



Original Article

## An Assessment of the Impact of Library Resources on Academic Performance among Secondary School Students in Tanzania

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### Keywords:

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This paper presents the findings from a study conducted to assess the impact of library resources on the academic performance of secondary school students in Tanzania, with a case study of Mbeya City. The research employed a survey research design, and both systematic and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 261 participants. Data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires designed with five-point Likert scale items, open-ended questions, interviews, and a document analysis guide. Respondents included teachers, students, heads of schools, school librarians, the Municipal Education Officer (MEO), and relevant office documents, all of whom provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, and the Pearson correlation coefficient. It was found that, although Mbeya City schools have made progress in establishing library spaces, their educational impact is limited by inadequate facilities, insufficient materials, untrained staff, and poor digital integration. Effective improvement in academic performance requires not just infrastructure and technology but also qualified librarians, relevant resources, and deliberate incorporation of libraries into teaching. The challenges are multifaceted, spanning structural, technological, managerial, and cultural issues. Based on these findings, this study recommends that efforts on staffing, resource equity, infrastructure, community engagement, and digital access can transform secondary school libraries into vibrant educational hubs.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Tanzania has long been committed to eradicating illiteracy and improving the quality of education through various reforms and policies. One of the key strategies has been the introduction of compulsory primary and secondary education, which has consequently led to an increase in enrolment. According to the World Bank (2016), both primary and secondary school enrolments have continued to rise year after year. During the third phase of the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), under the fifth government regime, the government launched the Tanzania Education Policy (TEP), accompanied by a nationwide campaign to expand student enrolment across all levels of education. One major initiative under this policy was the establishment of ward secondary schools, mandating every ward to build at least one secondary school to increase access and transition from primary to secondary education (Komba, Hizza & Jonathan, 2013).

While these initiatives led to a significant expansion in the number of schools and student enrolment, the development of supporting infrastructure—particularly school libraries—was largely neglected. This contrasts with the assertion by Mgimba and Mwila (2022) that school infrastructure plays a crucial role in education by addressing students' access to the school system and enhancing their academic performance. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), along with private education stakeholders, placed considerable emphasis on classroom construction, but made limited efforts to ensure that schools were equipped with adequate library resources such as textbooks, reference materials, and digital tools essential for effective

teaching and learning. For instance, the Tanzania Institute of Education (2013) reported that the government and local authorities planned to ensure the provision of appropriate infrastructure, adequate standard physical resources, and the development of essential facilities such as classrooms, administrative offices, laboratories, libraries, dormitories, staff houses, and ICT facilities. These strategic plans were well-intentioned, as they aimed to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to make responsible decisions and to access knowledge from various sources, including computers and e-books (Mgimba & Mwila, 2022). However, many schools today either lack libraries altogether or operate libraries that are poorly equipped and underutilised.

This shortfall has important implications for student learning outcomes. Libraries are critical for fostering academic excellence, encouraging independent study, and supporting curriculum delivery. A number of studies strongly suggest the importance of school infrastructure on successful teaching and learning, with the library being among the most critical facilities. Arua and Chinaka (2011) emphasise that a school library is ineffective unless properly utilised and that understanding which materials students use most can help prevent wastage and guide resource acquisition. McGrew, Johnson, Cosio and Evans (2004) add that students attending schools with well-stocked libraries tend to perform better academically, showing higher motivation and reduced absenteeism. Similarly, Agyekum and Filson (2012) found that students in Ghana frequently used library resources to complement classroom learning and engage in active learning practices. Benard and Dulle (2014) highlight the impact of quality library collections on

academic performance, stressing the need for access to diverse materials, including databases and e-books. Afolabi (2016) expands the scope of essential resources to include audio-visual and realia materials, asserting that a well-rounded collection enhances student engagement. Collectively, these studies affirm the vital role of well-resourced and accessible libraries in enhancing students' academic success and overall learning experience. Despite this, the status of school libraries in Tanzania remains under-researched, particularly in terms of how they influence student academic performance.

According to Sumra and Katabaro (2014), in Tanzania, students often perform poorly in national examinations due to poor English proficiency, inadequate instructional materials, and limited access to supportive learning environments such as libraries. Science subjects are particularly affected, with performance consistently lower than in arts subjects. Contributing factors include shortages of classrooms, toilets, water, electricity, and qualified, motivated teachers. Many students shy away from science combinations due to perceived difficulty and lack of academic support—factors which are often tied to insufficient infrastructure, including library services (Lyanga & Chen, 2020). While educational stakeholders acknowledge poor performance in schools, the specific role of library resources remains undocumented or generalised, lacking clarity on their impact across subject areas and school types.

