

## **RE-ENGINEERING SCHOOL LIBRARIES TO REVOLUTIONISE THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

The success of any educational programme in any society can only be made possible if there is conducive learning environment. In the light of the above, this paper examines the role of school library as well as its objectives in quality education. It also discusses education for better living. The place of school library in revolutionizing the Nigerian educational system is highlighted. Other issues x-rayed in the paper include: the role of the librarian, government, educational planners, philanthropists and other stakeholders in the education industry.

### **Introduction**

The term school library encompasses a collection of print and non-print materials stored in a building commonly used for educational purposes. Therefore, the school library by nature of its establishment is a great force for educational pursuit. It is expected that the school library, whether nursery, primary or secondary programmes must be completely integrated into the overall programme of the school. The success of any educational programme or systems can be made possible when there are qualitative school library services.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) identified the library as one of the most important educational services that every state ministry of education needs to provide funds for, to train librarians and library assistants for the services. In reality, a visit to most of our primary and secondary schools in Nigeria will convince one that there is negligence on the part of school authorities and educational planners towards schools and libraries as revealed by the studies of Onadiran (1977), Udoh (1986) and Gupiyem (1997). We should understand that education cannot be re-engineered without re-engineering the school library, which stands as the cornerstone of any qualitative education in

our society. Any person who has been involved in teaching in either primary or secondary school in Nigeria will affirm to the fact that the objectives of school libraries have not been realized. In most of our schools where libraries seem to exist, the curriculum has not been properly supported with library resources. Some of the subjects offered in the schools have no books in the library.

Even where there are books, such books have outlived their usage. Students are found to depend on lesson notes given in the class, without cultivating the habits of reading even during prep time because the students claim they still retain what were taught in the class. The horizon of their knowledge is supposed to be widened through reading textbooks to complement what has been learned in the classrooms.

It is a truism that today the falling standard of education in Nigeria can be attributed to lack of learning resources and teaching aids in our schools. The non-existence of adequate library services in our elementary and secondary schools call for serious attention on the part of our educational planners, headmasters and principals, if our educational system must be sustained for a long time to come.

### **Education for a Better Living**

Anyanwu (1987) expressed that, "the great need for educational provision in Nigeria is to enable the people to make their own decisions, economic, political or educational. In a word, it is to enable Nigerians to work themselves out of poverty and thus be able to place themselves in the right path in the search for national identity". This is the sort of educational provision, which will enable people to identify themselves both as the object and the subject of their improvement and not merely the instrument in an educational process imposed upon them from outside their own communities.

The true position is that education combined with socio-economic and vocational training within the framework of development will satisfy the basic needs of the masses of Nigerians. The integration of such goals in the Nigerian society will seek to achieve two major objectives:

1. *It will seek to enhance development and cater for the cultural and social needs of the Nigerian Communities.*
2. *It will make it possible for learners to participate actively in the life of society to*

*change society from within, and towards better living. What is significant in this connection is that library must equip people with the demands of change, thus the individual must be stimulated to learn whether at home; at work in his leisure time; in an educational institution; or in a neighborhood group. In this way, he becomes better able to define and control his own destiny. The interpretation of this idea is that education should belong to the whole community and last for a lifetime and should not be confined to the young people.*

Also, what is necessary is that the literacy and library facilities, as part of the provision for lifelong learning has to merge with all forms of initial education and not remain as a separate and marginal enterprise. Rather it should be integrated with all other forms of education into a type of community education service. Such integration, in the opinion of Kinney (1975) includes:

- 1. It will achieve positive result by effectively buttressing the primary school with other established educational enterprises.*
- 2. It will enable the school system to function successfully as a community educational system.*
- 3. It will help to extend the principle of equality of educational opportunity and will ensure that it applies to adults in the communities as well as to young people.*
- 4. It will enable education to prepare people to take full advantage of the opportunities in society.*
- 5. It will ensure that education makes its contribution to the improvement of the quality of the individuals within a community.*

However, it is worthy to mention that library services geared towards the development of a community or society promotes learning

as lifelong activity. It also promotes opportunities for continuous education, irrespective of age, sex, class, creed or status. It improves the quality of life of people and prepares them to participate fully in the life of society. It encourages people to acquire the knowledge of the skills for the improvement of their individuals and community circumstances as well as their society. When the resources of library are effectively exploited by the community of users, people would be able to develop the spirit of group action and self-help for effective adaptation to change.

### **Objectives of Schools Libraries**

The general school library is not different from other libraries be it public library or academic library. They serve the same purpose, role and objectives. Some of the objectives of school libraries as enumerated by Gaji (1987) include:

1. To support the curriculum offered in the school;
2. To provide basic collections aimed at educating the child in broader sense, that is beyond the curriculum offered in the school;
3. To teach the child to read independently;
4. To encourage reading for pleasure;
5. It assists the classroom teacher in preparing his/her lesson notes;
6. To get the teacher and the pupils to keep abreast of the latest, as knowledge is not static but it grows. It is only the library that keeps the teacher and pupils informed of latest development in various subject areas;
7. To cultivate good reading habits in the child, he/she does not have to be told to read; rather he should read after school hours.

Having identified the objectives, the school library must cover a broad spectrum of subjects taught in the school

### **The Roles of School Libraries in Educational Development**

The role of the school library in reshaping the educational system of our country lies in its ability and capacity to provide information for the group of pupils and teachers. Gupiyem (1997) observed that the role of school libraries in educational development

cannot be overstressed especially where adequate learning resources are available to the learners.

