

SCHOOL LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT AND ATTAINMENT OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION OBJECTIVES IN NIGERIA

Ogwu, M. F.

The College Library

Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study adopted literature review to examine school library development and the attainment of the Universal Basic Education objectives in Nigeria. Among the findings is that for school libraries to attain their objectives there must be set standards to serve as guidelines for management. Some of these guidelines are contained in some important policy documents on education management at local and international levels. Conclusively, it was recommended that government at all levels as well as management of privately owned institutions of learning are urged to invest substantial amount in the development of school libraries and facilities nationwide.

Keywords: School library, development, UBE, management

INTRODUCTION

A school library is often identified with primary and secondary school levels of education. The school library is unique amongst all other libraries (public, university/research, special, etc) because its objectives are anchored on enriching the foundation of learning (pre-school, primary and secondary schools). The foundation of any endeavour is expected to be solid and should form the basis of a higher and lasting structure. The school library should form the foundation of a child's independent use of information. This foundation is expected to consolidate the child's use and analysis of information at a higher level of learning and indeed throughout the child's life, when formal education would have terminated. The role of the school library, is therefore fundamental in the stimulation of learning skills, creative and reflective thinking, and more importantly, independent self-learning.

This fundamental role of the school library in formal learning can be more fully captured when we realize that "the library is not aside from or a buttress to the curriculum but its skills is the very foundations of the curriculum" (Kinnel, 1992). These skills include:

- Pupils 'Reading Skills: These are sharpened through access to a variety of carefully selected leisure reading materials (fiction).
- Learning to Learn skills: These are related to the skills of knowing when information is needed to solve a problem. How to locate information. How to analyze information. How to combine information from different sources to create new and richer information. How to evaluate the "new" information created.

The school librarian and the classroom teacher must cooperate in ensuring that these skills are taught to children by referring them to relevant information resources when completing class assignments, projects or group work. School libraries are invaluable education resources for primary and secondary schools. The National Policy on Education acknowledges this, so also does the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Implementation Guidelines. Education for All (EFA) implementation frameworks, the International Counterpart of Universal Basic Education (UBE) also recognizes this role of school libraries. Despite these policy guidelines and concern from well meaning Educationists and Librarians, school libraries have not been given the same attention government has been giving other aspects of the education delivery system. This article suggests practical strategies for giving school libraries the pride of place they deserve in the educational system in Nigeria. This has to be so if the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is to achieve its lofty objectives.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

According to Davies (1969), the purposes of the school library are:

- To participate effectively in the school programme as it strives to meet the needs of pupils, teachers, parents and other community members
- To provide boys and girls with the library materials and services most appropriate and most meaningful in their growth and development as individuals
- Stimulate and guide pupils in all phases of their reading so that they may find increasing enjoyment and satisfaction and may grow in critical judgment and appreciation
- To provide an opportunity through library experience for boys and girls to develop helpful interests, to make satisfactory personal adjustments, and to acquire desirable social attitudes to discriminating users of libraries and of printed and audio-visual materials
- To introduce people to community libraries as early as possible and cooperate with those libraries in their effort to encourage continuing education and cultural growth
- To work with teachers in the selection and use of all types of library materials which will contribute to the teaching programme
- To participate with teachers and administrators in programmes for continuing professional and cultural growth of the school staff
- To cooperate with other librarians and community leaders in planning and developing an overall library programme for the community.

POLICY GUIDELINES ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES

For school libraries to attain their objectives there must be set standards to serve as guidelines for management. Some of these guidelines are contained in some important policy documents on education management at local and international levels. The National policy on Education (1998) is the main policy document

prescribing standards on the levels of education in the country. The policy lists the library as an education service to be provided in schools. It says, "as libraries are one of the most important educational services, proprietors of schools shall provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions in accordance with the established standards. They shall also provide for training of librarians and library assistants for this service".

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000) recognizes libraries as "spatial enablers of teaching and learning" The Guidelines go no to recommend that libraries have to be of the appropriate quantity, size and quality to meet the minimum standards for promoting any meaningful teaching/learning. The Education for all frameworks on Action for Meeting Basic Learning Needs (1990) also states that "there is need to recognize libraries as invaluable information resources which must work in partnership with school and community workers. Libraries therefore need to become a vital link in providing educational resources for all learners: pre-school through adulthood, in school and non school settings".

THE PRESENT SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

There are ample policy statements from the Federal Government, its implementation agencies and international agencies for the establishment of functional school libraries. The National Policy on Education, as far back as 1977, had recognized the importance of school libraries as invaluable information and education resources. The policy directed all schools to operate functional libraries. However, 30 years after this policy guideline, almost all schools in Nigeria do not have libraries. Olanlokun (1996) remarked that "school library service was still in the formative stage in the educational development of the country. In the primary schools there are a few schools with anything called libraries. These are mostly fee-paying nursery and primary schools where a room is usually set aside for library. The need for a well planned school library service for the country cannot be overemphasized".

In the same vein, Aguolu (1975) had earlier remarked: "In Nigeria where the school library should certainly be one of the areas of dynamic development, it is often the most neglected. More often than not, the schools have little in the way of a library and what they do have is often a collection of books locked up in the principal's office". According to the Special Programme Unit of the Federal Ministry of Education Monitoring Report (1991), libraries were not available in most primary schools.

