

# **Roles of the School Library in Education of Nigerian Child**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The education of Nigerian child is crucial to the development of Nigeria as a nation, as a result of this, library services is very germane for the Nigerian child as education itself. The school library will bring out the best out of these children when they cultivate the habit of using library resources at their primary and post primary levels of education. The aim of UBE in promoting literacy in Nigeria is a significant improvement to assist our children when there are adequate library resources and librarians are trained to man the libraries. Both the students and teachers need a well equipped library and the expertise of librarians to succeed. This paper examined the roles of school libraries as well as children education. It revealed that without qualified librarians, the aforementioned roles of the library cannot be achieved. It therefore suggested that competent, effective and well trained library staff is the key to good library services. While appreciating the unflinching support and the capabilities of school library the author posited some recommendations for the government, parent and relatives, library boards, philanthropic organisations, authors and writers, who are interested in Nigeria children's reading habit to adequately equipped them for their further roles as nation builders.*

**Keywords:** School Library; Library Services; Children Education; Librarians; Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria can actually fulfil the slogan 'giant of Africa' and thus become a major force in Africa and indeed the world, if proper policies and structures are in place to inculcate the habit of reading into little Nigerians right from the scratch at their tender ages; as education now drives the growth of a nation.

The bedrock of education is the pre-primary and primary levels. This stage of development is crucial for the development of future adult citizens and workers. Just as a child cannot stand up and walk from birth, one cannot develop without primary education. It is the foundation upon which the rest of our educational system is built (Usoro & Usanga 2007). Usoro and Usanga (2007) pointed out that, in underscoring the value of basic education, the Federal Government of Nigeria on September 30, 1999 launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which is aimed at promoting literacy in Nigeria. The blueprint for UBE defines it as the foundation for sustainable

lifelong learning that provides reading, writing, and numeracy skills. It makes provision for a wide variety of formal and informal activities and programmes designed to enable learners to acquire functional literacy. Moreover, it meant to prepare the children for the future, with the ability to think rationally and to solve problems creatively, to manage and retrieve information, in addition to communicating effectively. It is also designed to instil lifelong learning as a habit, since lifelong learning is the organizing principle for education. The mission of education for children and youth is the development of skills for self-directed enquiry rather than the mere inculcation of subject matter.

Keith (2004) opined that the mission of education can only be achieved through a well-equipped library and users must be educated on how to retrieve and use the available library resources to meet their information needs. Children and their teachers need library resources and the expertise of a librarian to succeed. School libraries help teachers teach children. Information is power and access to information is indispensable to individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Children need the library for effective learning for lifelong education, this is in consonance with the National Policy on education (1993) which states that, “the aim of basic education is to equip individual with such knowledge, skill, and attitude that will enable them to: live meaningful and fulfilling lives, contribute to the development of the society, derive maximum social economic and cultural benefits from the society and discharge their civil obligation.”

A school library is a type of library that supports school programs as well as the teaching and learning process. School libraries serve students by providing materials to meet their various needs and encouraging reading and the use of libraries (Clarke 1999). Martin (2000) notes that “research shows that the reading scores for students in schools that focus on improving their library programs are, on average of eight to twenty one percent, higher than similar schools with no such development.” Adomi (2006) stresses the importance of adequate collections. School libraries help children to discover for themselves by independent study and learning how to ask questions.

Ilogho (2011), observed in a study ‘The Rising Population of Literates in Nigerian Schools: Role of School Libraries’ that in most Nigerian schools, youths or students are hardly seen around reading except for reasons of test, examination or homework. They are not easily given to reading for the love of doing so. Instead most engage in group discussions or gossip, cracking of jokes, indoor games e.g. cards, ludo, chest etc during free periods. They also use break periods to play football and other outdoor games. Furthermore, students who have access to computers and internet facilities prefer to browse, chat, send email, sms, face-book, yahoo messenger, play computer games. While at home students most times play football, watch Television entertainment programmes such as drama, films, comedies, listening to music, watch dancing competitions and so on in the absence of household chores. Chinelo (2010) in The Nation Newspaper of May 27th noted that no society can develop more than the knowledge base of its citizens. He decried the dying culture of reading among children as leaders of tomorrow. This is the pathetic state of the Nigerian society. It is either Nigerians are not reading or if they do, do so reluctantly.