This situation presents a critical knowledge gap, especially in cities like Mbeya, where both public and private secondary schools operate under diverse conditions. Poor academic performance, particularly in rural and ward secondary schools, continues to raise concerns about whether the issue stems from limited availability and use of library services. Therefore, this study was undertaken to assess the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of library resources and their impact on students' academic performance in secondary schools in

Mbeya City, Tanzania. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions: To what extent are library resources available, accessed, and utilised in secondary schools in Mbeya City? What is the relationship between the availability of library resources and students' academic performance? What challenges do students and schools face in accessing and utilising library resources, and what strategies can be employed to address these challenges?

Through this investigation, the study aims to provide evidence-based insights into how library resources can support teaching and learning, improve academic performance, and ultimately contribute to achieving Tanzania's broader educational development goals.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Mbeya Municipality, Tanzania, targeting secondary school students, teachers, heads of schools, librarians, and the Municipal Education Officer (MEO). Ten schools—six public and four private—were randomly selected. Stratified sampling was used for selecting students and teachers, while purposive sampling was applied to heads of schools, librarians, and the MEO. A total of 261 respondents participated in the study. Data collection involved questionnaires (administered to 200 students and 40 teachers), interviews, and document analysis. Questionnaires were appropriate for covering a wide geographic area, minimising interviewer bias, and allowing respondents time for thoughtful responses. They are effective for collecting first-hand data from large, scattered, and diverse populations (Srivastava, 2024). Interviews were conducted with one MEO, ten school heads, ten academic teachers, and ten librarians. This method enabled clarification of key issues and provided deeper insights into library resource availability and its influence on student performance. Interviews allow participants to express views freely and privately, without the constraints of fixed-response formats. For effective outcomes, a logical flow of

questions is essential to guide discussion and allow flexibility for deeper exploration (Taherdoost, 2022). The sample size of 261 was deemed sufficient to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. It captured diverse perspectives across school types and stakeholder groups and yielded robust data for both descriptive and inferential analysis, enhancing the study's generalizability. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise patterns, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Inferential statistics were used to examine relationships between the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of library resources and students' academic performance. Ethical clearance and permissions were obtained from the relevant authorities. Informed consent was secured, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and data were securely stored for academic use only.

## RESULTS

### **The Extent to Which Library Resources Are Available, Accessed, and Utilised in Secondary Schools in Mbeya City**

Under this section, the study seeks to examine the extent to which library resources are available, accessed, and utilised in secondary schools in Mbeya City.

Among the ten secondary schools surveyed in Mbeya City, 79.9% of student participants reported that their schools had a library, while 20.1% indicated the absence of a library. These findings align closely with the responses from teachers, of whom 68.6% expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with the availability of library resources, whereas 17.1% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Furthermore, only 28.1% of student respondents accessed library services from neighbouring schools, while the majority, 71.9%, relied on their own school libraries. Regarding the availability of library staff, the majority of both

teachers and students expressed satisfaction. Specifically, 51.5% of teachers and 64.7% of students reported satisfaction with the presence of library technicians, while 37.2% of teachers and 28.3% of students expressed dissatisfaction. Additional benefits of library resources, according to student responses, include the facilitation of teaching and learning, with 83.9% of students agreeing that the library simplifies this process, and 72.3% expressing satisfaction with the availability and utilisation of textbooks. Correspondingly, 78.6% of students agreed that the library serves as a place to access books and complete assignments and projects. Additionally, 74.5% of students agreed that the library contributes to student retention in schools, suggesting that regular class attendance and focused engagement enhance students' chances of academic success. The study further revealed that 80.4% of student respondents agreed that library resources in the surveyed secondary schools in Mbeya City stimulate their curiosity.

On the other hand, interviews with heads of schools and academic teachers revealed varied experiences regarding library availability and functionality. Approximately 70% of the respondents confirmed the presence of libraries in their respective schools, though the quality and standards of these facilities varied considerably. One head of school stated, *"Yes, we do have a library in our school. It's a well-structured facility with shelves, tables, and sufficient lighting. Students use it regularly for reading and doing assignments."* Similarly, an academic teacher remarked, *"The students benefit a lot from our library. It supports both classwork and research. However, more space and updated materials are needed to meet growing demand."*

Despite these positive reports, about 30% of respondents acknowledged limitations in their schools' library facilities. Several indicated that students conducted library-related activities in makeshift or improvised spaces. For instance, one academic teacher noted, *"Although we refer to it as a library, it is essentially a repurposed classroom."*



*It lacks standard features like proper shelving, seating arrangements, and ventilation." Another respondent added, "We converted one of the unused rooms into a library. It's not ideal, but it serves the purpose. We hope to improve it as resources become available."*

The interviews further highlighted challenges in resource adequacy and management. One head of school commented, *"Our library exists, but it's not fully functional. There are some textbooks and reference books, but we lack computers and internet services, which are essential in today's learning environment."* Another teacher shared, *"We don't have a standard library building. Students use a small room that has a few books. It's better than nothing, but far from what a library should offer."* Additionally, some respondents raised concerns about personnel, as one interviewee observed, *"The absence of a trained librarian makes it difficult to manage the library effectively. Sometimes students misuse the materials due to a lack of supervision."*

These responses collectively suggest that while most schools have made efforts to establish library spaces, significant disparities exist in terms of infrastructure, resources, and professional staffing, thereby impacting the effective utilisation of library services for academic enhancement.

