

School Libraries as an Instrument for Achieving the Objectives of the National Policy on Education for Primary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper identifies the objectives that are expected to be achieved by the National Policy on Education for Primary Schools. The roles of the library in achieving these objectives are examined. Problems inhibiting the establishment and maintenance of primary school libraries are x-rayed. The solutions to these problems are also recommended. Conclusively, the paper views a shift from government policy formulation to practical implementation of policies that affect primary school libraries as a necessity.

Introduction

The National Policy of Education (NPE, 2004) defines education as that which is given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. The NPE further states, since the rest of education system (that is secondary and tertiary) is built upon it, the primary level is the key to success or failure of the whole system. The broad objectives or goals of primary education include:

- a. To inculcate permanent literacy and innumeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- b. To lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- c. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in the contribution to the life of the society.

- d. To mould the character and develop social attitude and morals in the child.
- e. To develop in the child ability to adapt to his changing environment.
- f. To give the child opportunities for manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
- g. To provide the child with basic tools for further advancement including preparations for trade and crafts of locality.

In order to achieve these elaborate goals, some basic educational services are to be provided. First on the list of these services is the school library. Others are health scheme, counselling, educational resources center and specialist teacher for particular subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science etc and certainly we have to add use of the library, which according to Ajibero (1992) has been inextricably interwoven (with education) for such a long time that presently one takes this symbiosis for granted.

Just as the primary school forms the basis of foundation of other forms of advanced education, the primary school library should form the basis foundation on which bigger libraries in secondary and tertiary institutions are developed. After all, successful pupils have to pass through all the stages of education and in each stage he/she is expected to use the library facilities.

Like in other educational institutions, in the primary school, the teacher who is the leader of the team needs to consult many books to supplement the main recommended text(s), those he may not be able to afford to buy from his meager salary. Malumfashi (1991) observed that the primary school teacher requires printed and non-printed books in order to develop his intellect and plan to meet the needs of his pupils effectively. The absence of this is what lead teachers to fumble in the class. This has also contributed immensely to the assumed falling standards of education (Gupiyem, 1999).

On the other hand, pupils in the primary schools equally require a lot of reading materials both in print and non-print forms because pupils are always anxious to know how, what, and if of everything they come across as stressed by Malumfashi (1991). This is an indication that bye gone are the days when pupils get satisfied just by what the teacher taught them. Today, pupils are more inquisitive and their information needs could better be met when they are exposed to a variety of library

resources. This will help them to develop the habit of independent study and research rather than rely solely on what the teacher says. After all, the teacher himself does not know everything.

The place of the Primary School Library in the Educational System

As mentioned earlier, the school library should be an integral part of the system by providing supplementary sources of information for both teachers and pupils in addition to what transpires in the classroom between them. This calls for a well equipped and organized library within the school premises. Ayeni and Oyewobi (1998) quoted Oyebanji as having defined this type of library as an organized collection of published book and periodicals and of other reading and audio-visual materials and the services of staff who are able to provide and interpret such materials as they are required to meet the information needs of users. This is why the existence of primary school libraries in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era. Elaturoti (1999) argued, the existence of school libraries in the education system had begun with the introduction of Western education in this part of the world and this explains why colonial schools had them (school libraries). The school library, which is guaranteed or advocated by the Federal Government in the NPE at performing certain basic roles. Elaturoti further enumerated these roles to include:

- a. Teachers nearly always find that they do not have time in their lessons to teach everything they would like their pupils to know about a subject. The pupils need to supplement their class work with further reading.
- b. A great deal of useful general information is not included in the school curriculum and is not taught in class. Only the library can supply this information.
- c. Children need to develop their reading skills if they are to achieve their full potentials.
- d. Schools have the tasks of preparing children to continue learning after they leave school when they can no longer turn to teachers for assistance.

In order to achieve the above set out goals, the primary school library is supposed to stock adequate and relevant books that reflect the entire school curriculum for serious information in addition to fiction books such as novels, stories, children's magazines and local newspapers so that outside the teaching periods, the pupils can also read for pleasure.

The provision of information communication technologies in schools libraries such as the computer is an added impetus to current trends in librarianship. Their utilization serves a stepping-stone to becoming computer literate since present day appointment into positions emphasize the need to be computer literate.

