

Provision of Libraries in Nigerian Schools: A Catalyst for Educational Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Information Literacy is a set of abilities to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use needed information effectively. This paper therefore advocates for the promotion of information literacy skills in the Nigerian Primary School System and elaborates on the crucial role and the challenge before school library media resource centre in performing this function. For school library media resource centre to adequately impart effective information literacy skills in the Nigerian school system, the paper recommends: appropriate legislations by the Nigerian government on the establishment of school library media resource centre in all schools, change in attitude of school heads towards the establishment of school library media resources centre, staff of the school library media resource centre should be computer literate, school library media resource centre should be hooked to the Internet, adequate curriculum should be designed to Integrate information literacy Into the Nigerian School System.

Key Words: *Information Literacy, Information Literacy skills, school library, school library media resource centre, Nigerian School System.*

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INTRODUCTION

Section 3:13 of the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1981 refers to primary education as the education given in an institution for children between 6 and 11 years. The National Policy on Education described primary education as the key to the success or failure of the whole system of education. Certainly, the primary education level constitutes a significant segment of the Nigerian educational system. Furthermore, the National policy on education provides for the school library in Nigerian primary schools under section 10 as follows:

Section 10:4 Educational resource centres will be established at State and Federal levels.

Section 10:9: Libraries are one of the most important educational services. Every state needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in all educational institutions and to train librarians and library assistants for the service. In order to provide effective operation of libraries in Nigeria primary schools, the Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development in 1992 produced the minimum standards for school libraries in Nigeria. The document according to Fayose (2007) though inadequate in many respects at least can provide a starting point for the development of school libraries.

The library in the school according to Elaturoti (1995) is being referred to in many designations such as: school library, media resource centre, school library media centre, school media centre and educational resource centre. All these designations reflect the concept and functions of the school library. In this paper, the designation, school media resource centre and sometimes school library / school librarian shall be adopted.

Schools, according to Rader (2006) need to teach their students to integrate learning opportunities into everything they do in order to become successful in the constantly changing work environment and in society. Furthermore, students need to obtain high levels of literacy during every phase of their education. Given the complex technology environment and increasing global interactions, students must attain excellent communication and information skills to function productively in the workforce of the future. The effect of technology on libraries cannot be overemphasized. Thus, libraries are becoming one of the most important components of the information age. Furthermore, the effect of new technologies on access to information resources and the explosion of resources available make the role of school library media specialist a constant challenge.

Thus, the school library media resource centre should be in the vanguard for the promotion of information literacy skills in Nigerian school system. This becomes crucial as the school library media centre is expected to help the students to become a life long user of information. According to Wolls (2003), school librarians are to teach both students and teachers how to use the new technology, locate and use the best from the deluge of information in data bases and the internet and World Wide Web.

The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the challenges before school library media resource centres in the promotion of information literacy skills in the Nigerian Primary School System.

Information Literacy

Information literacy according to Rader (2006) is a set of abilities to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use needed information effectively.

Ojedokun (2007) quoting Middle States Commission on Higher Education defines Information literacy as "an intellectual framework for identifying, finding, understanding, evaluating and using information. It includes determining the nature and extent of needed information, accessing, evaluating critically information and its sources. Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for life long learning because they always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.

From the foregoing, information literacy is a set of abilities to:

- (i) determine the extent of information needed.
- (ii) locate and evaluate information,
- (iii) incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base,
- (iv) use information ethically, legally and with an understanding of economic and social issues.

It should be noted that information literacy includes library literacy internet literacy, research literacy and critical thinking skills (Rader, 2006). Thus, to be information literate according to the 1989 American Library Association Literacy Fund Report (cited in Ojedokun, 2007) a person must be able to recognize when information needed and have the ability to locate evaluate and use effectively the needed information.

However, whether information comes from the internet or the WorldWide Web, Online databases, books government departments, films, conversations, posters, pictures or other images or any number of other possible sources, inherent in the concept of information literacy is the ability to understand and critically evaluate the information.

School Library Media Resource Centre and the Promotion of Literacy Skills

People will need information literacy skills for their professional, personnel and even entertainment activities. There is the need for information literacy skills at all levels of our educational system. Thus if an individual possesses information literacy skills, he / she is considered competent and an independent learner. It means the individual can engage in the world of ideas; be able to display confidence and knows what relevant information is; he / she can manage technology tools to access information and to communicate(Ojedokun, 2007).

Following from the above is the relevance of the School Library Media Resource Centre in imparting and promoting of information literacy skills in the Nigerian school system.

