

# THE CHALLENGE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.

BY  
GUPIYEM GUNGSAT GUPIYEM

University Library,  
University of Jos.

## Introduction

There is an increasing awareness of the importance of learning resources centre in education of children and young people all over the world. The concept of a school Library Resource Centre, an Institutional Media Centre or a Materials Resource has gained grounds in the developed world since the 1960s (Fayose, 1993:14). This is only just being recognized and accepted in the developing countries.

The role and function, of the school Library will depend upon the emphasis, which the educational system of a nation places, on it. For a long time, the Federal and State Governments in Nigeria have paid lip service to libraries and librarians especially in pre-tertiary institutions. It was not until 1981, that the revised National Policy on Education mentioned services which states:

*"Libraries are one of the most important educational services. Every state Ministry of Education needs to provide funds for the establishment of Libraries in all our educational Institutions and to train Librarians and Library Assistants for this service"*

In the view of Fayose (1993,p.14) though the Federal Government of Nigeria recognizes the role of school Library as an important educational service, its document of 1981 was silent on standards for their effective operation. Fayose further informed that it was not until 1992 that the Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development

was able to produce its first minimum standards for school libraries in Nigeria. To him, though the document was inadequate in many respects, it provided a starting point for those wishing to

develop school libraries in their institutions.

The basic aim of education is to improve society's cultural values and accumulated body of knowledge from one generation to another, as well as to prepare the young ones for meaningful adult life. For instance, in Nigeria, the current educational system emphasized creativity, scientific and reflective thinking, inter-ethnic understanding among others and a holistic approach to teaching and learning especially at the primary level. This well designed educational goal cannot be achieved without the support of an efficient school library. Fayose (1993,p.14) observed that of all the types of libraries existing in Nigeria today, school libraries are the least developed.

### **The School Library In Teaching And Learning**

The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge -based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens (IFLA/UNESCO, 2006:1).

The school library has a vital role to play in education both inside and outside the classroom. It can encourage reading, extend learning resources, develop learning skills and critical thought, develop values, attitudes and appreciations and assist with developmental task. Because of its wealth of materials and the learning opportunities it offers, the library is ideally suited to the tasks of making education more relevant to current circumstances and more meaningful to students. The school library can no longer be committed to effective education in the twenty-first century (Dike, 1993:43).

Gupiyem (1997,p.14) quoted Harrison et al (1973) and Elaturoti (1990) as expressing that functional school library must contain a well balanced and carefully selected stock. The library collections should serve a dual purpose, that of enriching the curriculum and meeting the individual needs of staff and students. The collections should be wide and varied to cover all the subjects in the school curriculum.

A good school library resource center and its staff will develop in children good reading skills and encourage long-time 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. A child who has learned to de-code the letters of the alphabet cannot automatically become an avid reader. The habit must be encouraged and nurtured through the provision of interesting and challenging reading materials both in school and at home (Fayose, 1993,p.15).

### **The Mission Of The School Library**

The school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. School libraries link to the wider library and information network if it operates in accordance with the principles in the UNESCO Public Library manifesto.

The library staff supports the use of books and other information sources, ranging from the fictional to the documentary, from print to electronic, book on site and remote. The school library materials complement and enrich textbooks, teaching apparatus and methodologies. According to IFLA/UNESCO school Library manifesto (2006,p.1), it has been demonstrated that, when libraries and teachers work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills.

School library services must be provided equally to all members of the school community, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, professional or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those who are unable to use mainstream library services and materials. Access to services and collections should be based on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Rights and Freedoms, and should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, or to commercial pressures (IFLA/UNESCO, 2006:1).

### **Goals Of The School Library**

The school library is integral to the educational process. The following are essential to the development of literacy, information literacy, teaching, learning and culture and are core school

library services (IFLA/UNESCO, 2006:2 )

- Supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school's mission and curriculum;
- Developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
- Offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment;
- Supporting all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication within the community;
- Providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities and opinions;
- Organizing activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity;
- Working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the school;
- Proclaiming the concept of information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in a democracy.
- Promotion reading and the resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond.

The school library fulfills these functions by developing policies and services, selecting and acquiring resources, providing physical and intellectual access to appropriate sources of information, providing instructional facilities, and employing trained staff.

