

DEVELOPING A SCHOOL LIBRARY IN AUSTERE TIME

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Abstract

The paper takes a brief look at the 6-3-3-4 system of education. It examines the ways of developing school libraries in an austere time or depressed economy. The conclusion calls to attention the need to create Library Division in the Ministries of Education throughout the country.

Introduction

The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system lays emphasis on developing an education based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizenry and the provision of equal educational opportunities for all citizens at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This involves an independent struggle of the individual in life, in the formal educational system. These glorious pronouncements of the policy would be a failure if libraries are not integrated into the educational plans in the country.

According to Miller, 1983:

The most vital key to unlocking the mystery of the world of print to beginning learners is to provide a wide variety of exciting reading materials to them, to motivate them to want to read. The establishment of school libraries has a vital role to play in providing those books and stimulating pupils' interest in reading.

This indicates that the school library exists to help the students and teachers gain the most they can out of school instruction. It encourages

children to develop reading habit. It familiarises students with the use of books and locating information through books.

Functions of a School Library

The School Library, like all educational instruments should be properly tuned in order to perform its functions in the continuous assessment process in schools. It should, among other things:

- 1) be an information and learning centre where access to information is provided.
- 2) provide for the individual child a conducive discovering centre.
- 3) enrich the curriculum by providing additional materials.
- 4) provide a wide choice of books for "free choice" or habit.
- 5) transmit cultural awareness by providing the child information about his own country, history, its literature, its customs etc.

School Libraries in the 6-3-3-4 System of Education

The new policy of education in Section 10 sub-section 15 (5) states thus, "Libraries are one of the most important educational services. Every state Ministry needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in our educational institutions and to train librarians and library assistants for this service."

Researchers and librarians in many countries are of the view that school libraries achieve the following objectives:

- a) School libraries encourage children to use books independently to seek information and read for pleasure.
- b) School libraries teach children vital library and study skills:
 - how to locate information
 - how to take notes and organise reports, essays etc.
- c) School libraries improve children's reading skills; children learn to read critically for a variety of purposes.
- d) School libraries help children develop
 - a love of books
 - a respect for books
 - a desire to learn
 - an appetite for reading

However, the new educational ideas provide solid basis for the development of primary and secondary school libraries and in fact for their expansion as they are in the developed countries. This position has led in

drastic change in policy and provision of library facilities for schools in Nigeria by government.

It is important to note that school libraries have often been in the forefront of provision for students as total persons with a wide variety of interests and needs. Today, discovery learning and activity methods have become permanent features of many schools. In countries with advanced school library systems, it is possible to watch children discovering, not merely what their teachers want them to discover, but new and exciting concepts and understandings through the exploitation of relevant materials. In Nigeria, government intention in this direction is clear as it is sprinkled all over the new policy on education.

If we go by the National Policy on Education, our educational goals, objectives and philosophy are in line with current international thinking and practice. However, it is true to say that school library development has not kept pace with educational development in our country. Suffice it to point out here that several authors have drawn attention to the deplorable condition of many school libraries and the lack of it in many schools. Only a few schools can boast of good school libraries. It is sad to note that whenever there is a budget cutback, the school library is always among the first among the school facilities to disappear and there are cases of library funds being diverted to other purposes by Ministry officials or the school principals. Some school Principals have turned their libraries into classrooms in order to accommodate more pupils, while teachers with training in school librarianship are prevented from using the knowledge in developing their school libraries by being given full teaching load.

The National Policy on Education stresses the importance of teaching the pupils to communicate effectively, to develop scientific and reflective thinking, and to understand the world around them. These objectives cannot be achieved by textbooks teaching and note learning alone. Pupils will only develop inquiring and critical minds when the teachers move away from emphasis on memorisation and mastery of facts. The pupil needs to be provided with many varied presentations of the same basic material. Therefore, a well-stocked library can support and enhance the curriculum which the teacher follows in classroom.

To say the obvious, the transformation of Nigeria into a technologically developed country can only be achieved if our educational system is equipped with an improved library system, at the elementary and advanced levels. It is obvious that no student can afford all recommended books required by a school, especially because the cost of books have become prohibitive. Therefore, the development and maintenance of school libraries in every nook and corner of the society is an issue that shall not be debated.

