the new millennium, schools will have to adapt to the demands of the information society and globalization. New policies and frameworks will have to be forged to develop a literate society capable of competing on the world stage. In this regard school resource centres can play a valuable role in sustaining curriculum reform, supporting innovative teaching methods and enhancing teaching strategies. Every effort will have to be made in establishing resource centres in all schools.

South African educational authorities will have to begin to recognize the significance and multi faceted roles resource centres can play in developing quality teaching and learning. Schools, which presently have resource centres, must be strengthened and supported regarding human, physical and technical resources. Those schools, which have begun to assimilate and promote classrooms with students who are racially mixed, will have to be given special treatment. One cannot use parity as the norm for the promotion of resource centres in these schools. ExHOD schools have a large percentage of pupils who are black enrolled and as such, these schools ought to be given every opportunity to open up access of their present available resources to previously disadvantaged communities. Resource centres are generally well established in exHOD schools and thus educational authorities must allow for teacher librarians and other related staff to be redeployed in these schools. This will enable pupils who are and who were previously disadvantaged to gain access to these precious resources in exHOD schools.

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