

The Library Para-Professional and School Library Development

By

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Abstract

The best learning environment in schools, is that which the learner is exposed to learning resources. Where the resources are available, they need to be organised and maintained. Therefore the role of staff in school libraries, are inevitable. This article examines the role of different categories of staff working in school libraries and highlights their functions.

Introduction

The best learning situation in schools is that which the pupil discovers and uses knowledge for himself, (Fayose, 1995:16). This means the basic function of the school library is to provide conducive learning atmosphere and to make it more exciting and efficient to its clients. Onadiran and Onadiran (1989:15, cf. Gupiyem, 1997:17) said that a collection of books and other learning resources become a library only when competent and qualified staffs are put in charge of the resources.

In another development, Fayose (1995:16) informed that the first essential for an effective and efficient school library services is the staff, who will build up the library collection and provide various services to teachers, students and even the school administration. However, Gupiyem (1987:1) expressed that the category of staff a school library must have, should include the Library Master or Teacher-Librarian, Library Officer or Assistant (as the case may be), Library Prefects and Security staff. These

categories of staff are referred to as the Para-professionals in any library. The duties of these staff are as follows:

The Library Master or Teacher-Librarian

The library master (tutor) or teacher-librarian is a full-time member of the teaching staff who is chosen to supervise the library and oversee the Library Assistant(s). In many cases, the Principal may ask an English teacher to assume the role, but it is not always the case. In recent times, teachers that offer Library Science as minor subjects in their colleges of education or university are normally nominated by schools authorities to oversee the library activities in their schools. Although the library master is expected to put in additional time daily or weekly to oversee the library, s/he is not given an additional allowance or a reduced teaching load. The Nigerian School Library Association needs to fight for remuneration for such members of staff (Gupiyem, 1987:1).

His/her responsibilities will include such tasks and procedures amongst others, as consulting with the Principal and staff to find out how they would like to see library program set up. Ogunleye (1978) expressed that it is the library master's duty to determine what books should be ordered and how to organise the library facilities and services so that they will function efficiently, serving both students' and staff needs.

The functions/duties of the library master or leader-librarian also include the following:

Development of Library Policies and goals: This refers to how the library should function and the hours the library should be opened for staff and students. It determines and frames policies and target goals suitable for encouraging research by classes and individual staff and students.

Library Programme and publicity: This involves the usefulness of setting strategies for promoting the library, setting up a schedule to accommodate students and staff needs, raising their awareness of the pedagogical role a library and reinforcing the need to teach library-reference.

Budget Allocation and Expenditure: This is another pertinent role of the library master or teacher-librarian. It is his/her duty to know, or ask colleagues what their needs are in terms of curriculum, methodology, and assignments. S/he makes arrangements towards purchase of books from nearest sources and order from larger centres if necessary. S/he also keeps records of expenditures and new acquisitions.

Organisation of the Library: This refers to the physical organisation of the study areas and shelves. It involves where to shelve certain kinds of books, classifying, cataloguing and shelving all the books in given subject areas together in an orderly, logical sequence. S/he also implements a circulation system for lending books. It also sets aside time when library will be accessible to clients (staff and Students) during class hours, (for “Use of Library” Lessons) after class hours and during “prep” among other such sustainable periods. The Library master or teacher-librarian makes the school library what it is. S/he does both administrative and professional duties as highlighted by Obi (1977).

These duties include *Supervision of Library Assistants and Chairing Library Committee of the School*. Library Assistants are persons who are in charge of clerical work much as signing out books, shelving books, recording new purchases. If there are no hired/paid assistants, a system of using library prefects should be devised though library hours will be restricted.

While the Library Master (tutor) or teacher-librarian is expected to chair any Library Committee set in the school. S/he is expected to present the committee reports or recommendations on library affairs to the school administration, s/he is supposed to defend all decisions arrived at during the library committee meeting at staff meetings or to school administration.

Library Officer or Assistant

The Library Officer or Assistant is a full-time non-professional staff who is responsible for charging and discharging of books; s/he keeps the library in order, and handles other routine and

clerical tasks. The duties assigned to the Library Officer or Assistant should be contingent upon his/her abilities, the degree of initiative exhibited and the level of education. The Library Officer should be a diploma holder or an experienced Library Assistant who through promotion has climbed the ladder. It is essential to determine how well the assistant can read, understand, and cope with English. If understanding is limited, especially the ability to read, then the Library Master should tailor the tasks assigned to the assistant. If the assistant's education and English are limited the Library Master or others should use the simplest system possible to avoid confusion and clerical error. The Library Assistant must possess the minimum qualification of West African Certificate or General Certificate of Education, Secondary School Certificate of Education or National Examination Council.

Role of a Library Assistant

An Assistant can handle these responsibilities but s/he needs both training and supervision, on regular bases. **Accessioning and Book procession:** Newly received books have to be checked against the invoice to ensure that the shipment is in order. Books should be entered in chronological order of accession in an "accession" ledger, being assigned an accession number. They should be stamped with the school stamp and processed for circulation.

Circulation routine: This is the "lending system" you implement for the recording of loans. This usually involves entering each student's name, title, author, and accession number of each book s/he borrows in a ledger. Other circulation tasks include sending notice for overdue books, cancelling returned books. In other words, the circulation routines involve charging and discharging system in the library.

