

The place of library in the development of the Nigerian Child

BY

M. B. DAKUR
G. G. GUIPYEM
J. E. ADAH

University of Jos Library

Abstract

In this modern world, information is becoming an increasingly vital tool for development; in fact, it is a crucial component of life. Wherever one turns to, there is the clarion call to mobilize the people especially in developing countries like Nigeria in the field of social, political, religious, education and cultural development. However, the Nigerian child is not an exception in this mobilization struggle. The paper attempts to highlight the role of library in the development of the child and functions of the librarian. The changing role of libraries and librarians in developing the Nigerian child highlighted. In conclusion, suggestions for the improvement of the Nigerian child via library development are proffered.

Introduction

The quest for knowledge and information in a changing society like Nigeria cannot be over stressed. Any nation without standardized ways of information dissemination faces serious backwardness. It is a fact that information is very vital and it enlightens the mind and exposes the brain in matured ways on how to improve life politically, socially, economically and culturally.

The library is an information institution, which acquires, process and disseminates information to the training population in Nigeria, be it academic, public or special. Today, a large proportion of Nigerian children are exposed to the vagaries of western culture provided by mass media. In fact, prior to the attainment of a political freedom, only a small proportion of the youth were variously inculcated with the culture of reading with the aim to prepare them for leadership positions. The rest were X-rayed to the brutal culture of tribal and

ethnic conflict. Odi (1996) stated that, the youth has become a major consumer of the special variants of brutal culture that are produced in the mass media. An extraordinary quantity of popular music and brutal films, periodical literature and forms of dance is produced for and consumed by youths. Most of the Nigerian children have little access, except religious books in their various homes, with library books. It is sad to find that some parents who are in possession of books of various texts do not allow their children to touch them. This may be one of the reasons why the Nigerian child's level of information consciousness is low and when they become matured and occupy leadership positions, their perceptions with reading will not have any significance.

If Nigeria as a country is serious about ensuring that all children begin reading and learning to equip themselves for future leaderships, functional library services should be put in place. The development of Nigerian children is essential for the future of this country because they are the future leaders. In present day Nigeria, the number of library users has never been all that very large. Most of the library patrons are the intellectuals, Adi (1992) describes these intellectuals as those whose occupations require intellectual preparation and in practice the application of high intellectual skills. In the Nigerian context, this category includes: University teacher, students, scientists, writers, artists, secondary school teachers, lawyers, senior civil servants, engineers to mention just a few. Outside the intellectual stratum, the other sections of the society that patronize the library are very few.

The role of library in developing the Nigerian child

The library can simply be defined as a place where knowledge and information are acquired and disseminated. This definition therefore clears away the notion that the library is used only to read for an impending examination. The first duty of any library is to acquire books and non-book materials that can best suit library patrons. The



library does not just acquire any material but what the users want. And such materials acquired are not just dumped haphazardly on the library shelves for users. Rather, they are processed, so that all related materials are grouped together on the library shelves for easy retrieval.

The child, from year 1-3 can see and recognize a book especially books that contain pictures or graphic objects. Children derive satisfaction in environments stoked with books as do most others. It is unfortunate that Nigeria has not quiet embraced the importance of library services, not to talk of establishing children's libraries for the development of children's attitudes and skills. However, the authors appreciate the efforts of most of our public libraries where children's section or units exist. In this section, a wide variety of materials in printed and non-printed format are provided. Pictures, films, tapes to mention a few make learning very exciting.

Gupiyem (1999) postulated that an ideal library system for children should have the following materials:

- Video materials: These are video tapes (reel to reel) videocassettes and lately Video discs. Sound motion picture films are also considered video because they provide both audio and visual media.

- Audio recording: These include audio discs, audio tapes and cartridges of visual materials including shades, film trips, silent motion picture films.

- Graphics: Art prints, pictures, photographs, maps, charts.

- Ragalia: Consists of toys, games, models, and actual specimens.

- Microforms: This category of non-print materials is not only becoming popular in higher education but also finding its way into primary and secondary schools in developed countries.

