

CHANGING TRENDS IN THE TRAINING NEEDS FOR SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES IN IMO STATE; IMPLICATION FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) IN THE INFORMATION AGE

NWAKWUO, OBINNA P.

**ICT UNIT OF THE LIBRARY. FEDEKAI- UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY'
OWERRI**

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the changing role of the school librarian occasioned by the dawn of the electronic age, which has transformed the school librarian from a warehouse manager (o a reference consultant to teachers and students. Through a careful study of existing literature the researcher found out that school libraries in Nigeria are still mostly non-functional due to neglect and inadequate funding, where one even exists. The paper therefore advocates that for the sustainability of the UBE. School libraries should be provided and basic and/or continuing educational programmes in the areas of information studies, management and education should be an integral part of the curricula for the training of the school librarians. This is necessary for them to remain afloat and achieve set objectives of the programme.

INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the electronic age has occasioned the call for a change in the trends in the training cum education for the school librarian; otherwise "why have school librarian, when everything will be available online"? Such oversimplification draws attention to the changing role/services of the school librarian in an era in which the position is less of a warehouse manager and more of a reference consultant to teachers and students, while retaining the instructional focus that has always been a part of the position.

As schools change from passive learning environment into active ones, the role/services of the school librarian has to adjust as well. The modern day school restructuring requires that the librarian ventures from the library to collaborate with teachers and administrators. The addition of technology into the learning environment enhances information retrieval and offers the librarian a new entree into the student centred teaching method and demand the support ~of information resources and training in their use. Library technologies reach beyond the library walls via computer networks to put information resources into the hands of the end user at the point of need. With networks linking all areas of modern school, the best place to access information may no longer be within the walls of the traditional library. Unfortunately, the scenario described above is far from the realities in our contemporary school libraries where one even exist.

The state of school library development in Nigeria and Imo Sate especially is deplorable. (Okoyi, 2000). Even in the present 'age' which is the age of great advancement in all spheres of human endeavour, the role of school libraries in the attainment of educational excellence is yet to be fully appreciated by most citizens in Nigeria. The Nigerian government is also culpable in this regard, having paid only lip services over the years to the establishment of libraries in the schools. For instance, the government acknowledged the importance of school libraries as long ago as 1981 when it stated in its National Policy on Education (Nigerian Federal Policy on Education, 1981) that:

“The libraries are one of the most important education services. Every state Ministry of Education needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in all our educational institutions and to train librarians and library assistants for the services”.

A nationwide study carried out by Ayeni and Oyebanjo (1997): revealed that school libraries in Nigeria were still non-functional due to neglect and inadequate funding. In most states of the country, school library services were very inadequate because there were no financial allocations made to school libraries though financial allocations were being made to schools.

The poor state of library services creates a problem for the effective implementation and sustenance of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. Most schools are reported to lack libraries and the few that are available are poorly funded, lack adequate collection and accommodation and are poorly staffed (Okiy, 2000). Since the implementation guideline for the UBE notes the need for infrastructure and facilities, including school libraries to be provided to appropriate standards, it becomes imperative that school libraries be revamped with the utmost seriousness with a view to ensuring the success of the UBE programme.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN THE INFORMATION AGE

It is necessary to offer some discussions on the main characteristics of the school libraries in the world to show the necessity for a refocus on the training needs of the school librarian if he must cope with the demands of the present age. School libraries exist in most Countries and regions of the world but are at different stages of development. The history of school libraries can be traced back to the time when books and other written sources were used to supplement the teachers and textbooks in the distribution of knowledge. The general integration of the school libraries and its sources into the curriculum is much more recent and has developed out of two main factors: i.e. changing educational methodology based on research into students learning and an increase in the availability of information sources which can be of use in the educational setting (Sigrun. 1995).

The change in the educational methodology places at the centre the uniqueness of the individual and the obligation of the educational system to meet the individuals' needs. A school library programme becomes essential when such philosophy is used as a guiding principle for educational activities. A school library with a rich variety of sources is a prerequisite for the enrichment of the curriculum and systematic effort to meet the individual students need as well as sustain and achieve the objectives of the UBE in Nigeria.