### **Funding, Legislation And Networks**

The school library is essential to every long-term strategy for literacy, education, information provision and economic, social and cultural development. As the responsibility of local, zonal and federal authorities, it must be supported by specific legislation and policies. School libraries must have adequate and sustained funding for trained staff, materials, technologies and facilities. They must be free of charge. The school library is an essential partner in the local,

zonal and national library and information network. Where the school library shares facilities and/or resources with another type of library, such as a public library, the unique aims of the school library must be acknowledged and maintained.

### **Staffing Of School Libraries**

The school librarian or teacher-librarian should be a professionally qualified staff member who should be responsible for planning and managing the school library, to be supported by adequate staffing, who should work together with all members of the school community, and liaising with the public library and others (IFLU/UNESCO, 2006: and AASL 2006:1).

The role of school librarians or teacher librarians will vary according to the budget and the curriculum and teaching methodology of the schools, within the national legal and financial framework. Within specific contexts, there are general areas of knowledge that are vital if school librarians or teacher-librarians are to develop and operate effective school library services: resources, library, and information management and teaching.

In an increasingly networked environment, school librarians must be competent in planning and teaching and teaching different information-handling skills to both teachers and students. Therefore, they must continue their professional training and development.

### **Operation And Management**

To ensure effective and accountable operations the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2003,p.3) stipulated the following :

- The policy on school services must be formulated to define goals, priorities and services in relation to the school's curriculum;
- The school library must be organized and maintained according to professional standards;
- Services must be accessible to all members of the school community and operate within the context of the local community;
- Co-operation with teachers, senior school management,

administrators, parents, other librarians and information professionals and community groups must be encouraged.

### **Elements Of Quality School Library Programs**

The following elements define a “quality school library program”. Virtually any outstanding program, designed to support student achievement and learning process, demonstrates these qualities at a minimum.

#### **Element 1: Learning and Teaching**

The staff in a quality school library program:

- Is essential to the educational program in the school, and is fully integrated in the school’s instruction and activities.
- Integrates information literacy standards throughout the curriculum.
- Actively engages in collaborative teaching and planning practices.
- Promote, supports and encourage reading, literacy and learning in the school.
- Integrates and utilizes technology that is available for learning and teaching.

#### **Element 2: Information Access and Delivery**

The staff in a quality school library program:

- Provides access to information and ideas by acquiring current resources that support the curriculum, lead to improved school library program and other assessment measures and align with standard-based instructional practices.
- Is structured to provide flexible access to resources in a facility that is inviting, accessible, stimulating, and conducive to learning for individual and group use.
- Promotes and encourages the ethical use of information by students and staff.

#### **Element 3: Program Administration**

A quality school library program:

- Is staffed with both professional and support staff to ensure full participation in instructional activities and support the school’s standard-based learning practices.

- Demonstrates strong curricular and instructional leadership by supporting the mission and goals of the school with collaborate and active involvement in the school's curricular goals.
- Has a consistent budget and on-going administrative support to ensure a successful library program.

These elements are demonstrated by: at least one full-time school librarian endorsed by the Ministry of Education; appropriate clerical and technology support staff; librarian and teachers collaboration to integrate information literacy and contents standards; current resources which include books, magazine, videos, computer resources and online databases, etc; in the school library and other locations; supportive administrators who encourage teacher collaboration; flexible scheduling; adequate and consistent budget; well designed, stimulating, accessible, welcoming, comfortable environment and librarian who demonstrates professional leadership.

### **Position Statement On Flexible Scheduling.**

Schools must adopt the education philosophy that the library media program is fully integrated into the educational program. This integration strengthens the teaching/learning process so that students can develop the vital skills necessary to locate, analyze, evaluate, interpret, and communicate information and ideas. When the library media program is fully integrated into the instructional program of the school, students, teachers, and library media specialists become partners in learning. The library program is an extension of the classroom. Information skills are taught and learned within the context of the classroom curriculum. The wide range of resources, technologies, and services needed to meet student, learning and information needs are readily available in a cost-effective manner.

