

ORIGINAL RESEARCH: The role of libraries in ‘*glocal*’ education at Ama town, Shimane, Japan

Joseph Quarshie¹ and Tomoko Nanka²

Abstract

Modern libraries have evolved by incorporating information communication technology, marketing principles and user orientation to remain competitive and significant as information service providers. This research investigates how libraries may provide and promote materials on ‘*glocal*’ education in a small town in rural Japan called Ama-cho, and explores the library users’ perception of materials provided and the strategies used to promote them. The paper follows this single case with an embedded units design; data from 13 interviews and 50 questionnaires were collected and analyzed. The investigation found that the libraries selection of materials was guided by the town hall’s development agenda. In addition, it was found that librarians mainly employed visual methods, information technology and interpersonal skills to promote materials on ‘*glocal*’ education.

Keywords: ‘*Glocal*’ education, Information providers, Japan, Libraries, Librarians, Library users.

Introduction

Historically, libraries have been an integral part of formal education (especially schools) as well as public and private “storehouses of knowledge” (Lor 2004). As public spaces, libraries also serve as meeting places for scholars, avid readers and the general public. This property of libraries fosters interaction between library users. In today’s knowledge economy, information provided at school and community libraries is significant for both education and wealth creation (Caidi 2006). With the proliferation of internet use coupled with competition from modernized bookstores, among other things, libraries are beginning to redefine their services in order to attract and retain users.

In recent times, there seem to be a growing interest in maintaining or sharing a community’s local identity while embracing globalization. Among other things this has resulted in the coining and use of the term ‘*glocalization*’ which summarily expresses the notion of “think global, act local” or “think local, act global”. In their quest for sustainable development, the town authorities of Ama-cho (one of the four islands that make Oki District of Shimane Prefecture) pursued a fiscal discipline to overturn the budget deficit, initiated educational reform to save the high school from being closed by the prefectural government, and deepened their attention on supporting businesses that make use of local resources. The town authorities’ approach to sustainable socio-economic development is based on developing local products (goods, services and culture) using local and global know-how for a global market.

As information centers, Ama-cho libraries located at the town hall’s development center, the senior high school, junior high school and elementary schools, attempt to support the town authorities’ vision of ‘*glocalization*’ by providing information (mainly books) about local treasures as well as global thoughts and trends. In this context, we were interested in finding answers to the following questions:

1. How do the libraries provide information on ‘*glocal*’ education in Ama town?
2. How do the libraries in Ama town promote ‘*glocal*’ education?

¹Ama Town Hall, Shimane Prefecture, Japan e-mail: jqcruse@gmail.com

²Oki Dozen High School, Shimane Prefecture, Japan

3. What are the library users' perceptions of materials on 'glocal' education provided by the libraries in Ama town?
4. What do library users think about promotion of materials on 'glocal' education by the libraries in Ama town?

To review the efforts of the libraries in providing information for 'glocal' education and draw up lessons for implementation in other islands or small communities, this research seeks to undertake the following:

1. Discuss the basis for the choice of materials on 'glocal' education by libraries in Ama town.
2. Analyze the methods employed by the libraries to promote materials on 'glocal' education.
3. Investigate the perception of library users on the relevance of materials provided as well as the effectiveness of methods used by the libraries to provide 'glocal' education.

The following sections provide a review of literature on the evolving role of libraries and librarians especially with respect to education and in the context of 'glocal' education. This is followed by the research design, description of the methods employed in the study, an analysis of the findings and discussion of the results.

Role of libraries in general: There are many types of libraries owing to the core customer base they were built to serve. Libraries can be grouped under national, academic and research, public, school, special and corporate themes (Bakken 1998, 82). On a school campus or a community, the library is a "social place where interactions" ensue (Line 2002, 83). For example, junior high school students in Ama town occasionally hang out at the central library on weekends. A few final year high school students also use the high school library for group studies after school.

