

## Repositioning School Libraries for Efficient Service Delivery in Nigeria for the Twenty-first Century.

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### *Abstract*

*Considering the relevance and importance of libraries in the attainment of educational objectives, this paper looked into the functions of the school libraries and their expected roles in their area of operations. The meaning and the nature of school libraries and its expected services were examined. The status of school libraries in Nigeria was x-rayed, the challenges and problems of contemporary Nigerian School libraries were examined which included poor funding, out-dated collections amongst others, recommendations were made towards the way forward for these school libraries to beef up their information services and resources so as to provide efficient service delivery.*

**Keyword:** School Library, Library development, Information Service

### **Introduction**

A school library becomes a “source and force for educational excellence” only when it functions as an integral component of the total teaching and learning process (Ahmad, 2011). The National Policy on Education (2004) recognizing the place of the library in the educational system identified it as one of the most important aspects of educational support services. The policy therefore urges the various arms of libraries in all educational institutions to train librarians and library assistants for effective services and utilization of library resources. In spite of the above, however, school libraries in Nigerian primary and secondary schools are still performing below their defined roles in the new national policy on education.

The non- existence of adequate library services in our primary and post - primary schools calls for serious attention on the part of our educational planners, headmasters and principals, if our educational system must be sustained for a longtime (Dakar, Gupiyem and Nwokedi, 2007). The school library is meant to serve the school as a whole and to some extent the community in which the school is situated (Mbachu, 2007). According to Egesimba, Quadri, Drimkpa and Ezebuike (2011) conceptualized the school libraries as the libraries found in the primary and secondary levels of educational institutions and established with the aim of aiding the study and teaching carried out by these institutions, by

making information materials needed for the same purpose available in whatever format.

The role and contribution of school library services in the provision of educational resources in all levels of education cannot be overemphasized especially when one considers the functions of a library within the school system. As the university library is the intellectual centre of a university so also is a school library the centre of intellectual activities in primary or secondary schools.

It is because of the importance of school libraries that many educationally advanced countries pay much attention to the development of school library service. It is believed that with solid foundation of reading culture inculcated to the pupils in their infancy stage will build them all through their life. No wonder that their slogan “catch them young” This means trying to inspire into the pupils the love for reading at an early stage in their lives. This involves the creation of awareness of written letters and the desire not only to read textbooks but also to engage in creative leisurely and pleasurable reading. This according to Segun (1995) can only be done by the library through:

- ❖ Making available a collection of books, magazines and audio visual materials
- ❖ Providing a conducive environment for
- ❖ Reading
- ❖ Writing
- ❖ Storytelling
- ❖ Research and even debate and drama.

Despite the important roles the school libraries play in the attainment of educational goals, Nigerian school libraries appear to have failed due to total neglect by the government and the school authorities. It is as a result of this non performance of their expected roles that made Ibrahim (1999) to ask why even in spite of technological advancement and rapid growth in the Nigerian educational sectors, school libraries still display inadequacies in funding, staffing, collection and services. He went on further to identify that in one way or the other these inadequacies adversely affect the provisions of varied library resources and services rendered to the pupils.

### Functions of School Libraries

According to Dike (1993) the functions of the school libraries has “brought the school library from the periphery to the centre of education” continuing Dike (1993) states;

*We know that the school library is the learning laboratory par excellence. In the library, learners find the world of knowledge, interact directly with resources, acquire information literacy and develop research skills for life - long learning, moreover the library encourages active and participatory approaches to learning. All these are the expected functions of a functional school library.*

Regarding the physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning, Woolls in Dike (2001) makes it more explicit when she states that although the media center (library), as a facility, exists to house the staff, materials and equipment, its main function is to provide an environment which will encourage and support teaching and learning within its spaces.

According to Elaturoti (1995) the following are the functions of the school library:-

1. To support the teaching and education work of the school and
2. To develop in the young people the habit of reading both for pleasure and for the purpose of gathering information for themselves.

In his contribution, Ibrahim (1999) added that as the concept and contents of education continued to systematically and rapidly change over the years, the functions of school libraries have also rapidly changed and expanded to include the following:

- a. To identify and provide adequate and comprehensive teaching and learning in different formats which meet the intellectual and recreational needs of both teachers and the

students.