Shelving Returned Books: This requires replacing a book on the correct shelf in its proper place. Shelves should be clearly marked and well organised by subject area and or Dewey decimal

classification scheme. Mis-shelving should be checked constantly to make sure all materials are shelved in the right places.

Periodical Record: Daily newspapers should be stamped with the school stamp and displayed, then stored in chronological sequence in a newspaper section. If journals, magazines are received, they should be recorded in a register or card index, displayed for reading and then likewise stored in chronological sequence. Magazines should not be kept beyond one year, if they should be kept for longer period of time, they should be bounded.

Role of Library Prefects in Running a School Library

Keen and responsible students can be used to fill the gap –if there is no full time Library Assistant. The tasks listed above may be assigned to prefects, modified according to their abilities. More initial training and closer supervision may be required at the beginning. Library hours may have to be curtailed depending upon when prefects are available. They also may be used in the evening during “prep” if the hired Assistant is off duty.

Gupiyem (1987) and Fayose (1995:17-18) suggest checklist of duties for library prefects or students library aids to include the following: Cleaning and tidying up the library, re-shelving of returned books correctly on stacks, staffing of library to help in lending out books, and processing new books and getting them ready for circulation. His/her other duties include:

Organising and displaying newspapers, magazines and journals, checking in periodicals and newspapers to make them available for readers, helping to retrieve over-due books especially from among classmates, and repairing torn or mutilated materials.

Assistant can undertake the following tasks as well, if librarian or Library Masters properly trains them. These include helping to plan and set up displays and exhibitions, assisting in taking inventories, preparing statistical data and or, other duties which the Library Master (tutôr) or teacher-librarian may assign.

A Quality for Library Prefects or Students Library Aids

The following guidelines can be used to determine Library Prefects or students' library aids. It would be worthwhile to choose them across the classes so that they can influence their peers, and to encourage them to use the library as expressed by Gupiyem (1987) and Fayose (1995). Those to be chosen should have an interest in reading and library routines. The Library Prefect should be a person of unquestionable character. S/he must be an honest and sincere person, God fearing and someone that has interest in library work. The Library Prefect should be hardworking and dedicated to duty. Furthermore, s/he should be neat, orderly and should have a good sense of organisation. The Library Prefect should possess skills in the use of library tools and must in addition be willing to learn and work sometimes before or after school.

Useful Hints for Library Masters, Officers and Assistants

The Library Master, Officer, and/or library assistant should, stamp each book with the library or school stamp on the front and inside back cover, as well as on one or two pages inside the book. Since rules are necessary to maintain order and avoid theft, such should be posted by their signing out desk. They should ensure that the students know the rules. To make such rules easy to remember and therefore enforceable, they should be simple and short. This is because an elaborate lengthy list of rules is self-defeating. Keep the library locked unless a responsible attendant or prefect is on duty. An attendant or prefect should be seated by the door throughout the period. Library officials may insist on "body checks" if they suspect that students and/or staff or any clients who use library facilities are stealing books. It is easy to conceal a book inside a flowing Nigeria dress, for instance, *Babban Riga* gown, *Kafian*, *booboo*, or any such types of attires. The master or officer/assistant should determine whether to allow studying or whether to limit reading in library, to library books only.

If classes come together to exchange books, limit the length of time each class is to have in the library (15 minutes should be sufficient). Do not allow bags or non-library books inside the library. Arrange shelf space or storage space outside the library door or right inside, for users to leave other books, bags, etc. A notice board close to the sign out desk is a good idea for posting timetables, notices, overdue notices, displays new books, etc. Be strict about overdue books. Charge fines if necessary – up to ₦5 a week (or ₦1 a day). Lost books should cost at least the original price. Limit borrowing period to two weeks only. Library committee should decide fine. Wire mesh on the outside of library window help reduce thievery through window openings.

Masking tape can be used for book repairs if no other mending tape is available. Use fine money to purchase mending tape. Household glue is useful for gluing in loose pages. Masking tape can also be used for spine labels to indicate subject classification.

Old, ruined, unused books can be stored, discarded or sold. If you sell them obtain the principal's permission first. Charge according to the condition of the book. They can also be cut up for making small booklets, remedial materials, visual aids, etc.

Library Security

According to Brislin (1995:1), security has existed since people began to inhabit the earth and that archaeologists have discovered drawings attributed to early “Cavemen” which described how early inhabitants hunted and made war against other tribes or group of people. The early inhabitants of the earth needed to protect themselves from not only invaders but from animals as well. However, security generally refers to the protection of people and/or property in an effort to maintain what is considered normal conditions, expressed Brislin (1995). This implies the place of security in any library set up is inevitable and crucial. The library security staff should be literate and intelligent.

Functions of library security staff include the following:
Overseeing the general security of the library stocks and physical

facilities, and observing/checking of staff and users of the library when coming to/leaving the library premises. The security staff must ensure that all exits leading to the library are always closed and secured when the library is not operational. They must patrol the library inside and outside, make sure that lights and fans inside the library are put off when the library is closed and only security lights are switched on. They should provide security reports on regular bases to school management through the Library Master or Teacher-librarian, check the identity of users before permitting them to use the library and keep full inventory, giving the details and serial number of all library equipment (Channey and MacDoual 1992:283).

In conclusion, I wish to stress the fact that the school library is incomplete and functionally meaningless without the service of staff as discussed above.

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