In the same line, the City Secondary Education Officer (CSEO) acknowledged disparities in library infrastructure across secondary schools in Mbeya City, particularly emphasising challenges faced by public and community-based schools. When asked about the general status of school libraries, the officer stated:

*"To be honest, not all secondary schools in Mbeya City have adequate library facilities. Many of the schools that lack standard libraries are public institutions, especially community secondary schools. Some operate without any designated library building, while others use*

*improvised rooms that fall short of minimum standards."*

The officer further elaborated on the implications of these infrastructural gaps:

*"This situation calls for urgent intervention from the government and other stakeholders. Without proper libraries, students lack access to essential learning resources that could support academic performance. The disparities in infrastructure contribute to inequality in educational outcomes."*

Concerning staffing, the CSEO expressed concern over the shortage of qualified library personnel across schools:

*"In most schools we visited or surveyed, there is someone assigned to manage the library, but these individuals are often teachers with no professional training in library science. None of them is permanently employed as librarians. In some cases, temporary staff are engaged, but again, without the necessary qualifications. This compromises the quality of service delivery in school libraries."*

The CSEO concluded by emphasising the importance of investing in both physical infrastructure and human resources to ensure school libraries fulfil their intended academic support roles. These insights highlight the systemic challenges that limit the full potential of library services in enhancing learning outcomes among secondary school students in Mbeya City.

### **The Relationship Between the Availability of Library Resources and Students' Academic Performance**

In this section, researchers sought to examine the relationship between the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of library resources and students' academic performance.

**Table 1: Shows Whether the Contribution of Different Library Resources to Students' Academic Performance was Statistically Significant**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1(Constant)	3.986	1.540		2.588	.011
Availability of the library	-.506	.188	-.259	-2.696	.008
Availability of textbooks in the library	-.133	.181	-.062	-.738	.461
Availability of reference books in the library	.407	.095	.304	4.264	.000
Availability of computers in the library	-.195	.128	-.113	-1.533	.127
Availability of Internet in the library	.073	.100	.058	.731	.466
Availability of librarian services	1.349	.157	.778	8.612	.000
The standard of the school library	.007	.110	.005	.065	.948
Availability of space for students working	-.552	.169	-.309	-3.257	.001
Ratio of students to textbooks in the library	-.106	.142	-.065	-.747	.456
Availability of Newspapers in the Library	-.104	.117	-.069	-.891	.374
Arrangement of books in library shelves	-.007	.169	-.004	-.044	.965
Availability of past papers	.003	.128	.002	.025	.980

**a. Dependent Variable: Improved Students' Performance**

As presented in Table 1, respondents' data indicate that certain library resources and services available in the surveyed schools are significantly related to students' academic performance, while others are not statistically significant. Notably, the relationship between internet availability and students' academic performance was found to be statistically insignificant ( $p = 0.466$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that internet access in the library did not contribute meaningfully to students' academic outcomes within this study context. Similarly, other

resources demonstrated no significant association with academic performance, including the availability of past examination papers ( $p = 0.980$ ), arrangement of books in the library ( $p = 0.965$ ), student-to-book ratio ( $p = 0.456$ ), and the overall standard of the school library ( $p = 0.985$ ). Conversely, the remaining library resources and services analysed in Table 1 exhibited statistically significant relationships with students' academic performance, underscoring their potential impact on educational achievement.

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.724 <sup>a</sup>	.525	.469	1.800

The model shows a strong positive relationship between the combined availability and quality of various library resources and academic achievement, with an R value of 0.724, indicating a substantial correlation. The R Square value of 0.525 suggests that approximately 52.5% of the variance in students' academic performance can be explained by the predictors included in the model. The Adjusted R Square of 0.469 accounts for the number of predictors and provides a more conservative

estimate of the model's explanatory power. The standard error of the estimate is 1.800, reflecting the average distance between observed and predicted academic performance scores.