In view of the above analysis, the pupils must be taught thoroughly how to use library resources effectively so that they will have no impediment when they are exposed to advanced libraries. Udoh (1999) posited if a child leaves school at the age of 16 to 17 without the skills to access information, he/she is crippled for life.

Problems Confronting the Establishment and Maintenance of School Libraries

1. **Inadequate Funding:** Funding is one of the major problems inhibiting the establishment of school libraries. It is not however; possible to treat the funding of school libraries in isolation of that of the parent schools themselves. Funding in this context is the acceptance is the acceptance of responsibility for all the costs, usually in monetary terms to be used for the purpose of bringing about expected library building, resources, services and personal emoluments. Ayeni and Oyebanji (1999) wrote, before independence, this was largely left in the hands of private organizations and individual families it must however, be mentioned that native authorities in the Northern part of Nigeria supported primary education to some extent.

The post independent Nigeria witnessed the handing over most of primary schools to the government and subsequently inadequate funding of primary schools and no funding of their libraries at all. Ayeni and Oyebanji (ibid) further reviewed this situation and expressed that unlike the classroom for which the government had to allocate first ₦3,500.00 per classroom and ₦72.50K per child as early as 1976, no kobo had ever been allocated to school libraries. Unfortunately, the government may have felt that even this amount was too big for our primary schools, as the authors further informed that in 1977 this allocation was slashed to ₦2,50.00 per classroom and ₦40.00 per child and yet nothing for the school library.

From the above analysis, it shows that even though government recognize the important role school libraries play in the upliftment of pupil's education by entrenching its provision in the National

Policy of Education (NPE, 2004), practical steps have not been taken to implement the idea at the primary level. This is why Lawal (2004) quoted Aguolu and Aguolu as saying "many African students enter the University without ever using any library either in the primary or secondary schools.

2. Non-challant attitude of professional organizations and its subsidiaries in presenting the school library demand to state governments: This is serious issue, Nigeria Library Association (NLA) which is supposed to present issues to government and give it a hot follow-up has been showing less concern for the development of primary school libraries. Even its (NLA) branches, has crowded into the pocket of its national body. Year in, year out, bundles of articles on school libraries have been written and presented by librarians and those interested in school library development but not much is being done to actualize their arguments. Who is to be blame? The blame squarely rest on the executives of NLA. To buttress this fact, Bitagi (2003) quoted Wise as accusing NLA of inactivity especially in forwarding resolutions at NLA conferences to the higher authorities.
3. The lack of conscious attempt on the part of government and the designers of primary schools to integrate the library intot he school. In an ideal situation, where the role of school library is recognized by government or the school proprietor right at the planning, designing and building the primary school, a block of library should be incorporated and should be made functional too. This is what happens in tertiary institutions. In Universities for example, even where the establishment of the institution is impromptu arrangement is made for University library even before students are admitted not to talk of where it is formally planned and executed. Daniel (2000) noted that history of school library in Nigeria as dating back to 1954, when at the conference of West African Library Association (WALA) held in Accra, Ghana the need to develop school library as an integral part of the educational system was discussed, very little is done to achieve this noble objective in Nigeria, with emphasis to the Northern part of the country.
4. In-effectiveness of the Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA). The NSLA, like its parent organization, Nigeria Library Association is supposed to have made great impact in the

development of the school libraries in Nigeria. Unfortunately, after the initial pressure it mounted on Government in the late seventies, it has become a toothless bulldog. However, Daniel (2000) observed that NSLA in its peak period was formidable in the development of school libraries in Nigeria,

5. **Lack of will by professional librarians to work in primary school libraries.** The public primary school system in Nigeria was originally established with the view that those qualified to teach at such level are grade II teachers (graduates of Teachers Colleges). For most period after independence till date, grade II teachers have held sawg in our public primary schools. Even though there is hope that the situation may soon be reversed with the employment of products of Colleges of Education (National Certificate of Education, NCE holders) to teach in public primary schools, the professional librarian who holds a first degree (Honours) in Librarianship may consider himself as not fitting into the environment where his headmaster (Oga) is just a Grade II or NCE holder Mamman (2000) also informed that most public libraries lack qualified personnel because academic and special libraries pay better salaries and other fringe benefits that attract the professional librarians to such organizations.
6. **Continuous Increase in the Number of Tertiary Institutions:** Mamman (2000) opined for the curtailment of the number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to a manageable size, so as to ensure adequate distributions of scarce resources and better library services, but more of such institutions are being established. For instance, it is the hope of every state, religious organizations and indeed wealthy private individuals in Nigeria do establish own university, College of Education, Polytechnic, Monotechnic and the like, in addition to the fact that most or all the states have either a Federal University, Colleges of Education, Polytechnic, or Monotechnic. From the look of things, it seems as if the Federal and State Government are more concerned about the development of tertiary institutions and their libraries. This may be the reason why a certain percentage (10%) of allocation to tertiary institutions is decreed to be expended on the development of their libraries. Lawal (2004) noted that, as it concerns libraries by the NUC guidelines, Federal Universities are supposed to allocate 10 percent of their income to library development. Similarly,

