

SCHOOL LIBRARY ROLE IN ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE READING SKILLS AMONG NIGERIAN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to evaluate school library role in achieving effective reading skills among Nigerian children. The child can be exposed to experiences through reading. Reading will nurture children to responsible adults of the future. Therefore, the importance of reading to national development cannot be overemphasized. It was assumed that most primary and post primary schools do not have school media resource centres that could facilitate effective teaching and reading. The paper investigated whether a school with a school media resource centre can support the teaching of reading better than the school where there is none. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the school media resource centre plays a major role in facilitating the teaching of reading. Among the recommendations was that the teachers-librarian should inform parents about the benefits of early reading or pre-school literacy. This will help the parents to encourage their children to develop interest in reading and learning at the centre as their hobbies.

Keywords: *School library, reading skills, Nigerian children, National development*

INTRODUCTION

The education of a child is so important to the existence of any nation since the child of today grows into tomorrow's adult thus ensuring the continuity and survival of the nation. Those who are charged with the task of nurturing the Nigerian Child should comprehend, in adequate terms, the demands of their job; they should understand the social and psychological basis of those they are to educate. In the opinion of Robbins (2001) the child, in normal situation, is born into a home and grows into a successful adult or a failure, since the environment often limits certain traits inherited at birth.

The acquisition of language comes before the child can be taught how to count or read. This informs why Commeyras, (2001) concludes that the child, at birth, knows little or nothing but acquires almost all his knowledge after birth due to his experiences with people and objects he comes in contact with. Experiences shape his knowledge of events, people, opinion, personality, etc. The personality the child develops into is partly made from his accumulated experiences. How he relates and interacts with other members of his society is brought about by his knowledge, experience and opinion. His likes and dislikes are purely personal as shaped by his own judgement. His intellectual and moral developments play a good part of his discriminatory activities.

The task of exposing the child to various experiences is better achieved through reading. To encourage children to read therefore, calls for the teachers, librarians, information resource managers on one hand, to see the task as a social service to humanity while the parents on the other hand should be good observers of their children. For the purpose of this paper, any of these categories of people shall be referred to as a facilitator. He or she must develop love and maturity of understanding and a gentle care for children.

The attitudes of children to books should interest him just as their needs. Books are written by adults for children but such writers should put themselves in the place of the children. The differences that exist in children also exist in books. There are bright, average or dull children from various homes with varying social conditions and culture. On some occasions, adults may consider a particular reading material as good enough but the child may not like it. There is the need to enjoy what you read and so the facilitator has to know what book is good for which child. The child, according to Lahey (2004), requires meeting some psychological needs as he matures, broadens his horizon, socializes in the society, develops ideas, identifies positions, feels proud in the race and gains acceptance in his community.

The school library or media resource centre has a role to play here. Apart from stocking the appropriate materials that will attract the children to reading, the environment, in the opinion of Adeniyi (2006) should accommodate the socio-cultural demands of the children. At birth, he struggles to see, crawl, grasp, and engage in other activities until he gets at complex physical or intellectual endeavours of the expert man or woman. He wins recognition from group after a good event. He feels proud at success as his peers acknowledge him. Books that treat these themes should be brought to them in the format that will best appeal to them: colourful, highly illustrated, rich in local content, respect individual learning rates, gender sensitive, consideration for the digital trend, and emphatic in focus.

The need to know, explore and into experiment with new grounds is exhibited at early childhood stage. Children, in the opinion of Opara (2000), and Omojuwa (2002), become inquisitive and start asking many questions. The answers to their questions are kept in books and other media. All these resources should be the basic stock in the school media resource centres or school libraries. One may infer therefore, that the keener the child is mentally, the wider and more persistent his curiosity will be. The need to know accurately is basic and could be hunger or thirst, which books satisfy properly. So, explanatory books about other parts of the world, animals, plants, planets, stones, technology, etc. are good information for children. Do it yourself books, dictionaries, encyclopaedia and other quick informative and reference works are good for the curious child and one major way to quench the thirst of curiosity, according to Commeyras (2001) is reading.

SCHOOL LIBRARY AND THE SCHOOL MEDIA RESOURCE CENTRE

There are several definitions of a school library. Cummins (2001) sees the school library as a learning resource centre responsible for making available a total learning

package required by students, teachers and parents. On the other hand, Elaturoti (1990) views the school library as an integrated teaching and learning process of the school, providing a variety of books and non book materials which have been selected, acquired and organized in support of the entire school programme. Dike (2006) states that the school library concept gained momentum as a result of changing ideas in education. This has now made learning to be seen as an active process rather than passive. In essence, learning should now take place through direct interaction with resources in the environment. These resources can only be found or made available in the school library.

It is therefore reasonable to state that in the 21st century, education should now be child-centred or learner centred rather than what it used to be in those days; teachers-centred. In the developed countries, the teacher has lost her traditional role as the pivot of knowledge due to the advent of technology which has transformed the traditional library to media resource centre. Hence, the teacher now serves as a moderator or a guide in the learning process.