The physical features of a library influence its ability to deliver quality services. Contrary to a lay point of view that physical libraries are designed to aid movement and study, Line (2002) asserts that "*libraries were often not planned or operated to suit human beings*" (Line 2002: 73). Line's paper holds that architectural choices such as opting for beauty over function, flights of stairs and no elevator between the floors, heavy doors, poor or no signposting with uniformed officials are responsible for making libraries user unfriendly (Line 2002: 74). Features such as lighting and sound level also count in creating a conducive atmosphere within a library (Line 2002: 83). There are libraries that have special services for the disabled. Some libraries provide reading materials in braille. Additionally, others have audiobooks and physical environments tailored to facilitate movement of physically disabled library users (Kerscher 2006).

In addition to purchasing books, libraries also identify, locate and record indigenous knowledge to raise awareness about it and promote it. Such materials include sound recordings, films, videos, broadcast media and digital material (Lor 2004). At the American Indian tribal colleges, the college library plays a critical role in achieving the colleges' goal of "preserving and communicating traditional culture" (Duran 1991: 396) via audio recordings, etc. Bakken (1998) hints that as libraries gravitate towards digitization, libraries should protect indigenous knowledge against the effects of globalization (Bakken 1998).

With the proliferation of internet use, one may doubt the future usefulness of physical libraries. Line (1996) argues that the physical place of the library is still important in educational institutions. More so because it may be near impossible to digitize all books (Line 2002). Not dismissing the use of scientific management theory and IT for the purposes of preservation, Gorman adds that libraries ought to collect and promote books, which is more expansive (Gorman 2007: 488). Compared to books, information sourced

from the internet may be from “less reliable sources” (Ingwersen 1999: 11). Libraries have not been left out of the digital age. Many libraries have computerized systems for borrowing or searching for books from their collection or from other libraries they are connected with. Increasingly, there are so-called PC corners or media centers equipped with desktop computers in libraries. Some libraries also provide free internet (via Wi-Fi) connections for library users. According to Castelli (2006) libraries have become a mediator for IT infrastructure and library users.

With the use of information communication technology (ICT) physical libraries can serve library users with materials from other libraries via interlibrary loaning and partnerships. In the case of higher education, the partnerships encompass “academic and public librarians, computing professional, college and university administrators, faculty, publishers and vendors” (Kirk and Bartelstein 1999). Moreover as business people, librarians must work together with other professionals to “design, evaluate and maintain output processes, including economic aspects of collections” (Ingwersen 1999: 15)

If information is considered as a currency, then libraries in their capacities as repositories of information become a tool for wealth creation. Armed with digital information, libraries have the potential to redistribute information needed for business activity and wealth creation in hitherto information-deprived sectors of a society or an economy (Bakken 1998).

Adult education: Some libraries have expanded their services to encompass involvement in adult education or literacy. These take the form of library outreach programs, computer-assisted learning, and tutoring or literacy classes. Within the context of adult literacy, libraries distribute materials to persons that have been institutionalized in places such as hospitals, prisons, rehab centers and elderly homes (Schamber 1990). In recent times, libraries are more likely to have self-help books for young adults and middle-aged people especially during economic recessions characterized by low employment and frequent job changes. In a study involving 49 library policymakers across 4 countries, Caidi (2006) posits that libraries can indeed play a critical role in the political economy of a country by helping library users acquire skills that will empower them to contribute to society. In other words, libraries have turned into a “critical infrastructure for research and business in today’s knowledge economy” (Caidi 2006: 210). Furthermore, within the broader framework of adult literacy, libraries can be used as tools for disseminating information to rural communities to stifle misinformation and promote conflict resolution (Echezona 2007). Such projects can be carried out through mobile libraries, seminars and telecommunication services like text messages.

School libraries: Libraries are a necessity in high school education. Apart from their traditional roles of providing a place for further study and developing a reading habit, the library space in some schools doubles as a classroom, relaxing spot or space for club activities. Dent found a link between students’ library use and their academic performance, and also that the school library is useful for teachers as well (Dent 2006: 404-405).

Role of librarians: The role of the school librarian in the delivery of education as a service is more often than not unrecognized by the teaching staff and school authorities. Ideally, the school librarian ought to be consulted in the procurement of textbooks, additional readings and other media resources that compliment classroom instruction. Unfortunately, the role of the school librarian is mostly limited to keeping the library clean, quiet, organized and recommending books to highly motivated students. Agreeably, Ragle (2011) notes that the roles of library media specialists are more important than their current practice (Ragle 2011: 330). Thus, librarians need to form closer ties with faculty (or teachers) for the purposes of both research

and teaching (Stamatoplos 2009: 244-245). While there is the view that librarians should be allowed to play a front seat role in the delivery of education, there are little or no case studies where such a system is being applied.