On the other hand, interview responses from academic teachers, heads of schools, and the Municipal Education Officer (MEO) are presented as follows: For instance, one head of school stated:

*"Yes, our school has a library, and it is accessible to both teachers and students. However, in practice, only a portion of students visit the library weekly. I would estimate that just about 60% of them manage to attend at least once a week."* Another academic teacher noted: *"In some streams, it might take more than two weeks before students use the library. They are not yet in the habit of using it regularly unless they are given a specific reason to do so."* Similarly, a second head of school observed: *"The availability of the library alone does not mean students will read. Many of them lack intrinsic motivation to read or borrow books unless pushed by the teacher."*

The Municipal Education Officer (MEO) offered a broader perspective: *"From my professional experience, I've observed that students generally show low motivation to read or borrow books for private study. Even where facilities exist, regular reading culture is still lacking among many students."* Another academic teacher explained a common strategy used to encourage library use: *"What we often do is assign tasks that require students to consult books found only in the library. That way, they have to go there in order to complete the assignment."* Moreover, one head of school also added: *"We sometimes use recall strategies—following up with students on whether they've visited the library or consulted certain books. This helps to reinforce a culture of reading, though it requires consistent effort."*

Overall, the findings demonstrate a positive relationship between the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of library resources and students' academic performance. As presented in Table 1, respondents confirmed a significant positive correlation between the availability of various library resources—such as libraries themselves, textbooks, and reference materials—and academic achievement in secondary schools. The availability of these resources and services contributes to

approximately 72.4% of students' academic performance.

## **Challenges and Their Proposed Solutions in Accessing and Utilising Library Resources**

### ***Challenges in Accessing and Utilising Library Resources***

This section presents and discusses the challenges in accessing and utilising library resources. Several obstacles hindered students' ability to use the library as needed. Common challenges included overcrowding, shortages of chairs, limited electrical outlets and computers, a lack of necessary software on available computers, and inefficient use of library space. The findings are categorised thematically, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

### ***Inadequate ICT Infrastructure and Internet Access***

The study revealed a significant shortage of ICT infrastructure in school libraries. A total of 62.0% of student respondents rated internet access in school libraries as unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory, while only 17.4% expressed satisfaction. Additionally, 47.8% of students reported dissatisfaction with the number and quality of available computers, compared to 34.2% who were satisfied. Furthermore, 75% of teachers disagreed that students were effectively using library computers to access learning materials.

This is consistent with interview responses from teachers and librarians. One librarian stated:

*"Students fail to access up-to-date information because many computers lack internet connection, and some are completely non-functional."* Similarly, the Municipal Education Officer acknowledged the issue, stating that, *"The internet challenge in many schools has persisted for a long time. The government is aware of this and has long-term plans to improve infrastructure."* Additionally, heads of schools emphasised financial limitations.

For instance, one head of school stated, *"The budget for purchasing computers or paying for internet services is not prioritised in the capitation grants we receive."*

### **Limited Access to Newspapers, Magazines, and Scholarly Materials**

Approximately 45.6% of students indicated that their school libraries did not provide access to newspapers or magazines, while only 35.8% expressed satisfaction. Teachers corroborated this, with 50% confirming the complete absence of magazines in their school libraries. In the interview, one librarian attributed this to discontinued budgets that, *"Previously, we used to receive funds for newspapers and magazines, but now that budget no longer exists."* Heads of schools shared similar sentiments that *"The lack of a library budget has affected the availability of up-to-date materials like newspapers and magazines."* This lack of current reading materials limits students' civic awareness and critical thinking. As one student noted, *"We would love to read newspapers to know what is happening in the world, but the library does not even have one copy."*

### **Inadequate Library Space and Overcrowding**

Overcrowding emerged as a recurrent problem. Students and teachers reported a lack of seating and reading space. Quantitative data showed that 41.9% of students were dissatisfied with the amount of time and space available for library use. Conversely, 47.3% were satisfied, likely from private or better-equipped schools. On the side of teachers, one of them stated, *"There are up to six streams per class level, with about 70 students each. This makes the library too small for the student population."* In the same line, students confirmed the issue whereby one of them asserted that, *"When you arrive at the library, all the seats are occupied; others are left standing or return without reading."*

### **Poor Physical Infrastructure and Environmental Conditions**

A significant portion of the library facilities lacked basic structural elements, including fixed shelving and proper ventilation. In six schools, books were stored in movable or makeshift shelves, leading to frequent noise and disorganisation. For instance, one librarian had this to write, *"In our school, books are stored in boxes. When students search for books, they make a lot of noise."* Students also noted environmental discomfort, stating that *"The library is very hot, with no proper ventilation or good windows. The furniture is also inadequate."* These conditions discourage consistent library use and negatively affect student concentration.

### **Shortage of Library Personnel and Poor Resource Management**

The absence of trained librarians was a concern across schools. Most schools had only one staff member assigned to manage large student populations. This was reported to cause inefficiencies in book lending, tracking, and organisation. For instance, one librarian stated that, *"Since I'm the only one managing the library, I can't return books promptly before another group enters."* Book loss was also attributed to poor management, as one teacher noted, *"There is a high rate of book loss due to lack of proper storage and follow-up systems."*

### **Limited Student Engagement and Orientation**

About 60% of academic officers and heads of schools reported low student interest in using the library. Some schools resorted to monitoring attendance to ensure library usage. For instance, one head of school reported that, *"Many students do not go to the library unless they are forced by teachers."* Moreover, some students lacked the skills to navigate library resources, as stated by one of them, *"I don't know how to search for the books I need; when I go to the library, I end up wandering without success."* This underscores the need for library orientation programs and capacity-building initiatives.