In the library, learners can learn on their own through reading, studying or researching. This is because the greatest concentration of information sources and information resources are found in the library. Therefore a school that deprives her pupils of a library is at a great disadvantage because such students cannot become voluntary and lifelong readers. No wonder it was said in Nigeria, 2000 that school libraries help "to lay the foundation for lifelong learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning to learn, self awareness, citizenship and life skills".

Adeniji (2006) reiterates that the extent to which young people will be creative, informed and knowledgeable and exhibit the trait of a well cultured individual will be shaped by the boundaries of the content of library resources available within the school. Educationists, teachers and librarians and indeed all stakeholders in education at all levels readily agree that school libraries are desirable and are an integral part of the school system (Adetoro, 2006). Odusanya and Amusa (2004) posit that the indispensability of information seeking and usage in the teaching and learning process have made the library the fourth of the three established constituents of education. Dike (2001) sees the library as the teaching and learning environment which provides resource and learning opportunities for the realization of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education Programme. To further buttress this assertion, Elaturoti (2001) advises that the programme will achieve greater success if effective library services are made an integral part of the school system in Nigeria.

In Hall (1986) his definition of school library in Eze (2001) is all-encompassing. The school library is seen as a learning laboratory that provides opportunities for pupils to develop information skills and develop a commitment to information decision-making. Also, it is a learning environment which focuses on the processes, content, and how to provide opportunities for pupils to become self-directed learners and develop a commitment to lifelong learning.

Often, the library is referred to as the knowledge/ information nerve centre of every educational institution. In an ideal situation, a good educational environment is principally made up of the teachers, the pupil and the world of knowledge or the educational resources materials. The academic abilities of a student are usually affected by their level of interaction with the educational resources. The skill of being able to select relevant and important information from an avalanche of resources and kneading them together to produce a coherent and balanced picture can be enhanced greatly by the regular use of library or school media resource centre. Reading and writing go hand-in-hand. He who reads well writes well. Here lies the relevance of the use of the school library as an agent for promoting functional literacy. Obi (1977) confirms this by asserting that school libraries in primary schools lay the foundation of the reading habit and impart reading at the formative stages of the pupil's education.

In support of Obi's opinion, Falade (2006) concludes that the child is as good as the environment where he is nurtured. So, reading skills should be developed early and sustained by reading materials at successive stages of life. The opinion of Obi (1977) is more on the traditional school library materials but in today's libraries, resources can be accessed through multimedia means that could even break down the barriers of space and time. Today, television sets, video clips, internet facilities, cartoons and comedies are now part of the resources in the school library thus referring to it as school media resources centre. The ICT enhancement has further underscored the position of the school media resource centre as an integral part of the education system. This new expansion of the frontiers of resources in the school library is succinctly described by Lawal (2004) that learning resources that could be found in school libraries are audio, audio-visual resources, textbooks, easy books, fiction, reference sources, mainly encyclopaedia, dictionaries, biographical sources, newspapers and magazines.

THE LEARNING ENVIROMENT OF THE PUPILS

Since the invention of printing, the importance of books cannot be overemphasized. Books have served greatly in various ways. They have helped to bridge the gap between the past and the present and can even anticipate the future. Books have brought diverse cultures of the world together and have created to some extent, better understanding between man and man. Books are a major instrument for personal and national development, therefore, books as a source of information and knowledge are an indispensable tool for living. Children should therefore be encouraged to read and develop love for books and reading from an early age.

Books are very important instruments for educational, emotional, psychological and cultural growth. Books especially, literature books develop children's imagination and sensibilities and help them to consider nature, peoples, ideas or experiences in new light. This is because of the vicarious experience and innumerable characters and situations which are encountered in the books.

Young children would laugh out loud and feel a sense of superiority when interesting story telling books are read out to them. Older children will experience fear and loneliness when a story book of tragic nature with their intricate black and white line, while drawing will fascinate many children and enable them to appreciate the value of hard work.

The average child may never leave his immediate environment but he can visit other parts of the world and get to know what happens in other countries through reading. Much has been said about the average Nigerian home where books are simply absent and efforts to acquire them seem wasteful. The child therefore grows in the home with no reading experiences. His peer group cannot give much help as there are few homes where parents provide books for their children.

The unfortunate aspect of this, in the opinion of Hillier and Taylor (1999) is that such parents live in secluded, sometimes affluent areas, where the vast majority of children from poor homes cannot reach them easily. The public libraries which would have been the succour are few and in the view of Falade (2006) poorly equipped where they exist. Worse still, the right type of staff to handle children are lacking and children have to be aided by untrained attendants/assistants or some unenlightened parents. The problem therefore goes to the school where most teachers have no knowledge of library practice or service to young adults. Falade (2006) also concludes that most teachers themselves may have passed through such ill-equipped schools and so, the cycle continues.