This even becomes even more important as the new Nigerian Education System emphasized creativity, scientific and reflective thinking, inter-ethnic understanding and a holistic approach to teaching and learning especially at the primary school. Recognizing the supporting and influential role of the school library media resource centres in achieving the laudable objectives of the Nigerian Primary School System, Elaturoti (1995) identifies the purpose of school library media resource centres as:

- (i) To support the teaching and educational work of the school,
- (ii) To develop in young people, a habit of reading both for pleasure and for the purpose of gathering information for themselves.

Following from the above is the fact that the school library media resource centre is where information is gathered and transferred to knowledge. Knowledge is power; it is not really knowledge that is power but the use to which knowledge is put.

For a school library media resource centre to be relevant it must develop in the children good reaching skills and encourage long-term learning habits through listening, reading and viewing a wide variety of learning resources. These learning habits form the key to continuous success in school and to personal enrichment of leisure time throughout life (Fayose, 1995).

Furthermore, Elaturoti (1995) emphasizes on the skills which the school library media resource centre is expected to impart on pupils in the Nigerian school system. These include;

- (i) How to use a book to find a particular piece of information rather than reading it from beginning to end,
- (ii) How to make notes rather than copying out every word,
- (iii) How to compare and combine information from more than one source,
- (iv) How to use the non-book being given the appropriate hardware to extract information on subject of study.
- (v) The peculiarity in the format of each information media and their effective use in the education process.

In imparting literacy skills, the school library media resource centre, according to Wools (2003) requires a new approach to working with students and teachers. Furthermore, they should teach pupils and teachers the appropriate use of the databases available, the selection of

appropriate websites, and the selection of information from the ever - increasing amount found on the internet.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the school library media centre of today is now an active, technology - rich learning environment with an array of information resources. Thus the school library media specialist of today should focus on the process of learning rather than dissemination of learning. As earlier on emphasized, the school librarian, with impartation of the appropriate literacy skills, moves far beyond library lessons or bibliographical instruction into the role of helping the pupils to become a life long user of information.

Challenges for School Library Media Resource Centre

The expansion of the internet and myriads of information available on the World Wide Web pose a great challenge for school Library Media Resource Centre in the promotion of Literacy Skills in Nigerian School System. This even becomes very crucial as according to Nadden, A & others (2003) the volume of resources available on the internet together with the variability in their quality makes the internet a very confusing place to search.

In this way, the challenges for the school library media resource centre is to help students to learn how to find the relevant, accurate information form the overwhelming quantities available on the web. Thus, in collaboration with the teachers, pupils are taught to use their critical thinking skills to determine what is appropriate information and to use that information to look at a situation and propose a solution. Thus as elaborated by Wools (2003), "the school librarian collaborates with teachers actively helping to plan curriculum units of instruction from their beginning. As an expert in information resources, learning styles and patterns for students and teaching styles of all the teachers, the school librarian suggests the best method for implementing curriculum". In this way, the librarian integrates research skills into the students' everyday questioning, helping students to learn how to judge which materials to use.

However, the greatest challenge for school library media resource centre is how to help teachers to learn how to use electronic resources and how to integrate them in their teachings. In this way, the school librarian who serves as teacher of teachers must keep abreast of changing hardware, software and have access to new databases which will help the teachers and pupils.

Conclusion

In order to adequately promote information literacy skills in the Nigerian school system, it is desirable that every school has a school library resource centre. This becomes important as it is the belief that the best learning situation is that in which the pupil discovers and uses knowledge for himself and that the school library resource centre is to make this process more readily available, more exciting and more efficient. The need for school library media resource centre becomes even more expedient especially with the array of information sources available and the need for an information expert who can sort through the myriad of resources available.

Recommendations

In order to encourage the promotion of information literacy skills in the Nigerian School System, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should desist from playing lip service to the establishment and development of school library media resource centre. There should be serious legislations on the expected standards for the effective provision of facilities and resources in a school library media resources centre. This will enable practitioners to perform more effectively.
2. Attitudes of teachers and heads of school change towards the role and establishment of school library media centre in schools. They should see the school library media resource centre as necessary to their teachings and should integrate the resources there in into their courses. Thus, school heads should give the school library media resource centre the necessary attention it deserves.
3. In order to provide efficient and effective library services including training pupils and staff teachers, to acquire the necessary information literacy skills, the staff of the school library media resource centre must be professionally qualified. In addition, they should be computer literate. This becomes crucial as the staff of the school library media resource centres are teachers of teachers.
4. Every school library media resource centre should be hooked up to the internet. This will enable the school library media resource centre to establish links to acceptable websites that will provide pupils and teachers and administrators with information that is relevant to their needs.

5. Furthermore due to access to information via the internet, school media specialists should monitor adequately what type of information their pupils have access to.
6. Finally, adequate curriculum should be designed to integrate information literacy into the Nigerian School System.

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