



Article**THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN NIGERIA****Jonathan O. Mbachu**

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Abstract

The lofty goals of school libraries in Nigeria as a center for receiving and disseminating information and as a learning laboratory, a center for stimulating reading habit, recreational reading and reading interest will be elusive, if the school library resources are not channelled to accommodate the information communications technology now in vogue in the educational system of the world. Unfortunately the school library has received very little attention in Nigeria. This paper highlights the information needs of the school library in Nigeria, by calling for the introduction of Information Communications Technology (IT). It also explores the possibility of government evolving a national library policy in the country with respect to adequate funding.

Introduction

There is a generally accepted opinion about the falling standard of education in Nigeria, most especially at the primary and secondary school levels. School libraries, if effectively used can play a very important role in saving the situation. It is a known fact that an efficient and effective library represents the foundation on which a strong educational programme is built.

Education engages in these wonderful activities through its various services of which the library and all it has to offer have been identified in the National Policy on Education (1998) as one of the most important educational services which will help to build and promote useful skills and encourage long term learning habits through reading, listening to and viewing a variety of learning materials provided in our school libraries.

Olarewaju (2001) revealed, that homes generally have failed to give our children the needed facilities with which the above activities can be achieved, hence the need to

establish good libraries and provide the skills for using them effectively within the school time table most especially at the secondary school level.

As at now, the Federal and State governments of Nigeria are attaching much importance to school libraries. This is generating a lot of interest towards their establishment. Some of the States in the federation have either school libraries as an arm of the State Ministry of Education or as an arm of the State Library Board.

Concept of a School Library

The aim of a School Library in any educational institution is to support the educational work of the School. According to Azubuike (1999) the school library is an organized collection of books and non-book materials maintained in primary and secondary schools for the use of the pupils, students and teachers. School libraries are also variously called media resource centers, learning resource centers, instructional media center and school library media centers. A school library is very important in the development of the pupils hence it is seen as the center of the school learning programme, indeed it is the foundation of any modern educational structure.

The School library is the main library of the school. It is situated in a central location that can easily be reached by the pupils or the students and the teachers. The School library is meant to serve the School as a whole and to some extent the community in which the school is situated.

A school library should contain various books on all subjects of interest to the children and teachers. The contents may include: children's general reference books, such as dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedia, and other books of general nature, books on various subjects such as Religion, English, History, Geography, etc. including periodicals and magazines, fiction and non-fiction, story books and charts.

The Purpose of the School Library

The general purpose of a School library is to function as a part of the School programme. Everything in the library and the way it is organized must be planned to help the children. It should be involved in the teaching and learning process of the pupils/students. Hence, the School library should render the following services as summarized:

- a) The school library should be an information center.
- b) The school library should be a center for reading and recreation.
- c) The school library should be a center for teaching and a learning laboratory.

- d) The school library should be a place to inculcate the habit of using libraries and developing of reading skills.

1. The School Library as an information Centre

All forms of book and non-book learning materials are organized and housed in School libraries for purposes of information dissemination. In essence, it serves as a depository for all forms of learning resources.

According to Fanoiki (1983) the school library should therefore be a center where students find information to help them with their studies and for their personal development. As an information center, the school library provides various resources from which the child can select. The school libraries provide materials which can be used by the individual student and teacher as well as the community in general. It introduces the child to the resources available within his community that treat his culture or tradition. It enables the teachers, the pupils/students and the members of the community (where the school is established) to keep abreast of the latest information.

2. The School Library as a Centre for Reading and Recreation

This is a very important purpose of the school library. Most people in Nigeria read only when they are about to sit for tests or have examinations in sight. Recreational reading or reading for pleasure is one of those valuable services which school libraries should endeavour to inculcate into the minds of the child. This is because the child's mind is open and receptive to new ideas (NTI, 1999).

The library provides a variety of recreational materials to fulfill the current needs of the range of interests and abilities of children. Stories or light reading are of value because they allow readers to enjoy adventures which they cannot have themselves, to imagine the emotions and relationships which the character in the stories experience. In this way they help the children to develop their own ideas.

3. The school Library as a Centre for Teaching and as a Learning Laboratory

Nowadays, an educational programme is not built in terms of mastering of a single text book. Because education is dynamic, children should read many books and varieties of reference materials. Children learn how to find information through the use of dictionaries and encyclopedias etc. The school library teaches the pupils how to find this information. It helps the teachers to develop new methods in teaching. This is because there are enough materials on various methods of teaching. It also provides him with teaching aids for effective teaching and learning. The school library provides

enough materials to enrich and supplement teaching, as no one parent is rich enough to buy all the books the child needs and no individual teacher is able to provide all the books he will need for teaching hence the library should be used to supplement.