The information explosion as it is referred to now is a phenomenon which has also influenced the goals and purposes of education. In an information saturated world, every individual needs and uses variety of information. The school is therefore expected to prepare students for diverse roles in the society and consequently in a world where information is becoming one of the most important commodities, the schools must prepare students with information handling skills to facilitate their current and future use of information. The school library plays an important role in making student develop the concept of information retrieval and assisting them to acquire the skills for handling and managing information sources.

The school library houses information/information resources within the school and organizes them for dissemination. It therefore acts like a bridge bringing increased knowledge from the society into the school in order to provide challenges to the curious minds of the students. The main purpose of the school library therefore is to provide and exploit organized information to help broaden the knowledge base of the students and prepare them with

information handling skills to help them in their furtherance of information seeking and use in their future endeavour (Udoh. 1998)

The most drastic challenge in the role of school libraries is the availability of online sources through computer network. This has changed the mode of information transfers. Through the Internet, students have access to almost an infinite variety of information sources. They are no longer constrained to the only available materials the school has managed to acquire through purchase. School libraries are becoming information-clearing houses within the parent school and therefore need to constantly change and adjust their role as catalysts in the information society (Nwakwuo. 2006)

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN THE INFORMATION AGE: IMPLICATION FOR THEIR TRAINING

As was stated in the preceding sub-topic, the world is already in an era of technological revolution where Information and Communications Technology (ICT) forms an integral part of societal changes. Enhanced access to a variety of sources through ICT therefore calls for a revision of the educational programmes of school librarian so as to equip him adequately for the task of planning and teaching the new information handling skills with teachers for students. (Simpson 2003). Sigrun (1995), also support the assertion and wrote thus; *“School librarian needs to change the method of instruction for information skills in schools to include skills of coping with the enormous amount of information available to each individual through [various] channels.”*

It becomes imperative that the training for the school librarian should be such that will impart some basic knowledge and skills of ICT application for information services. The writer also suggest some of the fundamental skills required to include knowledge of the computer, how it functions, imputing and retrieval of information from it etc. Others include skills in the various ways to capture, organise and use ICT based resource and skills for Internet and on-line searches among others.

Unfortunately the training for the school librarian cannot be holistic. Reasons as seen by Sugrun (1995) include the fact that their role/function differ from school to school and location to location depending on financial situation, national legal frame work, teaching methodology, the educational objective of a given school etc. The school librarian's training can be carried out as a component in the basic educational librarianship programme for new school librarians and for those already, working, if is important to offer a variety of courses through continuing education. In view of these changes, it is very important that the school librarians are recognized as information specialists in the new sense".

The ideal school librarian goes beyond the libraries to the classrooms where they collaborate with classroom teachers to meet the information needs of students. The librarian suggest resources, locate and acquire materials, recommend strategies, facilitate the use of technologies and also direct students and teachers alike in the best practices in information seeking methods (Sugrun 1995).

Librarians collaborate with teachers and students to search out information sources, critically evaluate the sources and use technological means to synthesize their findings into new knowledge (Graver 1994). School librarians therefore must be versatile in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to promote them and instruct students and teachers in their use. As students become more self-directed learners, the librarian acts as a resource person in the student's quest for supporting information and the development of the appropriate presentation strategies.

In the area of collection development, the school librarian subscribe more to online and other electronic sources to meet their user's information need instead of print media. According to Eisenberg (1990), access to information whether by CD-ROM, internet, online database, video, telefacsimile, micro-forms or traditional print is overtaking ownership of information (ie the actual volume of resources available in a particular library) as an evaluation benchmark. Acquisition and selection criteria take on entirely new meaning when considering access to online service. It is obvious therefore that a new paradigm of selection and evaluation has evolved with the new technologies.

Also given the vast information sources available as a consequence of the information explosion, the school librarian must assume a managerial expertise to locate, acquire, disseminate and track information sources of many types. Note as well that the school librarian is still a teacher but more of an "information technologist" (Graver 1994).

Having exhaustively studied the role of the school libraries, librarians in the information age, we will now be faced with the reality of what type of training that the modern day school librarians require.

