



Article

SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEW INFORMATION AGE

V.O. Ezejiofor*, Ifeka Okeke** & Adaeze Orakpor***

*University Library, NAU Awka, **Library Science Dept., NAU Awka & ***St. Paul's
University College, Nibo/Nise College Library

Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed the new millennium into an information age. The age has ushered in great opportunities and challenges for individuals, organizations and governments at all levels. School libraries are no exceptions because they are part of the information society. They have to exploit the opportunities and find ways to overcome the challenges. In addition to their traditional roles of collection development, provision of library resources and facilities, they must provide electronic resources and facilities and also the necessary skills for effective navigation. This paper reviews the state of government school libraries in Nigeria, examines the challenges facing them and makes recommendations for their survival.

Introduction

The foundation of every state lies in the education of its citizenry. Education is a process through which people are trained either formally or informally to enable them acquire desired knowledge and skills. Schools are established for the acquisition of formal education. Education is an information intensive industry hence libraries are established in schools to cater for the information needs of pupils, students and staff. Okiy (2005) writes on the place of libraries in the educational environment,

"libraries are at the center of the academic excellence of all educational institutions providing all the relevant information resources necessary for sustaining the teaching, learning and research functions of these institutions. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of these educational institutions in producing high quality graduates into the labour market depend largely on the quality of information resources available in their libraries..."

Libraries established at the tertiary level are known as academic libraries while those established at the primary and secondary levels are known as school libraries. Generally, government owned libraries in Nigeria and Africa as a whole have suffered neglect and sometimes, outright abandonment. Mostert (2001) states "Chijioke (1989), Dube (1998), Sturges and Neill (1998), and Tise (2000) concluded that, in spite of lofty ideals, African libraries have failed in their designated mission..."

Today, the new information age is here with us with its attendant opportunities and challenges. An age which Daniel (1991) maintains has given the world a new understanding of time, space, distance and knowledge as well as a new definition of the world as we used to know and perceive it, by reducing the whole world to a global village, where you can do business of all sorts interactively either in real time or online from which ever point you may be on the planet earth.

Most of the challenges faced by libraries and librarians in this knowledge society can be attributed to three main societal developments as identified by Ogunshye (2000).

"Firstly, the transformation in the life style and user demands of modern library clientele as the information society evolves and the nature of the format in which knowledge has to be repackaged. Secondly, the globalization trend in world institutions, and operations for optimum results, making the world into a global village where it is increasingly imperative that we share, plan, merge and manage the planet earth's knowledge and resources. Thirdly, the development in the use of computers to store, organize and retrieve information and make knowledge available to users in distant places. "

The computer revolution has changed our way of life. A lot of transactions are now done electronically. In the field of education for instance, students now register for examinations and check their results online. Some of them are referred to one website or the other to obtain certain information. Distance education is also operated through the use of information and communications technology (ICT). All these call for the development of some vital information skills, which can enable students identify, locate, retrieve and use information creatively even without any assistance. All these requirements affect the roles of libraries and librarians who now have to perform both their traditional roles and the information-age-generated- roles. Experts nurture fear concerning the strength of libraries in Nigeria in relation to these new roles. And, of the various types of libraries in Nigeria, government school libraries (GSLs) seem to be the worst hit because though they are already plagued by such hindrances as lack of funds for materials and facilities, lack of qualified personnel and lack of space: they still have to provide library resources and services suitable for the information age, and also help

students and staff develop the skills necessary for the use of the resources. It is unfortunate that the public libraries they can lean on are not equal to the task.

In spite of all these obstacles, school libraries remain viable avenues through which governments can develop in the pupils and students the necessary information skills required for survival in this millennium. This paper therefore attempts to review the state of government school libraries in Nigeria; identify the challenges facing them in this new information age and suggest strategies which can enable them overcome those challenges.

The Role of School Libraries in Education

Onwuazo (2001) describes a school library as a library system particularly designed to be used in primary schools and in secondary schools respectively. School libraries support education methods, and curriculum. They are also known as media centers and the school librarian as the media specialist, enhance formal and programmed learning. School libraries can inter-changeably be referred to as the Media Resource Centre.

Several authors have written on the place of school libraries in education. For instance, Onadiran and Onadiran (1980), Muogilim (1984) and Woolls (2003) all agree on the vital position school libraries occupy in the education process of pupils and students.