### **Lack of Multimedia and Technological Tools**



According to 87.5% of teachers, school libraries lacked essential multimedia tools such as CD players and tape recorders, which are vital for language learning and digital engagement. In the same line, one teacher stated that, *"There are no multimedia tools at all. This prevents students from learning in a modern way."* This further limits students' exposure to modern learning methodologies and digital literacy.

### ***Financial Constraints and Budgetary Limitations***

The overarching theme across all issues was limited financial support. Heads of schools reported that capitation grants from the government were insufficient to cover library needs, including ICT, reading materials, and staffing. For instance, one head of school reported that, *"The capitation grant provided is too small; we cannot even allocate funds to improve the library."*

In summary, the challenges in accessing and utilising library resources across the studied schools are multifaceted, stemming primarily from inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, limited ICT tools, overcrowded and poorly maintained facilities, lack of trained personnel, and low student engagement. These constraints not only hinder students' ability to effectively use library services but also compromise the broader goal of fostering a culture of academic inquiry and independent learning. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from school leadership, government, and stakeholders to ensure libraries are adequately resourced, accessible, and aligned with students' academic needs.

### ***Suggestions Against the Challenges of the Availability, Access and Utilisation of Library Resources in Secondary Schools***

The findings from all respondent categories across the ten surveyed secondary schools revealed two major dimensions influencing library resource availability and utilisation: the ownership status (public vs. private) and the presence or absence of a functional library facility. These two variables

significantly shaped the access and use of library services, with private schools generally better equipped with library infrastructure and resources, while many public, particularly community-based schools, lagged behind in both access and adequacy. This is why most of the improvement suggestions came from respondents in community-based schools. The following issues were recommended by the respondents as thematically.

### ***Strengthening Librarian Professionalism and Role Clarity***

It was suggested that librarians should be exempted from classroom teaching duties to allow full focus on managing library services effectively. For instance, a librarian from a public secondary school expressed that, *"I am both the librarian and a teacher. It's difficult to do justice to both tasks. If I could be left to focus solely on library work, I believe I would do a much better job."*

### ***Equitable Distribution of Learning Resources***

It was recommended that there should be a balanced allocation of reading materials across all subjects, especially between science and the arts. One academic teacher from a public secondary school explained that, *"We have plenty of science books, but for subjects like history, civics, and literature, we often rely on a single copy or none at all."*

### ***Maintenance and Responsible Use of Library Facilities***

It was suggested that schools with existing libraries should ensure proper maintenance and responsible usage to avoid unnecessary damage or loss. This was highlighted by the Municipal Education Officer stating that, *"Schools with functioning libraries must take care of them. Teachers and students should be trained in proper usage to avoid damages that lead to unnecessary replacement costs."*

### ***Construction of Dedicated Library Infrastructure***

The responses from respondents indicated that schools lacking library rooms should construct proper library facilities to provide a conducive

reading and learning environment. One librarian from a community secondary school expressed that, *“We store books in cartons and sometimes in corners of classrooms. There’s no specific room. If we had a proper library, students could read and work in peace.”*

### ***Community-Based Interim Solutions for Library Space***

It was recommended that, while waiting for government-built libraries, schools and local communities should find alternative study spaces. This was insisted by the Municipal Education Officer who said that, *“While we await new buildings, schools can temporarily use available rooms or community halls. What matters is that students have a place to read and study.”*

### ***Bridging the Digital Divide Through Partnerships***

The findings show that schools near institutions with internet access should arrange scheduled visits to allow students to interact with digital learning resources. The Municipal Education Officer stated that, *“Where schools are near institutions with internet, teachers should arrange weekly visits for students to access digital content. It’s not perfect, but it’s a start.”*

In summary, the suggestions offered by respondents across the surveyed schools underscore the need for a multifaceted approach to improving the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of library resources. Key among these are strengthening librarian professionalism, ensuring equitable resource distribution, maintaining existing facilities, constructing dedicated library infrastructure, leveraging community support for interim study spaces, and bridging the digital divide through strategic partnerships. Collectively, these measures aim to create a more inclusive, functional, and student-centred library environment that supports academic achievement and cultivates a culture of independent learning.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Availability, Access, and Utilisation of Library Resources in Mbeya City**

The study’s findings demonstrate that while most secondary schools in Mbeya City report having a library, substantial disparities exist in library quality, accessibility, and staffing. Approximately 80% of student and teacher respondents confirmed the presence of a library; however, qualitative evidence reveals that about one-third of these facilities are makeshift spaces—often repurposed classrooms—lacking standard features such as proper shelving, ventilation, and lighting.