Planning between the library media specialist and the classroom teacher, which encourage both scheduled and informed visits, is the catalyst that makes this integrated library program work. The teacher brings to the planning process a knowledge of subject content and student needs.

The library media specialist contributes a broad knowledge of resources and technology, an understanding of teaching method, and a wide range of strategies that may be employed to help students learn information skills. Cooperative planning by the

teacher and library media specialist integrates information, skills and materials into the classroom curriculum and results in the development of assignments that encourage open inquiry. The responsibility for flexible scheduled library media programs must be shared by the entire school community.

The Ministry Education should endorse the philosophy that the library program is an integral part of educational program and ensures that flexible scheduling for library media centers are maintained at all levels.

The Area Inspectorate Offices should support this philosophy and monitor staff assignments to ensure appropriate staffing levels so that all teachers, including the library media specialists, can fulfill their professional responsibilities.

The Principal should create the appropriate climate within the school by advocating the benefits of flexible scheduling to the faculty, by ensuring appropriate staffing levels, as well as providing joint planning time for classroom teachers and school librarians.

The Teacher on his own part should ensure resources-based instruction and view the library as an integral part of the instruction. Students should ensure the library resources are effectively utilized and patronized.

### **Library Books And The Internet**

Why do students need library books when they have the internet?

The reality is that students need both; and the challenge is that students learn how to be effective consumers of all kinds of information, regardless of the format. (Mckenzie, 2000). Mckenzie further states that if the brave new world of electronic information comes to pass, there will be need for locally maintained library collection. Paper based resources will continue to be a major source for scholarly activity. According to McKenzie (2000) in this brave new world, anyone can be a publisher of information, because all it takes is for one to learn how to design web pages and upload the information on the Internet Server. This is not a difficult task for the digital generation or any adult who wishes to do so. The internet is one of the most democratic institutions since the invention of the printing press, and as such, it offers anyone a place to communicate whatever they wish, reliable and unreliable, good and bad, biased



and non-biased, accurate or inaccurate.

Still in the opinion of McKenzie (2000), one of the important missions of the school librarian is to develop a collection of materials; print, electronic, and non-print ...which support the learning, reading, and research needs of the students. He expressed that librarians today (21<sup>st</sup> Century) are using information technologies such as the internet to develop "Virtual libraries" of highly recommended and authoritative resources which were only available a few years ago in print format.

### **Determining The Quality Of School Library Collection**

In the opinion of Curtis (2006: 4 – 5) the school librarian could examine the collection in three ways: (a) Currency copyright date of less than 12 years old (b) items per pupil (standard for items per pupil) (IPP), 20 IPP for primary school, 25 IPP for secondary schools, 30 IPP for post-secondary schools (but not Universities), and (c) quantity, primary school (12,000 items), secondary schools (15,000 items) post-secondary school (18,000 items). What a challenge for developing countries?

How will quality collections be developed? Curtis (2006:8) suggested the use of technology to work smart and think out of the box! List all the task that need to be done, apply knowledge of selection and collection development and identify the resources (information and human) that can assist with the process.

However, the magnitude of building or rebuilding library collections is daunting (frightening). It must be done effectively, efficiently and accountably. These are the operative words that demanded a technological solution and a partnership with a major book jobber (distributor). Thus, effective in order to develop quality collections to support the curriculum and interests and ability level of the students. Efficient in order for the ordering process to be completed by the school librarian in a seven-month time frame (this involves ordering of materials abroad, for developing countries). Accountable in order to demonstrate that funding is spent responsibly, equitably, and for its intended purpose (Curtis, 2006:8).

#### **Weeding As A Process For Quality Control In School Libraries**

Weeding is the process of removing materials from the open shelves of any library and re- assessing its value in terms of

current needs (Gorman and Howes, 1989:323). For Morris, Gillespie and Spirit (1992: 460) it means to eliminate the unsuitable or unwanted.

The process of weeding is vital in quality control in a school library. This process involves the following:

- Weeding the out-of-date and no longer authentic; this condition occurs very frequently with science materials but no single subject is immune.
- The worn-out or badly damaged; sometimes repairs can be made, for example, books can be rebound, but costs shall be weighed carefully against the price of a replacement of adding a different title.
- Duplicate titles that are no longer of interest to students or teachers,
- The unpopular or unused materials can get in the way and has a hindrance effect,
- Community needs may have changed,
- Institutional objectives may have changed so that library objectives must change also.
- Cost of storage (Morris, Gillespie, and Spirit, 1992:460, Gorman and Howes, 1989:325).