Usoro and Usanga (2007), identified that in some parts of Nigeria, most children (especially those from rural areas or economically disadvantaged backgrounds) first meet books and reading materials in school, and have limited access to them in the home and in the community. The school library encourages its users to fully accept the responsibility for education and development. School libraries give individualized service, making sure that every library user gets information that meets his or her particular need. It also serve as a laboratory for it users to practice the skills of using indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, and catalogues; school libraries are being assisted by proper

funding to acquire relevant and varied materials for these purposes. Books and non-book materials are provided. These are well organized, and the right calibres of staff are put in place to disseminate information directly or give assistance to those seeking information on their own.

## **ROLES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

Libraries are as important for children as education itself. Library services imply both availability and accessibility of library facilities and services to the user and the willingness and ability of readers to use the facilities and services. The objectives of library services are:

- to promote in-service education
- to develop, assess and improve educational programmes
- to enhance teaching and improve competence of teachers
- to make learning more meaningful for children
- to reduce educational cost
- to develop and promote an effective use of innovative materials in schools.

Stressing the role the library plays in the environment of learning; Travaline (1997) maintains that today's library is like a big playground waiting to be explored and the librarians the best playmate: one who makes the playground worthwhile. Herbert (1997) agrees, saying that children's literacy develops and emerges as they explore and participate in a literacy-rich environment. At the centre of such an environment are books and other resources with contents that are familiar and appealing to children. Despite changes to the educational system, changes which have also occurred in developing countries, the central importance of the library and its learning resources have not diminished. These resources facilitate the acquisition of physical and intellectual skills necessary to assisting the individual to develop literacy for lifelong education as useful member of his community and also to acquire an objective view of the local and external environments (Ekpenyong 1990). EFA (1990) argued that there is a need to recognize libraries as invaluable information resources which must work in partnership with school and community workers. Obanya (2002) explains that library curriculum should be part of basic education. He added that this will ensure the following:

- developing interest in print and photographic materials, through (a) being read to (b) enacting scenes depicting what was heard (c) retelling the stories heard in one's own words and (d) undertaking out-of-class assignments related to what was read in class.
- extensive reading habits development in the middle years, through systematic exposure to a variety of carefully graded reading materials.
- intensive reading habits development in the final years, through (a) systematic exercises in reading for detail (b) exposure to technical vocabulary in a variety of areas (c) explorations with graphs, tables and other forms of graphic materials and (d) systematic training in the use of dictionaries, atlases, thesauri, and encyclopedia.
- self-collection training in collecting, storing retrieval of whatever teaching-learning materials one can find at all levels of primary and secondary education.

The educational aims of school libraries according to Idiegbeyan-Ose and Okoedion (2012), include:

- (1) To stimulate and enhance the reading habit
- (2) To develop in children the ability to read for information

- (3) To help pupils to increase and improve their knowledge of reading, speaking, and writing
- (4) To train children to care for books and make good and intelligent use of the library
- (5) To enhance children's reading and communication skills
- (6) To provide children with information, both current and retrospective, and
- (7) To provide recreation (Udofia, 1997 cited by Ogunrombi & Sanni, 2005)

Idiegbeyan-Ose and Okoedion (2012) further stated that the school library prepares both the teacher and pupil to achieve sound and quality education by all or any of the following:

- (a) The improvement of teaching by enabling the teaching staff to make reference to current books in the preparation of their lessons
- (b) Providing information for teachers and pupils on current affairs.
- (c) Providing supplementary reading for teachers, enriching class work.
- (d) Serving as the laboratory where all books on all disciplines encourage self-reliance, good use of leisure time, and arouses interest in reading (Ekweozoh, 1989 cited by Ogunrombi & Sanni 2005).

School Library World (2009) as cited in Idiegbeyan-Ose and Okoedion (2012) summarized the effectiveness of a school library as follows: it is accessible to the total school community, it is cost effective because one book is used by many, it provides flexible scheduling and timely access to the collection by all students, a broad range of materials, add new resources throughout the school year to keep collection dynamic, create a sense of ownership that is shared by the entire school community.