Obi (1974) identified the contributions of school libraries in education as follows:

- *promote the development of reading skill and encourage long term reading interests and habits. Reading is the key to continuous success in the school and to the personal enrichment of life. A student who learns to read does not automatically become a continuous reader unless the habit is encouraged with the provision of interesting and challenging materials which will:*
 - *Contribute to academic achievement in other subjects.*
 - *increase student's chance of success in institutions of higher education, or other professional pursuits.*
 - *provide students with vocational information leading to the choice of suitable careers.*
 - *help in discovering and developing the special gifts and talents of students.*
 - *train students to study independently by providing a wide range of materials for class projects, individual reports and class assignments; and*
 - *Provide up-to-date resources to meet the greatest challenge of education and the exposition of knowledge.*

School libraries work for all-round development of the child. They inculcate in young children the skills required for identifying, locating, selecting and using information creatively to solve both their personal and academic problems. The role of school

libraries in education is a crucial one especially in this information age, when life-long learning and computer literacy are pre-requisites for survival. The school librarian has the potential of helping pupils and students become information literate and this will enable them access information efficiently and effectively. A person who is information literate, according to information standards, can:

- *evaluate information critically and competently,*
- *use information accurately and creatively,*
- *recognize the importance of information to democratic society, and*
- *practice ethical behaviour with regard to information and technology.*

The Role of the School Librarian

According to Woolls (2003), the school librarian supports instruction in three roles.

- a) Learning and teaching role
- b) Information Access and delivery i.e. providing access to collection, and
- c) Program administration (includes the traditional areas of staffing and ensuring that the program had sufficient funding. The school librarian helps teachers also in developing their professional knowledge and in the provision of information literacy. For him to play all these roles effectively he needs to be well qualified. It is a fact that unqualified school librarians man most primary and secondary school libraries and most of them are not computer literate. The school librarian needs to be computer literate because no one can give what he does not have. A teacher librarian with a minimum of N.C.E. with library science bias is recommended to run both the primary and secondary school libraries.

The state of school libraries in Nigeria

Generally, government libraries in Nigeria and Africa as a whole have suffered neglect due to poor management and nonchalance on the part of developers. Mostert (2001) broadly categorized their hindrances into five main categories:

- the introduction of an anachronistic and inappropriate colonial model,
- inappropriate training of library staff,
- deficiencies in determining specific needs through analysis,
- lack of co-operation among agencies involved in library-related work, and
- the absence of sustained effort to achieve an alternative framework.

Most of our public libraries and school libraries are in a sorry state. Awe (2007) regrets the decay of almost all the vital sectors of our national life which includes our libraries, due to corruption and low value of the nation.

The story is not quite different with our academic libraries inspite of their elevated position as many of their resources and services fall below expectation.

Our school libraries appear to be the worst hit as many of them no longer fit the appendage "library." Researchers showed interest in school libraries as far back as 1940s and 1958s because of the vital role they played in the development of our young ones. In 1958, Lancour carried out a survey on behalf of the Carnegie Foundation which covered the English speaking West Africa and described most of the school libraries as "dingy rooms."

Banjo (1986) conducted a survey of the educational system of Bendel, Ogun Ondo and Oyo states and also noted that "only lip service had been paid to the provision of school library services". Obi (1964) also studied the situation in Eastern Nigeria now Anambra, Fnuogu, Abia, Cross River, Imo, Rivers Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom states and observed that most of the secondary schools in that region had unorganized libraries and unqualified librarians. Muogilim (1984) made an extensive review of the state of school libraries in Nigeria and concludes that:

"The sad and inevitable conclusion one could draw from this overview is that the status of library provision in our schools is everything but adequate. Yet the National Policy on Education has not only accepted school library as a good thing but also went further to propose measures aimed at furthering the development of school libraries which it considers as one of the basic infrastructural facilities for consolidating the quantitative gains already recorded in education in the Third Plan period. "

Zawua and Jam also conducted a survey of government school libraries in Benue State before the creation of Kogi state out of Benue. They studied such issues as Administration, Funding, Acquisition policy, Staffing as they relate to school libraries in Benue state. Some primary and secondary schools were visited to see physically the condition of the libraries in such schools. The findings showed that libraries are almost non-existent in primary schools while few secondary schools have what could be referred to as reading rooms. This is because information resources in such libraries are not properly organized, scanty and old.