The work of librarians has also evolved owing to an increased use of computers and computer devices in librarianship (Kirk and Bartelstein 1999; Bakken 1998) coupled with competition from modern bookstores (Line 2002). As a result of increased computer usage, librarians spend a considerable amount of time teaching students and faculty about the proper usage of library services including the use of online databases, online libraries, citation software, etc. These orientation sessions are structured as either credit hour courses, seminars or workshops.

Bookstores have increasingly become competitors of libraries. Many bookstores now have "lounges, warm staff, coffee, rest place during shopping, free internet browsing, attractive layout and design" (Line 2002: 75). While such changes are not out of the reach of many libraries, it may take some initiative and progressive thinking for a librarian to pursue such transformations. To thrive in the face of competition from bookstores, librarians are exhibiting the characteristics of marketing managers. It is not uncommon these days for librarians to apply marketing principles and techniques in their work (Chu 1999).

Libraries are on the path to change their traditional passive postures to a more user-oriented model of information provision (Caidi 2006: 205). The need for utilizing user-oriented models partly accrues to the diversity of customers and thus customer needs or preferences (Line 2002: 82). Equipped with tools such as task analysis, market analysis and marketing mix, librarians are able to "*help convert library users' needs and wants into effective demand for their products and services*" (Loo 1984). In this light, principles or techniques that librarians employ to promote their services is worth identifying. Taken that the library is a business and the librarian is a manager, the state-of-the-art librarian must combine "*scientific, research methodological, managerial and economic skills*" (Ingwersen 1999: 15).

The age of 'glocal' education: Fundamentally, the word 'glocal' pertains "*to the connections or relationships between global and local businesses, problems, etc.*" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2014), and "*characterized by both local and global considerations*" (Oxford University Press 2014).

In her article, Rahul Choudaha discusses the growing number of Asian students wanting to study in foreign universities while residing at home, as 'glocal' students "*who are willing to pay for a global educational experience while staying in their home country or region*" (Choudaha 2012).

The need of exposing students to global issues and trends has become imperative in the fast-paced globalizing world. Education focused on preparing students to meet the needs of a domestic market is gradually fading out. "*Every student should be educated as an international student, a global citizen with the aspiration to compete globally*" (Zhang 2013).

"Glocal education" as used in this research denotes education, literacy or the general transfer of information that pertains to both local and/or global content (i.e. history, culture, industry, etc.). The use of the term "glocal education" does not attempt to present a recognized or accepted field of study but rather to reflect on the content that pertains to local and global issues separately or together.

Although current literature has touched on various issues regarding the features, functions and future of community and school libraries, there is little or no mention about the role of libraries in providing and promoting 'glocal' education. Therefore, we have attempted to fill that gap, by a case study of the libraries in Ama town, through data collection and analysis, to understand how libraries in Ama town employ or dismiss the following points in the course of providing and promoting 'glocal' education: collection of

indigenous knowledge, adult education, user-oriented services, inter-library partnership and network, and recognition of the role of librarians in the delivery of education.

Methodology

This research is a single case study with an embedded units design (Baxter and Jack 2008: 550). The scope of the case study comprises the geographical and socio-economic context within which the study is conducted. The geographical context refers to Ama town while the socio-economic context refers to education (literacy) reforms as well as economic revitalization efforts championed by the town hall. The research deals with the role of libraries operating in Ama town, attempting to analyze the contribution of the respective libraries both separately and collectively within the geographical context of the study.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed within the limits of the case study design. With respect to qualitative data, primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews; 13 people consisting of four librarians, one elementary school student, two junior high school students, three senior high school students and three adults were interviewed within two weeks (between 6th and 20th September, 2014). The interviewees were selected using the purposive sampling method. Purposive (expert) sampling was used because library staffs are professionals that engage in library services in Ama town. In terms of library users, purposive (homogenous) sampling was employed because library users had in common the use of library services in Ama town. The head librarian of the central library and high school librarian were consulted in identifying the potential interviewees (i.e. library users).