- b. To systematically organize its materials for easy retrieval, access and utilization.
- c. To help develop various skills, learning and information enquiry skills.
- d. To relate its resources and services to the school's curriculum, extracurricular programmes and anticipated requirement for all teaching units of the school.
- e. Instructing and orientating the teachers and students on the use of library.
- f. To liaise with other relevant external bodies for required information, resources and services.
- g. To periodically evaluate its resources and services to determine their relevance to meeting the needs of the users.

### Nature of Services/Resources Provided in School Libraries

For the school library to fully perform the above role and also support the educational programme effectively it requires an organized collection of variety of learning resources -book and non book materials, suitable accommodation that provides space for storage of the learning resources, trained staff to organize the collection and also teach the students and teachers how to use the resources effectively.

If all these are in place then, the school library can render efficient services, like lending and borrowing books, newspapers and magazines in the reading room provided. Egesimba, Quadri and Ezebuike (2011) argues that there cannot be a functional school library without adequate stock of relevant materials such as textbooks, fiction materials, newspapers, films, projectors, radio, television, maps, charts, tape recorders, reference items and other educational materials.

The measure of the extent of user satisfaction in any library is the extent to which resources, facilities and services are provided.

### The State of School Libraries in Nigeria

A cursory look at the school libraries in Nigerian secondary and primary schools shows that the available facilities are far from being satisfactory. Essential resources such as adequate collection and qualified personnel amongst others are lacking. Researchers like Eze, and Okonkwo (2012) and Opara (2008) observed that the school libraries in some secondary and primary schools in Enugu state lacked library facilities. According to them resources like library collection and qualified personal were inadequate.

Adeyemi (2010) in his study of school libraries at Ekiti State also revealed inadequate funding, outdated collection and lack of qualified personnel to man the libraries. In a similar study, in Ondo state Ogumiyi and Jato (2010), also revealed lack of professionally qualified staff, lack of infrastructures, inadequate funding and lack of systematic organization of the resources available in school libraries. In his own study, Egbosa (2011) observes that most private schools do not have school libraries and where they exist, the facilities and personnel are inadequate which inhibit the utilization of the library in enhancing teaching and learning in such private schools.

According to Petters and Ottong (2012), some school libraries are found in dilapidated buildings and most of them are poorly funded. The authors see the school library as the most neglected of all services in the school system by the principal and the government. They further lamented that school libraries do not exist in some public secondary and primary schools in Calabar. According to Mbachu (2007), our school libraries in Nigeria are characterized by poor funding, lack of infrastructure, lack of qualified personnel, inadequate print and non print resources and total neglect from the school authorities. However, some secondary and primary school libraries in Anambra state through Governor Peter Obi's library intervention in 2012 gave school libraries computers and five hundred thousand naira (#500,000) each for the development of school libraries. This has beefed up the status of school libraries in that state. In a survey conducted by Odusanya and Amusa (2002), it was concluded that functional school libraries are almost non - existent in our public schools and students in the secondary schools do not see school library as beneficial to education.

Obayemi (2002) deplores the neglect of library and its development in some government owned secondary schools in Lagos State. The libraries according to him were grossly underfunded, understaffed, under stocked and unorganized. These findings confirm the observation of the Nigerian school library Association at its annual conference held in Nsukka in October 2002. The conference observed that the absence of government policy on school library development has been stalling the growth and development of school library in Nigeria. The availability of such policy would have set the minimum standard for funding, staffing, stocking and management of school libraries. The results of these various studies were in contrast to what is obtainable in the developed countries where the school library has moved far beyond a room with books to become an

active, technology - rich learning environment with an array of information resources to enhance teaching and learning- (Amaechi and Dike, 2013) All the inadequacies revealed by these studies hinder the exposure of Nigerian students to a wider selection of books and other non - book materials for classroom instruction.