This echoes findings from Dodoma Municipality, Tanzania, where fewer than 36% of secondary schools had libraries, and only 44% of those employed trained librarians, highlighting persistent infrastructural and capacity gaps (Mgina & Lwehabura, 2011). Similarly, research in rural Uganda showed that the presence of a library positively influenced students’ reading behaviours and academic engagement, but that impact was limited when facilities were poorly resourced (Dent, 2006). Despite infrastructural limitations, access and utilisation levels appear promising: over 70% of students reported using the library at least weekly for assignments and independent study. Students overwhelmingly agreed (80–84%) that libraries simplify teaching and learning and stimulate curiosity—findings consistent with broader literature indicating that school libraries enhance academic outcomes even after accounting for socioeconomic factors (National Library of New Zealand, n.d.)

Crucially, the study affirms a positive correlation between resource availability—such as textbooks, reference materials, and library staffing—and academic performance. This aligns with results from Meru County, Kenya, where researchers found a strong correlation ( $r \approx 0.75$ ) between well-equipped libraries and secondary exam performance (Diki, Thurania & Mwendwa, 2024). Similarly, in

Wakiso District, Uganda, library management, staffing, and planning were found to significantly affect student outcomes (Kabanda, 2020). Persistent challenges include the widespread absence of digital infrastructure. Many libraries lacked internet access, computers, CDs, newspapers, and professionally trained librarians. This reality undermines libraries' roles as effective learning hubs in the digital era. The University of Namibia study further supports this, noting that libraries require adequate ICT, strong collections, and qualified staff to impact academic achievement meaningfully (Nengomasha, Uutoni & Yule, 2012).

Therefore, based on findings obtained regarding the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of library resources in Mbeya City, this paper argues that while Mbeya City schools have made some strides in providing physical library spaces, meaningful utilisation and educational impact are constrained by substandard facilities, limited materials, untrained personnel, and poor integration of digital resources. Addressing these deficiencies—particularly through infrastructure improvement, technological investment, and librarian training—will be essential for realising the full potential of libraries as academic support centres.

### **Relationship Between Library Resources and Students' Academic Performance**

Regarding the question of the relationship between library resources and students' academic performance, the regression analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between library resources and academic performance, with an R value of 0.724 and an  $R^2$  of 0.525, meaning approximately 52.5% of performance variance is explained by the model. This confirms the substantial influence of library availability, access, and utilisation on students' academic outcomes (Beile, Choudhury, Mulvihill & Wang, 2020). It was found that the availability of a trained librarian demonstrated the strongest positive effect on performance ( $\beta = 0.778$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by reference books ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These

findings echo research showing that staffing and quality collections significantly boost student achievement—even after controlling for poverty or school size (Lance & Kachel, 2018; Martinez, 2024). Surprisingly, the availability of the Internet ( $p = .466$ ) and computers ( $p = .127$ ) did not emerge as statistically significant predictors. This suggests that infrastructure alone is insufficient without integration into curriculum, training, or student motivation—findings consistent with broader literature emphasising that access must be matched by effective use strategies (Martinez, 2024). Additionally, variables such as library space, book arrangement, student-to-textbook ratio, and availability of past papers did not significantly predict performance. This underscores that the mere presence of space or materials is not sufficient to drive learning outcomes unless human and organisational factors, like librarian guidance, are in place.

On the other hand, the quantified qualitative data showed that only 60% of students visited the library weekly, with the remainder attending irregularly or only under compulsion. One school head stated, *“Just about 60% of them manage to attend at least once a week”*; another noted that students *“are not yet in the habit of using it regularly unless they are given a specific reason”*; the MEO observed that intrinsic reading motivation was low. These findings reinforce the idea that student motivation and structured, mandated use of library resources play a critical role in translating availability into academic performance benefits. Consequently, academic libraries are increasingly exploring and implementing evidence-based strategies to demonstrate and enhance the impact of their resources and services on students' academic success and overall learning outcomes (De Groote & Scoulas, 2022). Moreover, teachers described requiring library-based assignments and employing recall strategies to enforce library usage. These pedagogical practices reflect broader recommendations that integrating library-based tasks into the curriculum can effectively foster

library utilisation while reinforcing a culture of reading and research skills. In this context, libraries serve as integral components of the educational process, not only promoting academic achievement but also enriching the overall learning experience. By supporting the curriculum, advancing literacy development, and nurturing lifelong reading habits, libraries contribute significantly to students' holistic growth—achieved through the provision of carefully curated print collections and the strategic integration of educational technologies (Muvhunzwi, 2012).

To conclude the discussion of this section, the findings underscore that while the presence of library infrastructure and digital tools is essential, their impact on academic performance is significantly enhanced when supported by qualified librarian services, relevant reference materials, and deliberate integration into the teaching and learning process. The evidence further highlights that student motivation and consistent engagement with library resources are critical for achieving academic improvement. Therefore, to maximise the educational value of libraries, it is imperative for schools to implement curriculum-linked tasks, provide guided access, and apply structured follow-up strategies. These measures not only encourage effective library utilisation but also cultivate a sustained culture of academic inquiry and self-directed learning.