The sample size of 13 interviewees was chosen to allow for in-depth interviews involving fewer people. Interviewing more adults and high school students rather than junior high and elementary school students reflected on the target of the town hall's agenda and also the level of demand for '*glocal*' literacy materials via library use.

The interviews were conducted at the conference room of the central library in Ama town and at the Oki Dozen High School library. Two consent forms were presented to the interviewees. The first form introduced the research project and sought consent from interviewees for the interviews to be audio recorded. The other consent form expressed the rights of the interviewee pertaining to the use of the information provided in the interview and preference to view drafts of presentations and publications before they are made public. Separate sets of questions were prepared and used to interview librarians and library users respectively.

Although the interviews could have been conducted in English with simultaneous Japanese translations, subtexts and nuances could have been lost during direct interpretations. Also, conducting the interview with the help of an interpreter would have made the interview time longer. With respect to the social context, the interviewees were considered to feel more comfortable listening to and speaking Japanese directly with the interviewer.

Quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was created to ascertain the extent to which the findings from the interviews were widespread i.e. a view generally held by most library users. Since the questionnaire was constructed after a preliminary analysis of the interviews, some questions in the questionnaire were based on keywords emerging from the interviews. The rest of the questions were founded on issues raised in existing literature. Fifty respondents (N=50) were selected using

the simple random sampling technique. The respondents included 10 junior high school students, 20 senior high school students and 20 adults. All 50 questionnaires were completed and returned.

26 respondents (52% of the sample) were female and 24 (48% of the sample) were male. The oversampling of females compared to males reflected on information from the librarians that there were more female library users than males in Ama town.

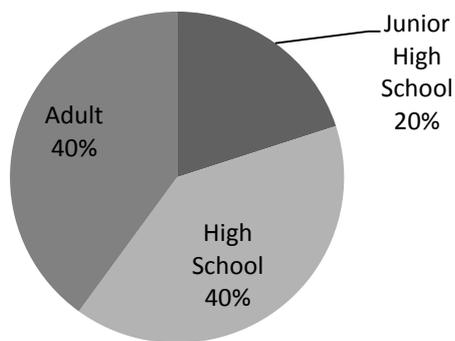


Figure 1: Grouping of respondents

Data analysis: The notes from the interviews conducted in Japanese were transcribed into English. The interviewees' responses were summarized into keywords and categorized under the research questions. These summaries were used to provide general responses to the research questions. Where necessary, statements from the transcribed audio recordings were quoted to support the analyses of information deduced from the notes. The survey data corroborated information gathered from the literature review and interviews in a form of triangulation (Figure 2).

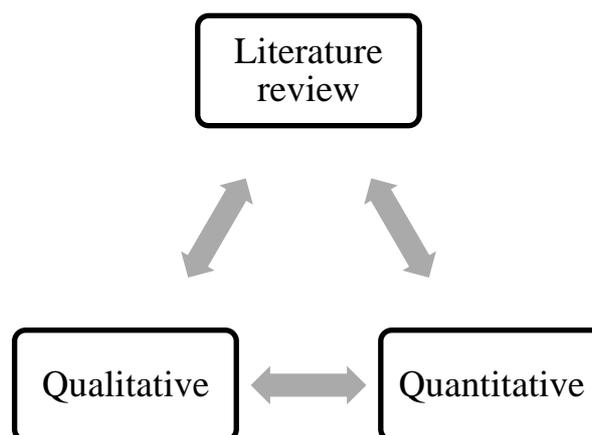


Figure 2: Analytical framework

Libraries in Ama town: Among the four main libraries in Ama town, only the central library has branches around the town. The central library has 11 branches excluding the main building. The central library was established in 2010. Its collection of 8000 books at the beginning of operations had increased to 25,000 books at the time of the study.