Therefore, re-engineering education for sustainable development required re-engineering the school library. This can be made possible if the type of school library suggested by Okpa-Iroha (1989) is developed and maintained. This type of school library he suggested is that which:

- a. promotes the development of reading interests and habits among children.*
- b. contributes to academic achievement in all subjects e.g modern language, mathematics, sciences etc.*
- c. increases the chance of success of students in institutions of higher learning or other professional pursuits.*
- d. provides students with vocational information to the choice of a suitable career.*
- e. helps in the discovery and development of special gifts and talents of the students.*
- f. is an academic centre in the school, which trains students in the use of books as source of information.*
- g. serves as a centre of intellectual life of a school*
- h. serves as a training ground for self-reliance, self-discipline and perseverance.*

The school library encourages reading for pleasure. The reading culture of Nigeria is so low and that is as a result of the attitude developed right from childhood school days. To many Nigerians, reading is meant for those who do not have anything doing. It is in this light that Akinlolu (1997) recalled the experience of a professor who relayed his experience abroad in a plane, to the effect that while all other whites were reading one book or the other, his fellow Nigerians were busy sleeping or drinking. This assertion confirms the fact that many of us in Nigeria are literate but not educated in so many aspects.

### **Role of the School Librarian**

The school librarian should be seen as an educational developer or facilitator. He has a big task in arresting educational backwardness in the school.

The librarian in selecting the pupils' materials should understand the needs and interests of the children as well as consider their mental abilities. It is imperative that the primary or nursery school librarians should, as a matter of policy, provide library materials that support and enrich the curriculum, enlarge the horizon of the pupils and stimulate their critical and imaginative faculties. In addition to books, he should provide encyclopedias, magazines, pictures, slides and recordings, maps, films and filmstrips. Their levels, needs and interests should be considered. The school librarian should have selection of materials that reflect African cultures and not foreign materials whose culture may be irrelevant to our children.

There should be occasions created for film shows. But such films should be organized as part of the task to instill reading habits in the students

### **Re-Engineering the School Library to Revolutionise Nigerian Educational System**

Libraries are luxuries that cannot be afforded in our public primary schools in most parts of the country. Fadero (2001) reported, Daniel (1987) noted in a survey of library. <sup>primary schools in Sierra Leone that only two schools out of 16 have a</sup> Fadero (2001) also observed that in a related exercise carried out in Lagos in [1985], using questionnaires, only 149 out of 962 primary schools sent the questionnaires responded. Twenty of these claimed to have libraries, while 129 had none. Another exercise carried out on primary school libraries in Lagos State in 1986 and 1987 using financial provision as a variable revealed that an average of ₦111.35 (1986) and ₦130.65 (1987) per school was given. Considering scarcity of books in the country and the attendant high cost, it is obvious that no meaningful development can be achieved for libraries in primary schools with the amount provided, lamented Fadero.

In the secondary schools, provision of school libraries are to some extent better off but not to say they have good libraries compared to developed countries. Principals and teachers are conscious of the fact that libraries should exist in their schools and possibly there after

named an empty store-the library. In some cases, the so-called library serves as the staff room or even the head teacher's office.

In a related development, Gupiyem (1997) identified some problems associated with school libraries in a research conducted in Plateau and Nasarawa states namely:-

1. No proper attention is given to library resources and services in terms of ~~national~~ <sup>financial</sup> support by school proprietors and administrators.
2. The stocks available on shelves in the 42 schools visited were mostly archival materials and were poorly organized too.
3. School libraries in Plateau State as of 1990/91 academic sessions were operating below the minimum standards recommended by professional librarians in 1967 at the Institute of Librarianship, University of Ibadan.
4. Staff running school libraries in Plateau state, were mostly inexperienced in library work and did not have professional knowledge in librarianship, hence not competent enough to handle the administration and organization of library resources.

Therefore, to re-engineer the school library in order to revolutionize Nigerian educational system, the above identified myriads of issues and problems must be tackled promptly.

### **Role of Government, Education Planners and Stakeholders in Re-Engineering School Libraries**

The future of our education system depends to a large extent on adequate investment on our school libraries. The National policy on education (2004) enjoins every state of the federation to provide Nigerian educational services to school at all levels of educational systems, it stressed that libraries are one of the most important educational services. Therefore, every state ministry of education needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in all educational institution and to train librarians and library assistants for this service. However, these are good policies that have not attracted any commitment of government. The educational planners, stakeholders and/or philanthropists are not left out in this area of lack of commitment. If there is lack of commitment, the school authorities cannot do anything better to arrest the unfortunate situation.

It is this non-challant attitude of government towards library development in schools that makes some principals to refuse accommodation to their school librarian because he or she is not a class teacher. Do you therefore blame a principal or headmaster who appoints or asks a teacher or school prefect to take care of the school library? Do you blame a principal who carves out an office, stock it with any types of books and call it a library? We do not blame a principal or head teacher who converts a building meant for library to a staff conference room. Such is the situation prevalent in many of our schools.

The government, educational planner's stakeholders and philanthropists in the education industry should give recognition to school library services. This service should include: the provision of funds to schools for library purposes, provision of suitable book and non-book materials; and employment of professional/qualified staff to take care of the school libraries. Also, in the course of establishing new schools, libraries should be considered as a priority project. Therefore, all programmes aimed at boosting literacy at whatever level must incorporate the understanding that both government and non-governmental organizations are to give assistance since government cannot do all things alone. It needs the support of philanthropists, corporations, financial institutions and the like.

## **Conclusion**

The library is the vital organ of any educational advancement. Therefore, a wise administrator must be aware that the school library serves as the greatest teaching aid in the school. The library should be given utmost priority, equipped with the necessary infrastructures and should be well organized and used. A qualified or trained librarian should be employed to run the library unit. Both the librarian and his headmaster or principal must accept that a good library and good librarian are indispensable to an efficient school. Heads of schools should channel the funds allocated for school libraries properly and not to divert such to other projects or personal use, if really we want our educational sector to survive and to be re-engineered for the better.



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