### **Challenges in Accessing and Utilising Library Resources**

The study in Mbeya City reveals a multifaceted set of constraints—technological, infrastructural, managerial, and engagement-related—that impede the effectiveness of secondary school libraries. These findings resonate with broader research across both Tanzania and the wider African context. It was noted that a significant majority of students (62%) rated library internet access poorly, with 47.8% dissatisfied with computer availability. This muted impact of ICT is not surprising; even in wider Tanzania, internet penetration and school library

access are hindered by poor infrastructure and unreliable connection (Tarimo & Kavishe, 2017; Kammer, Atiso & Borteye, 2025). Access to educational technology has emerged as a critical factor in bridging the digital divide and promoting more equitable learning opportunities. While educational technology holds immense potential to enhance learning experiences, limited access remains a major barrier in many regions (Lyanda, Koteng, Ong'unya, 2025).

Physical space constraints are a consistent bottleneck. In Mbeya, overcrowding and lack of seating and reading areas emerged as critical challenges. This aligns with Tanzanian studies demonstrating that overcrowded classrooms negatively influence teaching and learning effectiveness (Likuru & Mwila, 2022). Without adequate physical space, both instructional delivery and library usability suffer. Another challenge shown is that many schools lacked structural essentials—fixed shelving, ventilation, and proper furniture—causing disorder and distraction. Libraries where books were stored in makeshift boxes further compromised learning conditions. This parallels findings from other African schools where classroom libraries are extemporised due to space constraints, limiting both access and effective management (Olaleye, Ajayi, Oyebola & Ajayi, 2017).

Inadequate staffing and resource management was noted as a significant challenge whereby most schools operated with a single staff member managing entire library functions, leading to inefficiencies in lending, shelving, and recovery. Similar issues were reported in studies conducted in Ilala District, where limited librarian presence and infrequent library use were associated with poor academic practices. Consistently, it was found that the majority of students were not effectively utilising their school libraries. This challenge was further reflected in their reading habits, which remained unsatisfactory, as most students reported reading only occasionally (Nguzo & Kuboja, 2023).



Additionally, low student motivation and a lack of information literacy lowered library usage—a pattern echoed in Nigeria, where irregular library use correlated with poorer academic scores in tests and examinations (Jato, Ogunniyi, & Olubiyo, 2014). Hence, effective library services require active user orientation and embedded usage habits within school culture.

Moreover, lack of multimedia resources is noted as among of the challenges, whereby with 87.5% of schools lacking multimedia tools, students missed out on modern learning modalities. The absence of such resources limits exposure to effective audiovisual content, thereby constraining holistic academic support. This challenge went along with financial constraints issues whereby consistently low capitation funding was noted to affect libraries' ability to maintain ICT infrastructure, procure reading materials, or hire trained staff. This underfunding aligns with patterns identified across Tanzania, where textbook scarcity and poor infrastructure directly impede student performance. Several factors contribute to students' failure in their Form Four examinations, including the lack of trained teachers, inadequate school infrastructure, and insufficient library resources. A key underlying issue is the high cost of textbooks, which remains unaffordable for many families given their economic situation (Laddunuri, 2012).

Therefore, to conclude this subsection, researchers noted that the challenges in Mbeya City's secondary school libraries are structural (infrastructure and space), technological (ICT access), managerial (staffing and resource handling), and cultural (student engagement). These systemic issues collectively constrain the potential of libraries to become vibrant academic centres. Addressing them requires not just investment in infrastructure but also capacity-building, user engagement strategies, and consistent policy support to foster environments conducive to learning and inquiry.

### **Suggested Strategies to Address Library Access and Utilisation Challenges**

Findings from respondents across the ten surveyed secondary schools highlighted two key factors affecting library resource availability and use: school ownership (public vs. private) and the presence of a functional library. Private schools generally had better-equipped libraries, while many public, especially community-based, schools lagged behind. As a result, most improvement suggestions came from respondents in these under-resourced schools. Notably, their recommendations align with proven strategies for library development and education quality improvement in similar contexts. Primarily, strengthening librarian professionalism and clarifying their roles was strongly recommended, as respondents highlighted the burden on librarians who also serve as classroom teachers, limiting their ability to manage library services effectively. Extensive research attests to the academic benefits when librarians are professionally trained and focused on dedicated library roles. Research shows a positive relationship between the presence of full-time, qualified school librarians and higher student performance on standards-based tests in language arts, reading, and writing—regardless of student demographics or school characteristics. Schools with well-developed library programs and librarians who actively share their expertise across the school community tend to experience notable improvements in student achievement (Lance & Kachel, 2018).