According to the librarians, the mission of the town's libraries was to serve in lifelong learning, studying, relaxing, reading, student's dreams, self-improvement, tourist rest spot, ideas exchange, social interaction, requesting books and community knowledge storehouse. Moreover, their target audience was all town people, particularly persons engaged in education (i.e. board of education, cram school staff, and teachers), students, minorities, children and visitors. Visitors to Ama town comprise tourists as well as people visiting to study Ama town's development model. Frequent users of the central library were people in their 20s and 30s, more women than men, students, tourists, '*shisatu*' (people interested in Ama town's development model) and "*I-turns*" (people from other areas in Japan who have relocated to Ama town for various reasons). Compared to other graders, the libraries at the elementary and junior high schools were used very little by final year students. Additionally, there were more female library users at the junior high school than males. The high school library was mostly used by teachers and students. On average, about 30 people used the central library in a day while about 30 students and between 40 and 50 students used the junior high school and high school libraries, respectively.

Apart from the high school library, the central and school libraries were funded by the Ama town government, Shimane prefecture and other sources referred to as "*cloud funding*" by librarians. The high school library is funded by the prefectural government, Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) and other contributions.

Librarians in Ama town: Ama town's central library has a total of three full-time employees and two part time staff. Each librarian is based at the central library and also supports the running of libraries at the kindergarten, elementary and junior high schools. In a week, librarians at the central library visit the school libraries three times on average.

In all, four librarians were interviewed. Three were full time employees of the central library while the fourth was the librarian of Oki Dozen High School in Ama town. There was a special arrangement of cooperation between all libraries in Ama town. For example, books and other materials were shared through an inter-library loan system. Librarians would personally deliver books that were requested at other librarians. Sometimes teachers and education workers shuttling between the schools and the town hall, would transport books on behalf of the librarians.

All four librarians acknowledged awareness of the town hall's initiative on revitalizing the island. However, only three of them had heard of the term "*glocal*" in relation to Ama town's revitalization agenda. The sources they cited were a speech by the Mayor of the town, newspaper articles featuring interviews of residents or written by residents, other publications and from interactions with high school students. Two librarians asserted that they were making a conscious effort to support the town hall's agenda of a "*glocal*" island.

Library users in Ama town: All library users interviewed had used the central library since they moved to the island or since they started reading (elementary school students). The period of use ranged from 5 months to 8 years. The general reasons why the respondents go to the library were for study, books (e.g. Manga), magazines, talking with friends, break/relax, support librarians, attend events, internet, a good atmosphere for working, attend classes and submit homework.

They were interested in subjects ranging from books, music, sports, movies, health, rural development, and cooking to education. In terms of the subjects for which they used the library, the interviewees

enumerated general knowledge/general reading, fashion, national history, education, language studies, career, rural development/social design, reading as a hobby and books with local content.

Out of the ten interviewees, three (an elementary school student and two junior high school students) had not heard about the word “glocal”. The remaining seven interviewees have heard about the word “glocal” and provided definitions, such as:

“I think ‘glocal’ is an abridged version of ‘Think global, Act local’”.

“You live in the island and a depopulated area, but you can meet people from other countries, and you can have a global experience.”

“A person who can do many things in the world but looks and thinks about local issues...”

“I think it is the broadness of view and how to relate to things. For example, people who know what is happening in the world can connect what is happening in Ama town or in other places and see the laws and universality which are common between them.”

Findings and Discussion

In the following discussion, the operational definition of ‘glocal’ education is “education, literacy or the general transfer of information that pertains to both local and/or global content”.

How libraries in Ama town provide information on ‘glocal’ education: The librarians were asked what guided their selection of local content materials, and the responses included books about Ama town, books on local industry, the geo-park, studying and all materials about Ama town and Oki Dozen islands. The librarians admitted that none of the libraries in Ama town engaged in collecting original local content data. With respect to global content (or foreign-centered materials), librarians were guided by global/trending issues, the environment, people making a difference in the world, student’s study/study abroad and data (on resources, maps, etc.).

How libraries in Ama town promote ‘glocal’ education: To promote materials at the central library, the librarians displayed copies of book covers and decorated the library space. Within the library, special shelves for topics (such as local industry or festivals) and trending issues were created, known as “corners”. There was also a café corner at the central library where users could drink and purchase beverages. Outside the library, there were announcements on the library’s homepage, local television channel and the town’s internet-based public address system. A librarian said that she sometimes passed on word-of-mouth information about books during social interactions. Such an approach is consistent with the island’s culture of a close-knit relationship-based community. At the junior high school library, books perceived to be interesting to students were displayed at the entrance of the library. A monthly library newsletter called “*toshokan dayori*” is also used to promote materials. The high school library also makes use of a “*toshokan dayori*” and “corners” as well as a bulletin board and one-on-one book recommendation service for library users.