guidelines for the establishment of Colleges of Education stipulate that 10% of the budget of the institution each year should be allocated to the institution's library services. But there is no such a policy or provision for primary and post primary institutions in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the third tier of Government, the Local Government Councils that are supposed to contribute with the Federal and State Governments in the development of primary schools and their libraries largely, depends on the duo for their financial allocations, which is hardly enough to pay teachers salaries and their allowances. With the above development, the available professional librarians will also be consumed by the tertiary institutions and at the end of it all, none is left for the primary school.

7. Localization of primary schools and their population: Apart from those established in town and cities, most primary schools in Nigeria are in rural areas where there are no adequate provision of social, health, economic and other services. The numbers of primary schools are therefore alarming compared to their tertiary counterpart to the extent that hardly will be an effective library service to be provided for individual primary schools. Lack of social amenities such as electricity and portable water supply discourages professional librarians from taking appointment with primary schools.
8. Lack of authors within the primary school system: It is reasonable to argue that the best persons who know the most suitable information and its resources for the primary school pupils are the primary school teachers. Teachers in tertiary institutions write most of the primary textbooks. It is not ideal that when they are not meeting adequately with the need of their students' book requirement, they should still double as professional authors for primary school texts. The end result of this exercise is imparting into the pupils knowledge and information either above or below their comprehension or intelligence quiescence (IQ).
9. Contribution of parent Teachers Association and Other Non-Governmental Organisations: The contributions from the parent Teachers Association (PTA) and related Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), which should have been used to have direct bearing on the pupils such as equipping the school library with information resources are diverted towards meaningful

projects that will ensure that part of the money goes into the pocket of the parent Teachers Association Executive or the Head Teacher.

10.

Recommendations

After having highlighted some of the problems facing the school library, it becomes imperative to ask what is the next line of action not only to have school libraries, but also have them stock with relevant information resources and manned by professionally qualified personnel? Here are some recommendations.

1. Federal and State Governments:

Since all levels of government including Local Government recognize the fact that primary schools are the bedrock of any higher educational system, they should equally recognize that primary school libraries are the foundations laying stones for the provision and utilization of libraries in higher institutions of learning. In order to achieve this objective, Bitagi (in press) argued that the Federal and State government should shift from policy formulation to practical implementation of issues (and policies) that affect the establishment of libraries. In that direction, therefore the state primary education Boards should be made more relevant by

- 2. The role of Educational Trust Fund (ETF) and other government agencies:** In order to improve the quality of primary school education, the Federal Government, since 1979 had embarked upon programmes that would enable it achieve this objective. It was first the Universal primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and now followed by Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 which Lawal (2004) said it is an updated, upgraded and improved system. Due to the absence of infrastructure in schools, the Federal Government has established Education Trust Fund (ETF) with the sole objective of raising funds to meet the infrastructural needs of our institutions. The ETF projects are glaring especially in tertiary institutions. They provide computers, textbooks, tables and chairs, renovation work etc, however, not much is done in the area of provision of primary schools and their libraries. I wish to call on the ETF to turn their search light in

primary schools so that school libraries could be established, equipped and maintained.