## **SCHOOL LIBRARY AND CHILD'S EDUCATION**

A child seems to enjoy teaching and learning in a relaxed atmosphere with high level of interaction where questions could be asked for clarifications especially during leisure time. A good way of using leisure time can be permanently missed throughout life if people do not develop the habit of reading for pleasure when they are young. Librarians in school libraries involves in book selection, reference services, readers advisory work, current awareness service, cataloguing and classification of library materials. Teacher librarian should be an experienced practitioner with personal interest, not in books in general, but also in the sort of books children enjoys; this renders a library, a laboratory for it users to practice the skills of using materials acquired therein. A school librarian must know what subject users are interested in. Then find out what students like reading. The United Nations and UNESCO over the years gave high priority to reading promotion through education and cultural organizations. Towards this end, easy to read books or materials, newspapers, and other information sources have been published and are still being published. The school librarian being at the forefront in the school reading revolution can mobilize students to actively participate in promoting reading (International Federation of Library Association and Institution, 1996). Important tasks of teacher librarian that would explain the major roles of school library in Nigerian child's education are as follows:

### **Organising lecture and informal talks**

Children learn mostly through what they see and hear. Authors and subject specialists in children books are invited by the library to schools in order to share words with the children and entertain questions as appropriate. The kids would be impressed seeing authors they read about in books and listening to them at the very level of their understanding and by implication gaining and knowing what would not have been gained or known during their

visits to library to consult the books themselves. Listening to scholars/writers could aid determination in some kids of being like ‘the person telling the story’; thus, equipping a future glory of a nation (Mackey & Johnson 1996).

### **School library as friend of the library club**

The activities of library clubs include reading together with children and helping them prepare library guides, simple teaching aids, and reading competition. Excursions to other schools and libraries are also beneficial. The school librarian must adopt workable strategies when organizing reading promotion programmes for students. The entire school should be carried along in the Reading promotion programme. That is students, teachers, parents, and other staff of the school must be properly enlightened and educated.

Mackey and Johnson (1996) identified some strategies for encouraging reading among reluctant readers. These include: offering classroom reading time, allowing selection among a limited number of books, discussing selection technique with students, following an author’s series or genre, browsing, talking to friends, teachers or librarian, or making a choice based on an appealing title or cover. Reading the beginning of novels aloud in class can help “hook” reluctant readers.

According to Mackey and Johnson (1996), encouraging students to read comic books, children magazine, series books, adventure stories, fiction-books, newspapers, biographies, and many others should be acquired to provide a long list from which students can select what they want to read. Comics and illustrated colourful materials particularly appeal to children and adolescents. Also the ICT technology has a strong advantage of being used to promote reading among youths. The youths in our society tend to find ICT technology highly fascinating and exciting. Hardly can you find young persons in urban cities who cannot use or operate any of the new ICT technologies, be it internet, TV, telephones, GSM, emails, computers, computer games etc. Research however, has shown that young people are not reading because of the advent ICT. It is my belief that it can be used to promote reading. Today there are a wide range of electronic information resources and databases in the library. A lot of literary works for children and teenagers can be found on the internet, including stories and novels in CD-ROM formats, talking books, audio-visuals etc. Young people can be encouraged to read electronic materials, especially those who have access to ICT equipments. Another approach to promote reading is to introduce a “Readers Club”. This should consist of the school librarian, teachers and students. The club is responsible for organizing all reading campaign events for the entire school. The club will organize programmes on weekly bases taking into consideration all levels of students. The following are some of the activities that should be included in the Readers’ Club programmes:

- Organize reading competition and give prize awards to best readers
- Pay visit to renown authors and publishers
- Go on excursion to University libraries, National Public Libraries, Publishing houses
- Organize reading seminars for students and teachers
- Each week, students with the guidance of class teachers should design bookmarks to promote a particular book, genre, or nonfiction area.
- Have students participate in book recommendation and selection process
- Introduce student journalism and have them write reviews of new library books and publish them in the school newspaper/magazine.
- Have students’ record book talks, on audiocassettes and check those audiocassettes out to other students.

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- Give students time to talk with each other in an informal one-on-one or a small-group basis about books they have read for assignments or share aspects about the books they are reading.
- Have students select books for teachers to read aloud in the elementary schools.
- Have students select books for the library or for the classroom collection.
- Have students design poster advertisements about books and display them in hallways, etc. (Kuhlenschmidt, n.d.)