For promoting materials on ‘glocal’ education, the central library had strategically placed bookshelves for books on Ama town and town development at the entrance. There was a corner for newspapers at the junior high school library and a corner for books on Ama town at the high school library. In terms of global content, the central library had corners on poverty, war, economics and town development. In both the junior high school and high school libraries, a corner was created to introduce the country of origin of the

assistant (English) language teacher (ALT). The high school library also employed the “*toshokan dayori*” and corners for trending global events such as the Olympic Games and soccer world cup. According to the high school librarian, “*When the London Olympics was held; I made a corner about London. I did the same thing for the Brazil world cup...*”

Library users’ perceptions of materials on ‘glocal’ education in the libraries: The library users were unable to say how librarians selected or provided materials on ‘glocal’ education. They however observed that librarians provided materials about the environment, sustainability, geography/geo-park, topography, history/local history, countries, town development and practical social design.

The results from the survey (in Figure 3) show that respondents were more interested to learn about ‘glocal’ history, culture, industry, language, education and town development.

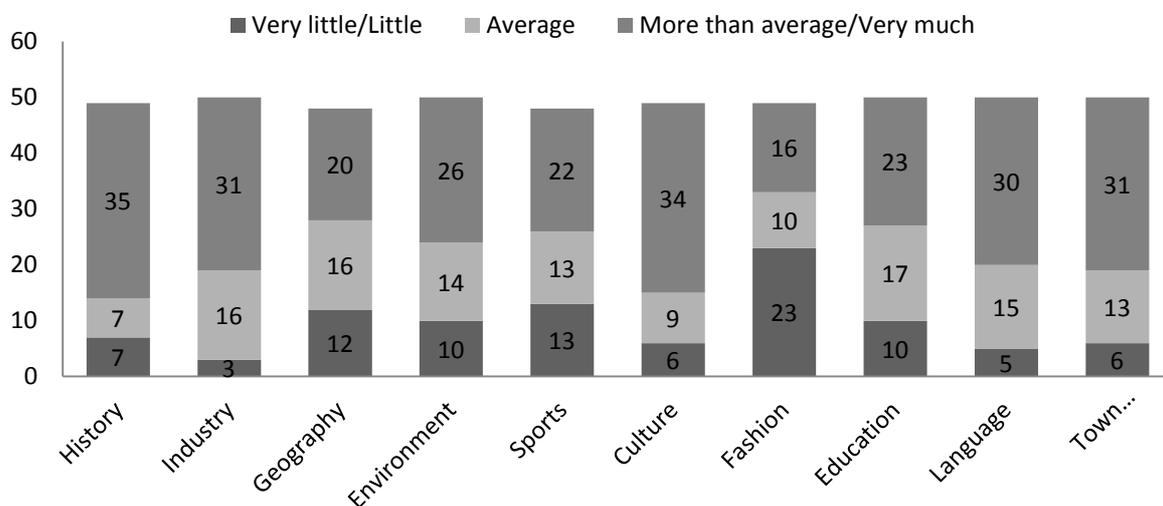


Figure 3: Rating of respondents’ interests in ‘glocal’ education (N=50)

Figure 4 shows that respondents rely a little more on the libraries than the Internet when seeking local education. On the other hand, it shows that respondents significantly rely more on the Internet than the libraries when seeking global education.