The question now is whether the teacher who went through such a difficult programme is prepared to change or become committed to really assist his pupils. Omojuwa (2002) thinks the teacher can change and become the teacher-librarian who will be exposed to routines in the library so as to be able to start and manage their school media resource centre. In the suggestion of Jacobson and Raymer (1999), such centre should be handled by teacher-librarians who have a flair for reading books in general, but with particular bias for the sort of books children enjoy.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MEDIA RESOURCE CENTRE

The media resource centre is a dynamic store house of knowledge where teachers and pupils come in contact with the 'the world' where they acquire the general knowledge which forms the basis for all further learning (Correa 1997). There are usually collections and reading activities geared towards encouraging reading in primary and secondary schools. The staff of such a centre are usually competent in instructional methods and have ability to work with children. Children of all ages come to the centre and must be served according to their respective needs. The teacher-librarian should be familiar with children's verbalization and vocalization errors and how to correct them. The school media resource centre has an important role to play in achieving effective reading skills and in the development of any nation. Daniel (2001) lists the core services of the centre which are essential to the promotion of effective reading skills in the children. Some of them are:

- Develop in children good reading skills and encourage long-term learning habits through listening, reading and viewing a wide variety of learning resources. These learning habits form the key to continuous success in school and to personal enrichment of leisure time throughout life.
- Support and enrich the formal curriculum of the school.
- Act as a broadening influence by providing pupils with the means of studying theories and ideas put forward by others than their teachers or textbooks.
- Develop and sustain in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of library throughout their lives.
- Organise activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity.
- Provide students with vocational information leading to choice of career.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings of the study, it could be concluded that the school media resource centre plays a major role in facilitating the teaching of reading. It is also worthy of note that irrespective of location, the school media resource centre remains an integral part of the school system and a fundamental impetus to effective teaching. Therefore, every school should endeavour to establish school media resource centre or expand the existing school library to accommodate multimedia resources. Furthermore, the following should be taken into consideration.

Story telling: Children should be given ample opportunities to listen to stories. Community story-telling is fast eroded because of rapid urbanization and socio-economic and factors. The schools will be doing children a world of good if they could take up this activity. All nursery and primary schools should have at least three periods a week in the time-table devoted to storytelling. The teacher should tell children stories and also ask children to tell stories of their own. The junior secondary school could have at least one period on the school's time-table. The teacher could select a good story, read it aloud to the students several times noting the various actions and the characters involved.

Teaching methods: Teachers should change their attitudes to teaching. Most teachers give their classes the impression that their lesson notes is the best of all and end all of education. Teachers are not walking encyclopaedias and their notes can never contain all the known facts of a given topic. They should therefore provide extra reading lists to accompany what has been done in class which is usually only a paraphrase of the class textbook. They should commend the children who are able to supply more facts of a given subject instead of censuring them. This will serve as motivation for others.

Exhibition of reading materials: The education ministry or related stakeholders from time to time should organize book fairs, quizzes and other activities that can bring children and books together. Children's authors, editors, publishers, teachers and libraries should learn to work in collaboration than they do presently. Librarians

and teachers because of their profession should be in the forefront of encouraging children's book fair either through writing by themselves or evaluating what has been published.

Parents/relatives involvement: Parents, uncles, aunts and others who wish children well should give those books as gifts from time to time and encourage them to spend the small gift item of money which is presented to them in buying books. But most importantly, children should be given time of their own daily to read undisturbed. There is nothing annoying as being called away to be sent on an errand when one is in the middle of an interesting reading.

Book availability: The availability of the right type of books, especially at the beginning of reading stage, is crucial to the acquisition of good reading habits. Children first learn to talk in their mother tongues and in many states of the federation; teaching in the first few years of the primary school is in the mother tongue in line with the provisions of the first part of the National language policy on education. Yet there are no supplementary reading materials in these languages. Books in Nigerian languages especially for the early primary school years, are essential to enable young children to develop early interest in reading. Many publishing houses in Nigeria are now making efforts to provide creative reading for Nigerian children. Macmillan launched the Winners Series in 1976, Evans African Library Series started earlier and so did Nelson's Rapid Reading Series. More publishers are encouraging local authors and it is hoped that more children books will be published. These books must get to children for whom they are written.

The teachers-librarian should also inform parents about the benefits of early reading or pre-school literacy. This will help the parents to encourage their children to develop interest in reading and learning at the centre as their hobbies.

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Through effective classroom-library collaboration, teacher-librarians can help make others successful. They can support their colleagues in accomplishing their goals. These teacher-librarians are educators who intend to position themselves as essential partners in the literacy programs in their schools.Â Something magical happened among the villagers. As each person opened their heart to give, the next person gave even more. And as this happened, the soup grew richer and smelled more delicious.Â Make a case for moving the library program into a central role in the academic program in your school. If you are not yet serving in a school with a strong.Â If the library staff was unwelcoming, the student teachers and the children in their care simply did not use the library at all. Creating a school-wide reading culture is important to promote reading as a lifestyle. Students need to see their teachers as readers. Create posters of teachers and staff reading their favorite books and display them in hallways throughout the schools.Â Schools can play an important role in providing opportunities so that students read over the summer. Ranging from giving away books to providing summer library hours, there are many ways that schools can support independent reading during the summer months. 13. Support Author Visits.Â It can be a cost-effective way to build classroom collections of books to support students. 18. Share Books through BookTalks. Readers need to share books with one another.