A National Primary Education Commission report (1999) also echoes the unavailability of libraries. The report observed that library service which was supposed to assist pupils in learning as well as provide teachers with adequate references materials were lien to the school system. Non-availability of these facilities has serious implications for teaching and learning. The report therefore recommended provision of libraries. A recent article in the New Nigerian of 29/10/2001 confirms

the dearth of school libraries in Nigeria. The article lamented that if school libraries were not established by UBEP, the expected result of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) would not be fully realized.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A FUNCTIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARY IN EDUCATION SERVICES

The goals of basic education as stated in the Universal Basic Education Implementation Guidelines are dynamic and cannot be met only through teacher-pupil classroom interaction. There is never sufficient time for the teacher to cover all that the child must know about a subject during a class period. More importantly, these goals are expected to be inculcated in the pupil and carried forward throughout life, because they will continue to exist as public libraries, national library, government libraries special libraries etc. Libraries are continuing education centers. The school library actually stimulates the pupil to acquire the habit that should perpetuate learning-to-learn skills and life-long literacy culture so that the adult "graduate" continues to learn throughout life and continues to be useful to himself and society. According to Edwards (1973), a functional school library must:

- Store a wide range of books/non-books, printed and graphic materials, audio-visual software and the apparatus needed for its use. It must also stock objects such as models, specimens etc.
- Have the record of such materials, organizations persons and places available outside the school, which would aid the learning process.
- Include space and equipment for the manufacture of learning materials by both staff and students.
- Be multi-purpose room for individual and group work, exhibitions, drama etc.
- Be located in a centre area for equal access by all.
- Be organized such that retrieval of information is quick and easy.
- Have professional staff.

These may sound like the ideal situation and over-ambition for our system, but most of these characteristics can be achieved in phases of development.

UBE'S INTERVENTION IN THE PROVISION OF FUNCTIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARIES

The Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) is aware of the death of functional libraries in schools. In line with the UBE Implementation Guidelines that recommends "standard" libraries in terms of quantity, quality and size, the Management of UBEP is articulating the following strategies to ensure school library development and services. The UBEP is finalizing manuals on minimum standards for school libraries. These manuals will provide guidelines on services, personnel, and workable strategies for quality collection, sustained funding, space, stock and training/re-training of school librarian and so forth. These guidelines are encouraging uniformity in the development of functional school libraries and ensure sustainability.

The UBEP is using a multidimensional approach to ensure the provision of

school library services. One of these approaches is through the FGN/World Bank Primary Education Project. A total of 1,110 focus schools have been identified for classroom collections for supplementary readers. This may look like a drop in the ocean of over 43,000 primary schools in the country, but it is a good starting point. The UBEP has expanded the scope of the UBE headquarters library to include children's section. This section is already providing services to schools and teachers in the FCT. Over 100 teachers and 50 pupils attended an interactive workshop on promoting a reading culture in school in June 2001. The programme featured a month-long exhibition of African writers' novels and stories published by Heinemann.

Other activities to be provided by the section include:

- Library use skills.
- Creative writing (Children are encouraged to recreate stories read).
- Art and craft.
- Drama, dance, music, poetry.
- Exhibitions/competitions.
- Serialization of African children's literature on radio/TV (the portable library services to schools will start as a pilot project within Abuja metropolis).

The Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) has a 12 zonal office structure. These zonal offices are expected to have functional libraries modeled after the UBE Headquarters library. The children's section of these 12 offices will also reach out to schools and school-age children in their areas of operation. There are 36 State Primary Education Board (SPEBs) in the states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). These 37 agencies have begun to develop libraries that will offer services to schools. At the last meeting of UBE management and SPEBs in June 2001, the following states report library activities; Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Lagos, Kano, Kwara, Niger, Oyo and Plateau. All the 774 Local Government Areas are also expected to have libraries with children's section that extend to schools.

The UBEP, under its community involvement in the Primary School Improvement Project, has been able to stimulate communities to build school libraries. One of these is in Bajoga Central Primary School Bajoga, Gombe State and the other are in Gura Primary School, Michika, and Damawa State. The project intends to further stimulate other communities to develop school libraries.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School libraries are invaluable to qualitative learning. The federal government of Nigeria is aware of this as evident in its policy guidelines and statements. However, there has not been any enviable development of school libraries alongside other structures like classrooms and textbook interventions in the education-revamping programme of the FGN. Libraries are the very foundation of the school curriculum because they provide information resources and teach the skill that stimulates learning-to-learn skills, which are basic to life-long literacy. Therefore, government at all levels as well as management of privately owned institutions of learning are urged

to invest substantial amount in the development of school libraries and facilities nationwide.

The UBEP should ensure a systematic provision of central school libraries in line with the on-going construction of UBE classrooms. This is in view of the provisions of the National Policy on Education that all schools would be provided with libraries as well as the vision of the UBE Implementation Guidelines that libraries will be provided to meet the required quantity, quality and size. The UBE is Nigerian's answer to EFA (Nigeria is a signatory EFA goals), therefore EFA's guidelines on the provision of school libraries should be met.

It will be useless to provide libraries in schools without adequate professional management. If libraries are to be provided in school to meet UBE implementation standards, the quantity of available trained librarians may not be adequate to manage the libraries. There is the need for massive training of para-librarians as has been done in the case of UBE pivotal Teachers. This provision should be considered as a priority by UBEP. Serving teachers need a re-orientation on how to use library resources to stimulate the research skills of pupils. This is because their pre-service training does not adequately ensure this. If libraries must meet their objectives in schools, teachers must be sensitized on the need to work with school librarians in developing teaching techniques to ensure the appropriate use of the school library and books in teaching and learning.

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