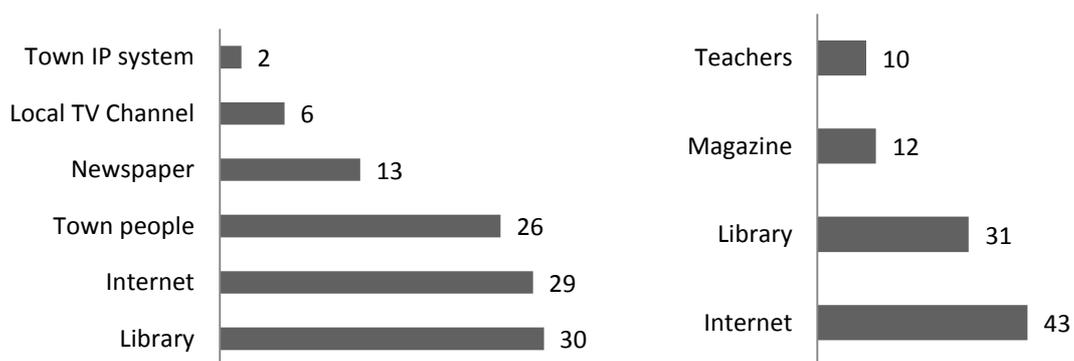


Figure 4: Source of local education, on the left (N=49), and source of global education, on the right (N=50)

Regarding the perception of library users on materials provided, two interviewees mentioned that books provided were not enough. Another interviewee observed that there were more materials on local content than global content. In all, 60% of the respondents (N=38), indicated that the use of library materials for 'glocal' education was useful since their demand for a deeper knowledge was met.

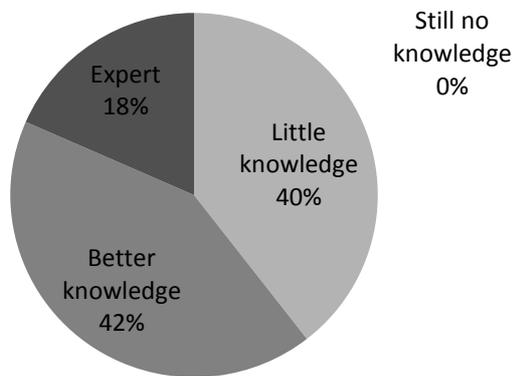


Figure 5: Perception of usefulness of materials at the library (N=38)

Overall, 88% of all respondents (N=50) agreed that the libraries in Ama town were playing a role in their 'glocal' education. Respondents acknowledged that libraries in Ama town played a significant role in providing 'glocal' education and would remain their major source for 'glocal' education in the future.

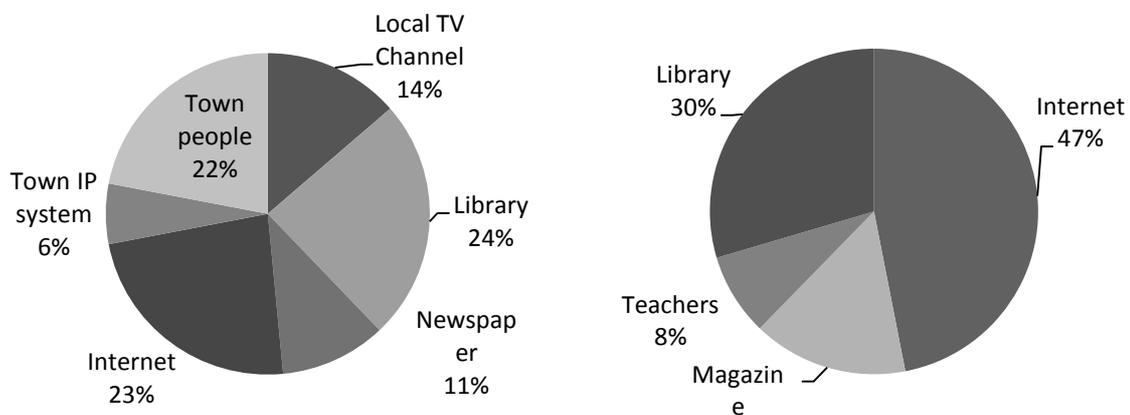


Figure 6: Future sources of local education, left chart (N=50) and global education, right chart (N=49)

Library users' perception of promotion of materials on 'glocal' education at the libraries: Library users identified methods generally used by librarians to promote library services such as electronic loan system, availability of manga, book request service, reading picture books to children, kid's corner, air-conditioning, good atmosphere, and furniture.

The tools for promoting 'glocal' materials deemed most effective by library users were the atmosphere, the one-on-one book recommendation service, book request service, topical shelving (corner), and the café.