### **Organizing educative recreational film shows and radio book talks**

Library houses educational films as audio/visual material and this include such categories as teaching film, business film, informational film, documentary film, religious film, training film and many more. Activities in the library such as organising educative recreational film shows and radio book talks can be linked mainly to the ability of the individual to control the speed of the delivery of information. Children/students tend to retain what they watched in films than what they read, so when children/students read, they can pause at any time with difficulty in remembering what has been read after a period of time but this has changed with the advent of online video, recreational film shows with projections and radio book talks which can be paused, watched severally and rewound easily. The growth of online video in sites like you tube has greatly improved the opportunity for the creation, distribution and education of potential learners

### **Display of books and posters**

Children/ students tend to learn by what they see. Newly acquired materials or the unnoticed ones can be displayed at strategic points in the library to reflect current events, fellow students' creative works, and children in other parts of the world. These types of activities will create awareness and curiosity; promote library services, draw the attention of students to new books, special collections, under-circulated titles and services that are offered within the library that often go unnoticed. Displays are meant to be current, changed regularly and should meet the interest and needs of the library community.

### **The Library initiates School library magazines**

A school magazine is an annual publication of a school. It is usually published once a year. It contains the literary works or other information of a school. It also contains quizzes, poems, short-stories etc. It is the responsibility of the library to set-up a committee comprising of a librarian, teacher and upper class students. The editor invites writings/articles for the magazine and this should be from the school children/students, to help develop their writing skills, then the best articles are selected for publishing. A student can express his/her latent talent through the school magazines and this can also enrich their knowledge. It is a part and parcel of school life. Other activities include story hours, book talks, and the like. These activities, when well planned, provide much scope for advising and guiding children in their reading and learning; these therefore explain vital roles that the library plays in education of Nigerian child.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

For any Nigerian child/student to secure a brighter future, emphasis must be laid on the importance of information acquisition and use; these takes effect in the library and without qualified librarians the aforementioned roles of the library cannot be achieved. A competent, effective and well-trained library staffs propels a good library service. A trained and highly knowledgeable teacher librarian can coordinate activities in the school library successfully. In addition, he or she will be able to select and produce materials, and become acquainted with the resources of the



school library to educate teachers and students. Based on the importance and the benefits of the school library to both staff and the students, the following recommendations are expedient:

### **Government**

Considering the high cost of information resources and the dwindling government assistance, other stakeholders including the private and public organizations like States Library Boards, Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Nigerian School Library Association, Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Reading Association of Nigeria, Parents Teachers Association, Book Foundation and other non-governmental organization should see it as a matter of urgency to come to the aid of school libraries by supporting and strengthening the library development in primary and secondary schools in the country. Not only that there is a need to seek assistance from international organizations like UNESCO, UNDP, or non-governmental agencies such as Book Aid International (BAI), Rockefeller Foundation, Macarthur Foundation etc. Library deserves a vote in the yearly budget of government (Ajegbomogun & Salaam [n.d.])

### **Parents and Relatives**

Parents and relatives should start presenting story books as birthday gifts to their children while such will stimulate their reading habits. Parents should create compulsory time for reading and insist that children must observe it on regular basis. They should also commit spending their resources on books and other related reading facilities. In doing so such would have motivated the children to acquire a lot of knowledge and a reading habit that would sustain them for better future. Since habits are usually formed early in life, the home and the school can set the correct standard in subsequent years for the children. These abilities will enable one to skilfully move through the tangle of information which one encounters during each stages of life (Ajegbomogun & Salaam [n.d.])

### **Awareness Campaigns**

Every State Library Board is expected to mount campaign in the schools, public places on the importance of library in our society, the use of films, pictures to enlighten people on the essential of reading culture in our society. School libraries in Nigeria should be ICT compliant in order to enhance the quality of education in schools. A platform should then be created to call the attention of the government to ensure provision of electronic resources and regular supply of electricity for their effective utilization.

### **Individual/Organisational Assistance**

The efforts of individuals and some organisations should be so recognised. There are philanthropic organisations, authors, writers and other individuals who are interested in developing the Nigerian child reading habit, as a result they will volunteer to build a library and equip it with resources necessary for a functional library and such people when identified should be encouraged to do so. And this will develop the Nigerian child to have access to current and adequate information. The quality of education of Nigerian child will continue to nose-dive if the gap of establishing well equipped libraries is not bridge and the issue of maintenance of school libraries remained unaddressed. School library should therefore be topmost in the agenda of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Nigerian child.

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