### **Factors that Hinder Efficient Service Delivery in School Libraries**

The provision of efficient service delivery in any library depends largely on the extent of user satisfaction which is measured by the adequacy of the resources, facilities and services available. (Du Mont and Du Mont, 1979). In the case of school libraries in Nigeria, there is gross inadequacy of resources, facilities and services which hinder efficient service delivery. The following factors hinder efficient service delivery in school libraries

- a. **Poor funding:-** One can confidently say that the school library system in Nigeria today is characterized by poor status in collection, facilities, human resources, modern information facilities like ICT and poor quality service. Most if not all of these problems emanate from poor funding as was stressed by Elatoroti (1995). Without adequate funding, a school library cannot meet up with the standards of services and resources required for efficient service delivery.
- b. **Poor and out-dated collection:-** most of the school libraries in Nigeria rely on donations both locally and foreign which in most cases come when the books are outdated and they want to weed their collections. This may not be relevant to the current curriculum at the time of its arrival- (Eze and Okonkwo 2012).
- c. **Poor management of school libraries:-** Inwang and Nna - Etuk (2005) in their study of librarians and resources management in school libraries in Akwa-Ibom revealed that school libraries in the state are still left to individual efforts of the school management due to untrained personnel and lack of funding.
- d. **Leaders' neglect of development of school libraries:-** Nigerian leaders are always indifferent when it comes to educational issues let alone development of libraries. The government can afford to spend huge amount of money in politics but finds it difficult to fund educational ventures like the development of libraries.

## How can School Libraries be Repositioned to Render Efficient Services.

For the school libraries to actualize their mandates, they need to be adequately supported by the establishing authorities as well as by members of the community for whom it is established. Some concrete strategies to achieve these are:-

- **Adequate funding:-** Adequate budgetary allocation is needed to cover stock building and other overhead costs. The library fees that students pay, should be used specifically for running the library. This was supported by Ayeni and Oyeboji (1997) who noted that improved budgetary allocation to Nigerian school libraries will definitely reflect positive changes in their service and resources.
- **Attitudinal change by leaders in favour of library development:**  
There should be attitudinal change by all citizens of Nigeria in favour of all types of libraries Academic, public and school libraries.  
**Integration of ICT to school libraries:**  
Integrating ICT in library services provided at the secondary and primary school libraries will help in repositioning school libraries for efficient service delivery and also make collaboration and resource sharing with other libraries possible. A library that is computerized and hooked to the internet, apart from enhancing classroom teaching and learning, will also solve the problem of obsolete and unavailable books in the library.
- **Cooperation between various stakeholders:-** The various stakeholders in the educational sectors should cooperate to see that school libraries are built in schools and also made functional. The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) should liaise with the Ministry of Education in order to achieve this.
- **Specialized Agencies:-** The help of specialized agencies like the TETFUND, NGOS should be sought so that school libraries are built in government schools and equipped with ultra-modern facilities with recreational activities that can attract the Nigerian child to be a habitual user of the library. There should be a means of accessing the Tetfund meant for library development and use it for that purpose.
- **Nigeria School Libraries Association:** The School Library Association which is an arm of the Nigerian Library Association should be empowered as a regulatory body for school

libraries in Nigeria with the responsibility of ensuring that every school has a functional library that meets IFLA standards.

**Recruitment of qualified librarians (Teacher Librarians):-** School libraries should be manned by qualified librarians that have the competent skills needed for the provision of efficient library service.

**Training and retraining of teacher librarians:-** From time to time seminars, conferences and workshops should be organized for practicing teacher librarians who are digital migrants in order to equip them with the current and best practices in librarianship. These will enhance their service delivery.

## Conclusion

An overview of the status of Nigerian school libraries show that they are far from attaining the modern standards. The measures suggested if properly implemented will enable the school libraries to provided efficient service delivery. It is therefore recommended that:

1. All the stakeholders including governments, institutions, NGOs, communities and individuals as a matter of priority should make adequate funds available for the development of school libraries.
2. A legislation by the government in favour of virtual and use of ICT facilities in school library operations in Nigeria should be enforced.
3. With the introduction of ICT facilities in school library operations, there is need for information literacy to be taught in secondary and primary schools for maximum utilization of the library resources by students.
4. All citizens of Nigerians should develop love for the library and its development.

Finally, if all these suggestions and measures are put in place the Nigerian school libraries will provide efficient services to their patrons.

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