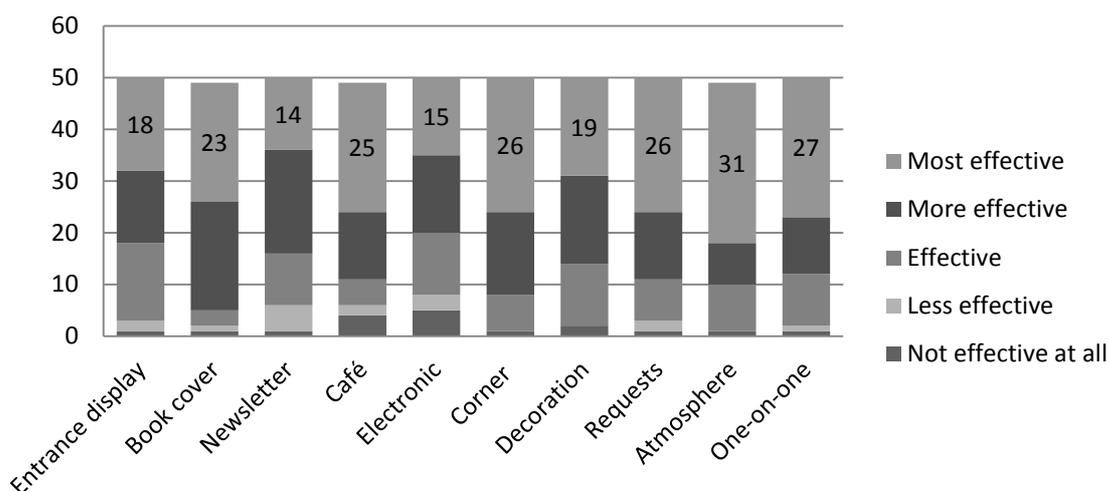


Figure 7: Users' rating of effectiveness of promotional tools (N=50)

The impressions of library users' regarding the promotion of '*glocal*' education materials was that it was easier for them to find books. A library user opined that the inter-library loan system was good because it allowed for a wider use of books. One library user recommended that in order for libraries to effectively promote '*glocal*' materials, digitized reference services must be installed, corners about school curriculum should be created and one-on-one recommendation should be improved.

Conclusion

The libraries in Ama town appear to select local content materials that deepen the library users' understanding of the traditional culture, town development and the tourism industry (e.g. Geo-park). The choice of global content material seems to be broadly guided by the notion of learning from success stories pertaining to town development, environmental sustainability, and human resource development. Much thought is also given to connecting the island to the rest of the world. This was observed in the creation of corners for global issues or trending issues around the world using books, magazines and newspapers.

The Ama town librarians use information technology, interpersonal skills and visual methods coupled with strategic positioning of '*glocal*' content materials to promote their use. For example, the library website and electronic borrowing system, one-on-one book recommendation service, display of book covers and library newsletter and topical shelving (referred to as 'corners').

Based on the respondents' perception of the most effective promotional tools used by the libraries in Ama town, an atmosphere of freedom created at the library and the competence demonstrated by librarians played significant roles.

In a sum, libraries are the second major source of information for '*glocal*' education among library users in Ama town. Materials at the libraries are provided in the form of newspapers, magazines and books. The general impression was that both local and global content materials provided and promoted by the libraries were relevant because respondents were able to derive better knowledge as a result of their use.

The role of libraries in '*glocal*' education at Ama town holds some generally applicable lessons. Libraries are able to reach the community more if they devote a portion of their collection to matters related

to local industry or initiatives, for example, tourism and town development. To enrich their collection and strengthen their positions as knowledge storehouses, libraries should engage in the collection of indigenous knowledge. Against the backdrop of rising unemployment and in another vein, the need for young people to acquire multiple skills, libraries could stock up self-help books. To be worthy competitors of bookstores, libraries may increase the sense of freedom by creating café corners close to the exit in order not to disturb the work of the majority of library users. A partnership and inter-library service between the community and school libraries is highly beneficial. School librarians must advocate for the use of the library space as classrooms in order to promote the library as a place for all students. Furthermore, librarians can make libraries more user-oriented by developing systems to frequently take book requests and recommending materials to library users on a one-on-one basis.

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