In a more recent survey conducted by Ozor I. N. under the supervision of Ezejiofor V. O. four government secondary school libraries were selected in the Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State and the following information were obtained:

Name of school	No of students	Size of collection	Source of Acquisition	Status of librarian	Library facilities	Charging system used	Classification system used	Availability of ICT facilities
Urban secondary school, Oji River	603	2273 books	PTF& Purchase	Not qualified	1 long table, 2 long desks & 2 shelves	Nil	Nil	Nil
Girls' sec. School Achi	521	2,100 books	Purchases	Not qualified	2 tables & 5 chars, 6 shelves	Nil	Nil	Nil
Girls' Sec.School Ugwuoba	222	300 books	Purchases	Not qualified	2 tables & 2 chairs. Boxes used for keeping books	Nil	Nil	Nil
Community Sec.School Ugwuoba	187		PTF & purchase	Not qualified	2 tables & 2 chairs. Boxes used for keeping books	Nil	Nil	Nil

From Table 1 above, it could be seen that there is paucity of library materials and facilities in most GSLs. In Anambra State the situation was not quite different as GSLs did not have sufficient library facilities but some of them have computers, thanks to Education Trust Fund (ETF) which provides forty-two thousand naira (N42,000) each for ten schools computers annually on a rotary basis. Hopefully this gesture will be obtainable in other states of the Federation.

Challenges Facing Government School Libraries in Nigeria

The challenges facing government school libraries in Nigeria, in this new information age are multifaceted. The major ones are examined below.

Fund: GSLs have often suffered due to the lack of funds for developing their collections and providing quality library resources and services because the sponsoring government has failed to place them in their rightful position. Most of the promising statements of governments at all levels often end as mere lip-service. The government needs to release funds to the appropriate authorities for the supply of books, A/V materials, computer systems and other ICT facilities in GSLs.

Computer phobia: Most students and staff develop phobia for computers. They see it as a mystery box and tend to withdraw from it. Some of them are afraid of damaging the computer at the slightest mistake. It is a great task for the school librarian to make students and teachers become enthusiastic in the use of computers in their academic work.

Changes in the role of school librarian: A lot of changes have occurred with the introduction of computers and other ICT facilities today. The role of the school librarian has changed. Woolls (2003) states that “this new media required a new approach to working with students and teachers, as well as many new skills beyond storage and retrieval. The teacher librarian now works in a new environment and has to show the appropriate use of the database available, select appropriate websites, and select relevant information from the deluge of information on the Internet”. The teacher librarian now has to combine his traditional roles with other new ones.

Pornography and misinformation: The school librarian has the responsibility of ensuring that students do not download unwanted information especially pornographic materials and inaccurate information from the Internet. This requires time and diligence on the part of the librarian.

Changes in library arrangement: The introduction of ICT facilities in the school library will naturally create the need for some adjustments. For instance, more space will be needed for the equipment and for the users. The libraries may also need to be screened when certain materials are being used. In future, school libraries may need to connect classrooms to libraries to enhance accessibility.

Installation and repairs: Cost of installation and repairs of computers and other ICT facilities is relatively high. School libraries' budget in Nigeria is naturally low but such installation and repairs could be expensive. Expert computer repairers are still not many. This causes a lot of delays and makes the cost of services still high.

Incessant power failure: This is now a routine in Nigeria and this means that GSL need standby generators in order to make effective use of ICT facilities.

Recommendations

Having reviewed the state of school libraries in Nigeria and the challenges facing them in this information age, the following recommendations are made:

- Every level of government in Nigeria should accord the school library its rightful position in the education processes. They should provide sufficient fund for the provision of both print and electronic facilities to enable them achieve the desired goals in relation to the education of Nigerian youths. Government should bear in mind that most of our young children come from homes where ICT facilities are not available.
- Qualified and computer literate teacher librarians should be employed to manage G.S.L. for more effective and efficient performance.
- School librarians need to train and retrain in order to update their knowledge especially in the use of the new information technologies. They have to be computer literate.
- School librarians should pay serious attention to the issues of misinformation, pornography and plagiarism in students' use of the Internet.
- G.S.Ls should go into self help projects involving Parents Teachers Association (PTA), Community leaders in order to boost the collections and facilities of the libraries especially ICT facilities.
- G.S.Ls should go into resource sharing ventures with other libraries. For instance, they can cooperate with the public libraries around them. In this case they need to use systems that are compatible with those of the cooperating libraries.
- G.S.Ls can supplement their personnel by borrowing staff from private computer out-fits on a temporary basis but they should always make sure they are educated. Such personnel can teach students keyboarding and searching.
- School libraries can obtain manuals, guides from libraries and Internet on information literacy training methods.
- School librarians' Associations should be conscious of the various changes in librarianship and the challenges facing GSL and school librarians. They need to organize workshops, conferences and seminars on a regular basis in order to intimate their members of latest developments in their area.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to review the state of government school libraries in Nigeria and to examine the challenges facing them due to the demands of a new information age. It was discovered that libraries in Nigeria are generally in a poor state and the school libraries appear to be the worst hit. The major challenges are insufficient fund, lack of qualified and computer literate personnel, computer phobia, new roles of the school librarian, etc. Strategies for adjustments are recommended. Notable among them is the call on all levels of government in Nigeria to implement

their plans concerning libraries at the right time. Government and other agencies related to library services are also implored to use funds meant for school library facilities for such purposes. If school libraries are adequately stocked with relevant and up-to-date material (both in print and electronic formats) they will serve as veritable tools for the development of Nigeria's human capital. The Honourable Minister of Education rightly pointed out during the 2006 presidential forum that Nigeria's development will not be saved through oil, gas and solid mineral but through the training of her human capital. The Minister also articulated information and Communications Technology (ICT) as one of the needed information structures that will move the nation forward. The development of libraries particularly school libraries is therefore imperative in this age of information communications explosion and information technology.

References

- Awe, T. (2007) Nigeria. *"The sorry State of Lagos Central Library"* The Vanguard January 25 <http://allafrica.com/stories/20070125060.html>
- Banjo Commission: Report of the Commission Appointed to Review the Education System of Eastern Nigeria. Ibadan; Government Printer, 1986.
- Daniel O. (1991) *Information technologies applications to libraries, Internet possibilities* in U. A. Alkalari (Ed.) *Fundamentals of Research and Librarianship* Kaduna: Institute of Management Consultants, p.71 -72.
- Elaturoti, D. F. (1983) *"Survey of Secondary School Libraries in Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States of Nigeria."* Nigeria Journal of Library and Information Studies Vol. 1 No. 1.pp. 52-65.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998). National Policy on Education. Lagos. Federal Ministry of Information.
- Mostert, B. J. (2001) *"African Public Library System. A Literature Survey"* LIBRES: Library and Information Science Research. Electronic Journal ISSN 10586768 Vol. 11 issue 1 March 31.
- Muogilim, E. S. (1984), *"School library services at the crossroads: The case of Anambra"* state of Nigeria. Paper presented at the annual Conference of the Nigeria Library Association.
- Obi D. S. (1974) *The Curriculum needs of the Sub-Saharam African Library Schools: a study in comparative education in Librarianship* Quoted in Muogilim.

Obi, D.S. (1984) *"The Library Scene in Eastern Nigeria"* Nigerian Libraries Vol. 1 No. 1 February, 1984 p.21

Onwuazo, E. E. (2001)) *"Types of Libraries"* In KenAzubuike (Ed.) Fundamentals of library and information science Awka: NEPAJ Publishers p.20.

Ozor, I. N. (2005) The state of school libraries in Post Primary Schools in Oji River Local Government Area. Unpublished thesis, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

Okiy, Rose B. (2005) *"Using Libraries in Nigeria as tools for education and national development in 21st Cenfury"* <http://libr.org/isc/articles/21/13> pdf.

Okiy, R. Ibid.

Woods, B. (2003) *School Libraries* In Mariam A. Drake (Ed.) Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science.

Wiikksm V, (2003) op. cit p.2583.

Zawua and Jam (1992) *"Centralized School Library System in Benue State"* Nigerian Library Association. Benue State Chapter Library week, Makurdi, Nigeria vol. 24 no3 253-268.