4. The school library as a place to inculcate the habit of using the library and of developing reading skills.

After their schooling, children should be aware of the need to continue their education and should have confidence in their ability to do so. If their school has equipped them to find information, they will be encouraged to go on using the libraries later in life, and as they get admission into tertiary institutions. The provision of a well organized library and training in its use are the most valuable contribution that a school can make towards preparing its students to continue learning after their formal education comes to an end.

Learning to read does not end when the children are able to decipher the print. It is a skill that will grow with practice. It will be forgotten, if it is not used. By providing books for information, recreation and pleasure, the school library can play a big role in helping the students, to improve on their reading skill and fluency.

For the school library to function effectively vis-a-vis its aims and objectives as enumerated above, it requires the following:

1. The Stock

The library should be able to provide reading materials on all the various subjects taught in the school and some should cover the children's extra curricula interests like hobbies, sports, etc. According to Nwogwugwu (2003) a good school library is a necessary factor for the success of any educational goals. For a library to do this, its stock needs to be critically and painstakingly acquired in line with both the school curricula and the aspirations of the community. These objectives should be taken into consideration when stocking the school library.

The school library stock should include non-book materials as they become increasingly relevant. Examples of these are audio tape cassettes, flash cards and gramophone records, etc. they are more effective than books because of their visual experience.

2. Accommodation

As a function of the school library there should be adequate space for students, staff and furniture. Each of these has a distinct need which the building must meet. There should be space enough to organize the library's work to store and prepare books and

other materials before they are added to stock. Also there should be adequate room for helping students and organizing the loan of materials.

3. Staffing

A collection of books is not a library; it is only one of the conditions under which a library becomes a possibility. The most important event in the life of a library is the selection of the librarian. Personnel play a vital role in the achievement of a school library's objectives and goals. Personnel are necessary for planning and managing the library so that its programmes can be translated into action. Teacher librarians must know how to organize the library so that it can be used effectively. They must be able to show students and teachers how to use it.

The teacher librarian must be able and willing, if necessary, to carry out clerical routines. They will need to acquire simple technical skills to enable them operate audiovisual materials and other equipment.

Funding

School libraries require funds for survival and growth; funds are needed for upgrading the recurrent expenditure such as staff emoluments, stock acquisition, maintenance work and capital projects such as purchase of equipment and the provision of infrastructure. The teacher librarian should therefore give proper attention to the planning and implementation of the library budget.

Expectation of the School Library in the 21st Century

The information explosion in the 19th century will be a child's play compared to the ICT explosion in this millennium. The impact of this new technology, i.e. the Information Communications Technology in the total operation of the library means that computers are now used for acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. School libraries in the developed countries are no longer restricted to only textbook learning. Libraries are now being transformed from their traditional modes of operation where printed materials were the order of the day into multimedia centers. Information sources are now being converted into Compact Disc Read Only Memory (CD-Rom) data-bases and accessed directly online. It is now clear that information technology has taken over the operation of libraries as we approach a 'paperless' world. Billings (1996) revealed that sooner students will sit at home and have all lectures and that less burden shall be put on academic structures. The impact of this is that librarians need more than ever before to acquire this new knowledge and skills to be able to apply it in our libraries.

Technological Implication for Funding of School Libraries

The school library is a very important sector in the education of our young ones. Therefore, the present scenario of inadequate funding of our schools and their libraries by both the Federal, State and Local government councils leaves much to be desired. Fund will be required for training and retraining of specialist staff, who will man the media centers. Various types of equipment; that is, the Information Communications Technology (ICT) equipment, like computers with various accessories procured and maintained. How far these goals are achieved depend on the level of funding. Proper management should be evolved in order to cater for the schools. Ad-hoc measures are sometimes taken by government in making funds available to the schools and their libraries. Various sums of money have been released by the Education Tax Fund (ETF) to finance various projects and sometimes by direct participation by the ETF. Ifidon (1996) observed that this is not the kind of funding we envisage for the 21st Century library. According to him, there should emerge a comprehensive policy on the nature and level of funding libraries, so that the libraries should not depend on their ability to beg.

Conclusion

The challenges posed by the new information age for our school libraries are enormous. The present scenario is that school libraries in Nigeria are backward in the provision of adequate resources such as adequate stock, accommodation, staffing and funding as expressed in the National Policy on Education. It is also important to recommend within the scope of this paper for the Federal Government to evolve a national library policy in the country with respect to funding.