Equitable resource allocation was also recommended, which calls for balanced distribution of learning materials, particularly between arts and sciences, is essential for providing inclusive academic support. Duncan and Kayoro (2022) highlight how initiatives such as Book Aid International's *Inspiring Readers* program have promoted reading across African schools by fostering collaboration between schools and libraries. Through the program, public librarians were trained to equip teachers with the skills needed

to manage school libraries and provided ongoing support. This significantly improved students' reading habits, attitudes, and confidence. As a result, children developed a more positive outlook toward reading and demonstrated increased self-esteem and confidence.

The maintenance and sustainable use of library facilities was also recommended. For example, the MEO's suggestion to nurture and use existing libraries responsibly reflects a global understanding of the importance of library preservation. Although specific studies from similar contexts are limited, libraries play a vital role in both the formal and informal learning sectors across Africa. They support education within schools and communities and are essential for promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality learning for all. Libraries serve not only traditional students but also working individuals, online learners, school dropouts, and out-of-school children—ensuring access to learning opportunities at all stages of life (Osuigwe, 2023). Similarly, the construction of dedicated library infrastructure in schools was also recommended. This responds to the reality that many secondary schools lack designated library facilities, which hinders resource-based learning. For example, a study by Simba (2018) reveals that the condition of most secondary school resource centres in Tanzania is generally poor, with very few having functional facilities. To enable School Library Resource Centres to effectively support resource-based learning and improve education quality, the study recommends that the government prioritise their development by providing adequate human, infrastructural, and financial support.

Additionally, community-based interim solutions were recommended. This approach involves using temporary spaces, such as community halls, while awaiting the construction of government-funded libraries—an idea that echoes successful precedents in other contexts. For instance, in South Africa, academic libraries have expanded their community engagement by converting unused classrooms into

libraries, donating books and equipment, and promoting reading beyond school settings. These initiatives support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education and lifelong learning. Key efforts include teaching information literacy to students and librarians, promoting reading and writing, hosting library visits, and donating school supplies, computers, and computer literacy training. These findings demonstrate the potential of academic libraries to transform lives beyond academia through effective community engagement (Bangani, 2024). Moreover, fostering institutional partnerships to bridge the digital divide was identified as a critical intervention. Collaboration with nearby organisations to facilitate digital access reflects broader practice. Research from Ghana shows that academic libraries boost quality education by offering information literacy training, donating equipment, and providing secondary learners access to labs—reducing the digital divide. Investments in digital collections, literacy programs, and collaborations between librarians, faculty, and other stakeholders integrate library services into distance education and strengthen student success (Banleman, Dukper & Dabontin, 2023). Therefore, enhancing library support services in schools requires continuous investment in digital resources, strengthening information literacy instruction, and fostering collaborations and partnerships.

Therefore, in concluding this part, we believe that these well-considered recommendations—spanning professional staffing, resource equity, infrastructure development, community engagement, and digital accessibility—provide a cohesive blueprint for transforming secondary school libraries into dynamic educational hubs. With sustained policy support and investment, these strategies have strong potential to improve academic outcomes and foster lifelong learning.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the availability and utilisation of library resources in secondary schools across Mbeya City present a generally promising outlook, with many schools hosting well-structured libraries featuring adequate ventilation, lighting, spacious reading areas, and well-organised bookshelves, strategically situated in quiet, learner-friendly environments. Key services—including access to textbooks, reference materials, and librarians—are reported to be satisfactorily accessible by both students and teachers, with regular weekly usage indicating meaningful integration into the teaching and learning process. The findings reveal a positive correlation between the availability of these resources and improved student academic performance, as libraries serve not only as hubs for independent learning and research but also as critical support systems for easing the instructional workload of teachers. However, despite this progress, significant challenges remain, particularly the absence of essential digital infrastructure such as internet connectivity and computers, alongside the lack of educational media, periodicals, and professionally trained librarians, all of which constrain the full potential of libraries as comprehensive learning centres. To maximise the educational benefits of school libraries, there is a pressing need for sustained investment in digital resources, human capacity development, and the diversification of learning materials to enhance the libraries' contribution to academic excellence in Mbeya City's secondary schools.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the availability and effectiveness of library resources in secondary schools:

- The government should allocate a comprehensive budget specifically for constructing and equipping libraries in secondary schools, particularly in underserved community schools.

- Reliable internet connectivity should be made accessible in all secondary schools to facilitate access to up-to-date digital academic resources and enhance students' and teachers' information literacy.
- School administrations should ensure that libraries remain open for at least five hours during weekends to enable students to engage in extended reading, assignment completion, and project work.
- Secondary school libraries should be regularly stocked with newspapers and magazines to promote awareness of current affairs and enrich the teaching and learning process.
- The government and education stakeholders should invest in training and employing professional librarians who are dedicated solely to managing library services rather than combining them with teaching duties.
- To promote a reading culture and lifelong learning, the government, NGOs, and private sector partners should collaborate to establish well-resourced children's libraries from primary through secondary school levels.

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