TRAINING/EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENT OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

Educational Programme for School librarians will inevitably vary from one part of the world to another but must never be on a lower educational level than the equivalent teacher training. However, irrespective of the existing variation, there should be no compromise for three general components essential for the development and operation of effective school library programme and these include: Information studies, management and education (Carrol1990], Courses in information studies are essential components for selection, organization and utilization of society recorded information and ideas. Courses in management are necessary as well to equip the school librarian with knowledge required for the administration and daily operation of the school library and its personnel, while courses in education are essential for an effective interface with the classroom teachers in the instructional roles to develop effective information users. Generally the professional preparation is a bit separate from both librarianship and teaching but can be housed within library schools, teacher training institutions or separately. The researcher recommends also that competencies need to be borrowed from both teaching and librarianship.

However, a cursory look at the programme of library school in Nigeria indicates some departure from the acceptable norms in the developed countries. They lack the personnel and facilities for ICT education and training essential for the information professionals of the modern age. (Nwalor, 2000). School librarians must have opportunity to keep up to date with developments in their field. Technological advances are rapid in the form of online services and new information media. The librarian therefore requires knowledge for effective interaction with such media. Sigrun (1995) advocates for distant education programmes to enable teachers study at their own speed and possibly take courses through the use of information and communications technology.

THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AND THE SUCCESS OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE)

The UBE Programme was launched in September 1995 with the aim of eradicating illiteracy to its barest minimum among the adult population of Nigerian. To achieve this goal, the UBE aims at making education at the primary and junior secondary schools compulsory. This is

one of the government's programmes established to demonstrate its strong commitment to international policies geared towards the eradication of illiteracy in Africa.

In fact the specific objectives of the UBE Programme as outlined in the implementation guidance of the Federal Ministry of Education are:

- ❖ Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its rigorous promotion.
- ❖ The provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.
- ❖ Reducing drastically the incidence of drop outs from the formal school systems through improved relevance, equality and efficiency.
- ❖ Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision of promotion of basic education; and
- ❖ Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, education and ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long-learning (Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, 2000).

In the realization of these noble objectives of the UBE Programme therefore, and considering the position of the school library/librarian as veritable tool in their actualization. Today's school library/librarian becomes sources of educational excellence and fundamental to any educational programme. This is because the scope of knowledge has become too vast to be covered extensively within the boundaries of classroom instruction, superior though that instruction may be. The modern day school library extends these boundaries immeasurably in all areas of knowledge and in all form of creative expression and the means provided to meet and stimulate the many interests, appreciations and curiosity of learners (Uche. 1997). Also considering the fact that the information explosion according to Udoh (1998) has revolutionalized information generation, storage and dissemination, school libraries must not be left out. The school library of today should be transformed from the traditional structure dominated by print media to multimedia centers dominated by modern information and communications technology (ICT) facilities that facilitate the acquisition, storage processing, retrieval and dissemination of information in schools.

This idea tallies with the expectation of the federal government in establishing the UBE when it stated. "UBE is an excellent opportunity for Nigerians to confront head-on the challenges and the full advantage of the possibilities offered by the new information and communication technology for improving the quality of education (Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education 2000)."

Abimbade (1998). corroborates with my assertion and stated that no educational system can afford to stay outside the knowledge age. The way out for us therefore is to inculcate computer awareness, computer appreciation, computer literacy and computer application into UBE. Also, it is necessary to Inculcate Computer Assisted instruction (CAI) in the teaching and learning process because studies has proved that it can be useful in enhancing achievements and improving the attitude of students (Etukudo 1995; Bankole 1998; Ajelabi 1998).

Today's school library is better suited to facilitate the instructional methods advocated by the use of CAI. it is better suited to provide the required multimedia resources hence it is expected to be administered by trained school librarian who serves in triple capacity of a teacher-librarian, media programming engineer and curriculum energizer (Okoye, 2004). The responsibilities of the librarian as illustrated so far go beyond acquiring, organizing and

maintaining of a collection of library materials. He or she is an educational instrument employed in vitalizing, energizing and powering the educational programme in the schools. (Udoh, 1998). The school library is undoubtedly indispensable in empowering the schools to achieve various goals in the pursuit of academic excellence under the UBE programme (Kolade 1998).