3. **Publish or Perish:** As argued earlier on, the primary school teachers know the type and level of information that best suit various categories of their pupils. The primary school system should be reformed in such a way that primary school teachers should be adequately trained to be able to write the required books for primary school pupils. In addition to the above, their condition of service should be improved to be at par with those in the higher institutions. If this is done, it means the primary school teachers will also receive research grant and academic allowances, since they will now be involved in research and publications. A system whereby a primary school teacher is made to publish or perish will give room for upliftment of the standard of education and abundant production of library books. In a study titled 'Twenty years of academic status (1983-2003) for librarians in Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) library system: the pains and gains. Omoniwa (2003) found out that 82.5% of the librarians in ABU have not received any promotion in the last five years. Taking the primary school teachers in a like manner, we believe this will ginger them not only to work harder but the adequate provision of primary school literature will be ensured.
4. **Establishment of books depot/network libraries:** To enhance the attainment of the objectives for which primary school libraries are established, each State Primary School Education Board should have a central collection of all books related to the curricula of the primary schools. This may require additional subhead in the Board's allocation for primary schools. Through this method, acquired books will be distributed evenly to all primary school libraries.

In addition to that an effective network of primary school libraries should be established to facilitate resource sharing since each school library is expected to acquire different books through some other sources.
5. **Expansion of State library services:** The state library service should be expanded to include service for primary schools. Within

the state library system, a section or department should be created with the sole responsibility of acquiring and giving on loan books that are directly related to primary school curricula. This is something like a mobile library service but different in the sense that to avoid placing all the burden on the Library Board, the board will only need to inform the Headquarters of the various schools of the materials available for loan to their schools which will be deposited at state branch libraries. The Headmaster will then arrange for collection and return when date is due.

6. **The Intervention of professional bodies:** Both the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) and its sister organization, the Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA) have greater roles to play in actualizing the establishment and maintenance of school libraries. The NSLA in particular should make recommendation on how school libraries should look like and pass such to NLA for presentation to the authorities. This should then be given a serious follow-up so that such recommendations are not swept into dustbin. A committee may be appointed for this purpose.

Library building for primary schools: As a matter of policy and practice, primary schools should be designed and built with their respective libraries.

7. **Role of parent Teachers Association:** The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) also has a major role to play in making school libraries a reality. Instead of urging parents to buy recommended books for the pupils, specific amount of money to be called "library fees" should be raised by the parents to equip the school libraries. The advantage of this over individual's possession of books is that books in the library will serve generations of pupils. Old parents should be reduced the cost of paying for such books whenever they have to send new pupils to the school.
9. **Professional librarians:** To have and maintain qualified professional librarians in the primary schools, it is hereby advocated that a teacher within the school system with interest in librarianship should be given in-service training in professional

librarianship. This will go a long way in saving the cost of having to employ professional librarian solely to man the school library.

10. **Upgrading the school library system to media resources centers:** The school libraries in Nigeria should acquire the status of a media resource centers. This is because we are in a world of information revolution using information communication technologies (ICT) to back up Daniel (2000) identified information of technology as a term, which encompasses the notion of the application of technologies to information handling including its generation, storage, processing, retrieval and dissemination. This therefore calls for stocking in school libraries information communication equipment such as the 16mm film projector, slide projector, and more recently the computers in which it should be hooked to the Internet. The provision of Internet services will be an added impetus to having access to various sources of primary school literature within and outside the country.

Osagie (2000) supported this recommendation as follows: In communities where telecommunications and power infrastructure are reliable and efficiently run, it is possible to access library materials in far away countries without leaving one's study, whole books, journals, research documents are easily placed at one's finger tips without having to visit the local library. The emphasis made here is that our pupils should learn to be computer literate right from primary schools through the provision of computers and necessary electronic gadgets in the school media resource center.

11. **Director of school library services:** Lastly and more importantly, libraries should be involved in decision-making on issues that affect school libraries. In that direction therefore, we wish to call for the appointment of Director of School library services both at the Federal and State Ministries of Education, which is very essential and necessary. The Director must be a professional librarian, well experienced in the field and willing not only to coordinate the activities of school libraries, but also to ensure that they are established, equipped and maintained. The various states primary school management boards should also have a librarian as

a member, if the provision of school library services is to be taken seriously.

Conclusion

The role of school libraries in attaining qualitative education at the primary school level cannot be overemphasized and it is not quantifiable. In order to achieve the objectives for which primary schools are established to the fullest, school libraries must be established to supplement the teaching and learning processes. All hands must therefore be on deck by all the stakeholders to ensure the establishment and maintenance of school libraries. The Federal and State Governments are hereby called upon to translate their policies of providing primary schools with libraries to practical implementation of same, by providing adequate funds to realize this dream.

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