The school library collection may be of immediate and potential use to teachers and students when a regular and systematic review of the school library stock is done via weeding, renewed or replacement by the school librarian or teacher-librarian.

Conclusion:

All stakeholders must consider the school library as the life wire for quality education. It is the engine that promotes, enhances, and maintains life-long education of the individual and the society. For high standard of education to be encouraged in Nigeria and other developing countries, effective and well run school libraries should be established. Standard school libraries will assist to check and minimize examination cheating and lead to improvement in standard of education. Finally, developing countries need to borrow a leaf from developed countries for the managing of school libraries in this twenty-first century.

Recommendations and suggestions.

For managing effective school libraries in developing

countries in the twenty-first century. The following recommendations and suggestions:

- The establishment, development and maintenance of school libraries in Nigeria, should be made compulsory for every school, from Nursery to Senior Secondary Schools have been made.
- All secondary schools must each have a standard school library by the year 2012, otherwise right to present students for WASSCE and NECO should be withdrawn.
- Librarians (chartered) should be engaged in the inspection of newly established schools (both public and private) with immediate effect.
- Minimum standards for running effective school libraries adopted by IFLA/UNESCO for developing countries should be implemented in all schools on or before 2010.
- Every school should employ a qualified librarian or teacher-librarian to oversee the activities and services of the school library.
- Library fees of three hundred and five hundred Naira as minimum, should be charged per child per term with effect from 2007/2008 academic session for primary and secondary schools respectively, as this will go a long way for the implementation of recommendations 1- 5 above.
- Each school must open a bank account mainly for "Library Development" and all library fees must be paid to such account, no cash payment should be done in the school, for effective accountability.
- Principals promotion should be based on the implementation and effective accountability of Library fees, based on external audit report, to be sponsored by Government.
- The Nigerian Library Association in conjunction with Nigerian School Library Association should mobilize and sensitize all stakeholders for effective revolution in school libraries in Nigeria before the year 2010.
- Governments through their ministries responsible for education, are urged to develop strategies, policies and plans which are to implement the principles of the above recommendations.

- Standards for items per pupil (IPP) are hereby recommended as follows (a) 5 IPP for Nursery, (b) 7 IPP for junior secondary schools, and (c) 10 IPP for senior secondary schools. This should be achieved by 2015 if Number 1 to 10 above are logically followed and implemented.

### References:

- American Association of School Libraries (AASL, 2006). ALA/AASL position statement on appropriate staffing for school library media centers. Available in <http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/proftools/positionstatement.appropri>, Downloaded April 26<sup>th</sup> 2006.
- Curtis, D (2006). School library facts. Available in <http://www.bcpl.net1^dcurtis/Libraryfacts/>, of April 26<sup>th</sup> 2006.
- Dike, V. W (1993). *Library resources in education*. Enugu: ABIC Publishers.
- Elaturoti, D. F (1990). *Developing a small library media center* Ibadan: Onibonje Publishers.
- Fayose, P.O. (1993). *School Library resource centers for educational excellence*, Ibadan: AENL Educational Publishers.
- Gorman, G. E & Howes, B. R. (1989). *Collection development for Libraries* London: Bowker-Sour.
- Gupiyem, G. G. (1997). Library resource in Senior Secondary Schools in Plateau State of Nigeria: M.L.S thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Harrison, K. C (1973). "School Library Resource Center: Recommendations Standards for policy and provision London: The Library Association.
- IFLA/UNESCO (2006) IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto. Available in <http://www.ifla.org/vii/s11/pubs/manifest.htm> Download April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

McKenzie, J. (2000). The Educational Technology Journal, When the

Book? When The Net? Updated article March 2000.

Available

in

<http://www.bcpl.net/~dcurtis/libraryfacts/>. Download April 26<sup>th</sup> 2006.

Morris, B. J; Gillespie, J.T. & Spirit, D. L (1992) Administering the school library Center 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Providence. New Jersey: R.R Bowker.