In conclusion, the UBE implementation guideline states that standard school infrastructures and facilities which include standard libraries should be provided to facilitate the attainment of effectiveness and academic excellence in schools. It is necessary also to state that the standard school libraries required for a successful UBE programme should not be anything lower than a standard multimedia centre as have been described ab initio. They should be properly funded and the trained librarian (in modern trends in school librarianship) provided to administer them so as to effectively harness the information resources and to promote an effective UBE programme. In this way, the UBE programme will make the desired long lasting impact on the school children and the educational system in Imo State and Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Abimbade. A. (1995); information technology education programme: A paper presented at the National Convention of Nigerian Association, for Educational Media and Technology (NAEMT) at FCE(T), Asaba, November, 22-25.
- Ajelabi. P. A. (1998). The relative effectiveness of computer assisted and test assisted programme instruction on students /earning outcome in social studies. Ibadan: University of Ibadan. PhD thesis.
- Ayeni. E. O. and Oyefeanjo. V. A. (1997): the Present state of Nigerian school libraries and strategies for their effective funding: Nigeria Libraries. 31(122), pp77-85.
- Bankole. B. B. (1998): Effects of Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) on primary pupils learning outcomes in mathematics;; Ibadan: University of Ibadan. (Unpublished M.Ed. dissertation).
- Caroll. F. L. (1990); Guideline for school libraries: The Hague; IFLA Section of School
- Etukudo. U. E. (1995). The effect of computer assisted instruction on the achievements of senior secondary school students in graph. Ibadan: University of ibadan. (M. Ed Thesis)
- Farmer, L. S. (1995); Leadership (within the school library and beyond Worthington, OH; Linworth.
- Fayose, P.O. (1995); School library resources centers for educational excellence: Ibadan; AENC Educational Publishers.

- Federal Ministry of Education (1989); National Policy on Computer Literacy: Lagos. FMI. Press
- Iromantu. O. C. (1998); Challenges and opportunities for the information revolution in Nigeria: A paper presented at the National Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Library Association held in Abuja 4-6 May: pp.1-9.
- Kolade. H, K. (1998]. Personnel requirements for Nigerian library media centres. In: Nigerian School librarianship: yesterday, today and tomorrow. Elaturoti D. F. (ed). Ibadan: Nigeria Library Association.
- Libraries, pp.12 Craver. K. W. (1994). School library media centres in the 21st century; changes and challenges. Westport. CT: Greenwood Press. Eisenberg, M. B. and others (1990). Trends and issues in library and information science.: Syracuse. NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources.
- Mohammed. Z, (2000): information technical education in Nigerian library and information science schools and the challenges of the digital age; In: information technology in library and information science education in Nigeria; paper presented at the 10th Biennial Conference of the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALJSE); held at the University of Ibadan from 4-7 August 1999, pp. 32-41.
- Nawkwuo, I. P. (1995): A Survey of school library resources in Isiukwuiato LGA of Abia State: Abia State University, Uturu. Nigeria: (B. Sc. Project).
- Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education (2000); Implementation guidelines for the Universal Basic Education (UBE); programme; Abuja. Federal Ministry of Education, pp. 1-7.
- Nwakwuo. O. P. (2006). The status of the application of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the education for library services in Southeastern Nigeria. Ibadan: University of Ibadan (M. Inf Sc. Thesis).
- Nwalor. K. N. (2000). Collaboration in the provision and utilization of IT facilities to library and information science education in Nigeria. In: information technology in library and information science education in Nigeria: paper presented at the 10th Biennial Conference of the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE); held at the University of Ibadan from 4-7 August 1999, pp. 35.
- Okiy, R. B. (2004). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and the development of school libraries in Nigeria: A catalyst for greater female participation in national development; Information Development 2(1) pp. 45.
- School Library Manifesto: UNESCO: 1980.
- Sigrun. Klara Hannesdottir (1995). What do school librarians need to know? Guideline for competency requirements: IFLANET .61st IFLA General Conference-Conference proceedings-August 20-25.

- Simpson, Carol (2003). The school librarian's role in the electronic age; ERIC Digest. USA: US Federal government. Turner, P. M. (1987); A Case for helping teachers teach; Englewood, Colorado: Libraries unlimited.
- Uche, A. C. (1997). Book care, user's services and basic infrastructures in primary school libraries. Owerri: Imo State Library Board.
- Udoh, V. W. (1998): The Perceived role of the teacher librarian in effective implementation of educational programmes of the school. In: Nigeria School Librarianship; Yesterday, today and tomorrow, (ed.), Ibadan; Nigerian School Library Association, pp. 201-215.