Fayose (1980), Miller (1983) and Udoh (1987) stated that in the Western World, the School Library is often referred to as the "hub" or the "heart" of the school. In the library, the teacher and librarian work as a team to enhance and increase the student's academic learning and performance. Similarly, Fayose and Osazee succinctly declared that:

It is in the school library that the pupil can master not only the skill of reading... but also learn to know the extent and depth of knowledge. Whilst working in the school library, he recognises that there are various shades of opinions and different points of view... and that he must evaluate, discriminate or weigh one opinion against the other before making a final judgement.

Consequently, if Nigeria wishes to achieve the goals stipulated in the National Policy on Education, which categorically states that educational activity must be centred on the learner for maximum self-development, the government must begin to take concrete steps to facilitate the establishment of quality school library services in primary and post-primary institutions and to ensure that they are adequately funded and staffed. Therefore, it should be noted with concern that libraries are very indispensable ingredients in the successful implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Developing School Libraries in an Austere Time

With the above analysis of the importance of school libraries to the operation of the new policy on education, its establishment or development is necessary in schools, no matter the economic situation in the country.

The following ways can be adopted for the development of a school library in a depressed economy or an austere time.

a) Government to Give Grant-in-aids for Library Services in Schools

Oni-Orisan in 1986 stated that the school library must be seen as an integral part of quality education for which government has responsibility. Government must see to the establishment of more school libraries for those students without any, as well as make provision for the continued growth in improvement of school libraries already in existence. Such aid can take the form of:

- i) Grants for construction of school libraries, for furniture and equipment and for stocking or replenishing them with books and audio-visual resources.

- ii) Government to grant revolving loan to Library Division in Ministries of Education for centralised bulk purchase of library stocks for distribution to schools. Such loan can be repaid by levying library fees on students with permission from government.
- iii) Ministries of Education to allocate library budget for library services in its yearly budget. This will help improve the poor position of school libraries as is the experience with most states.

b) Participation of PTA (Parents and Teachers Association)

It has been made abundantly clear that Government alone cannot shoulder the burden of education at all levels. The School Library is an important area in which Parents, Teachers Association (PTA) must be enlightened and allowed to levy School Library development funds, in the same manner they do for classrooms. Due to the high cost of books and the belief that no child can acquire all the reading materials he or she requires, a school library if collectively built up by the PTA should have a richer and varied collection which will be available to all the pupils (rich or poor). Also the following can be considered:

- i) As many schools collect development or PTA levy yearly, its utilisation for library development at this austere time will certainly improve the library situations in our schools, if such levies are being utilised in that direction.
- ii) Schools can organise 'Parents Day' or 'Open Day' show where the money realised should be used solidly for the purchase of library materials.
- iii) Parents and teachers can come to the aid of schools by donating cash or kind contribution for the development of school libraries on regular basis.

c) Other Voluntary Organisations

Bodies like Boards of Governors, Old Students' Associations and other voluntary bodies can readily come to the assistance of school libraries. Old Students' Association can raise an endowment for building, equipping and furnishing their alma-mater school library, while Boards of Governors can fix levy for purchasing books and other library materials on regular basis.

d) Launching of Library Development Appeal Fund

Schools can organise the launching of a library development appeal fund from time to time to help up-date the collections of their stocks. Such an appeal should be made to philanthropists, well-spirited Nigerians and organisations interested in improving the standard of education in our schools through the provision of library materials.

Conclusion

If school libraries are to be given due consideration and to enhance the implementation of the National Policy on Education to the letter, then I would strongly suggest the establishment of Library Divisions in the Ministries of Education throughout the Federation. Unless that is done all effort by the Nigerian School Library Association in improving learning atmosphere in our schools via library development will have little impact as most of the planners in the Ministry are yet to be convinced of the role of school libraries in the implementation of the new policy on education.

Finally, School Library Development cannot take place without teachers who accept the value and who possess the necessary attitudes, motives and have the skills to make the school library a central place to the educational programme of the school. The adequate utilisation of a library in schools depend to a great extent on the teacher's role in the development of awareness of information concepts and skills among the young ones. Therefore, viewing the significance of school libraries in the implementation of the new system of education in the country, we should not be discouraged in our struggle to create conducive learning atmosphere in schools via the library because of the economic depression the country is passing through. The long term benefits should be our goal.

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