The availability of the above mentioned materials in the library can promote the development of reading interest and habits in children. The child at an early stage is very inquisitive and curious to know about things happening around him. In another development, Gupiyem (1997) observed

that questions of who, what, when, where arise naturally with a child. As these questions are answered, pupils develop their inquisitive minds, find fulfilment and satisfaction and a life long habit of using books and libraries to develop naturally. Gupiyem (1999) further informed that, the library can develop the research skills of the beginner, through the following:

- To be able to promote the development of reading interest and habits through reading, listening to and viewing a variety of learning materials. Such learning habits form the key to continuous success in school, and to the personal enrichment of leisure time throughout life.

- To contribute to academic achievement in all subjects in present schooling, nursery or primary and increase students chances in institutions of higher learning or other professional pursuits.

- Help in discovering and developing the special gifts and talents of students.

- Serves as center for training students to study independently by providing a whole range of materials for class assignments. It also serves as a source of information.

- It serves as a training ground in self-reliance, self-discipline and perseverance to the children.

It is a truism that poor reading habits amongst our youths and adults emanate from lack of childhood exposure to books and access to libraries. Exposure to books and library, lead the child to the habits of reading.

The place of the library in developing the Nigerian child cannot be overemphasized. Mention can also be made of its numerous role apart from the functions discussed above. Such includes:

- The library provides all sorts of books for leisure and for recreational purposes, thereby developing the child's intellect. Fagbemi (1991) observed that reading sharpens thinking and creative imagination and expands ones scope of experience all of which enables one to be more knowledgeable about other environments.

The library, when properly utilized, becomes the



children's storehouse of information and reservoir of endless delight for them. Once children develop the habit of using the library to gain information, it will remain with them throughout life.

It is the cultural laboratory of mankind and has therefore played a major role in the cultural development of the people. The ideas, intellectual and creative power of the adults are deposited and preserved for the younger generation. It is in the light of this, that Oni (1992) opined that children are like seeds in the hands of adults, and that it is the kind of fruits they are cultured to bear that they would germinate to bear in adulthood.

The library helps the child become independent in information searching and study.

Through reading variety of library materials, the child gets vicarious experiences. Through these experiences, he becomes better prepared to meet met problems because through reading, he already has made similar problems. Hutcherson (1978) observed that vicarious experience is valuable to the child because it gives him an opportunity to carry on some of the trial-and-error process of choosing and rejecting behaviour patterns.

The library does more than inform, it also exerts a strong emotional influence as well as affects attitudes and understanding tremendously, although one cannot measure the exact level. This emotional attitude cannot be overlooked, for building the right attitude is indispensable for future leaders. Butchelor (1978) said that no child, no matter how bright or fortunate, can possibly have first hand contacts with all peoples of the world, but he can learn about them vicariously through reading.

The library is social institutions where readers tend to live their lives in a group of readers share their reading experiences. They often form clubs in order to have a forum where they can discuss what they read.

There is no doubt that the use made of library

resources by our younger ones is indispensable at every stage of learning and development from childhood up to adulthood. In his own contribution, Giainey (1993) observed that the intellectual development of all children is the central purpose of the school equipped with library provisions and services for citizenship, economic well-being and individual self-actualization.

The library, if it is to succeed in contributing to the development of the child needs a lot of re-engineering and support from educational administrators.

Presently, one cannot say that what obtains in most states of the federation is anything to write home about. However, the whole responsibility for the development of children through library services lies with parents, educationists and government.

Utor (1987) observes that children are seen as people therefore, they should be served properly with an information balance menu. This is responsibility for all of us and we cannot evade it.

The librarian and Nigerian child

In this technological age, Nigerian children should be given the regard and recognition due to him. They are created beings not only to be seen but to be heard as well. As individuals they have desires, feelings and understanding.

Based on the above statements, the Nigerian librarian is in a constant struggle to give each child the needed information, guidance and direction. The librarian is regarded as an educational facilitator like the teacher in the classroom. For the library to have a positive impact on the development of the Nigerian child, staff in charge of the library should be well trained in the field of librarianship. Indeed, children's library should not be underrated whereby just anybody could be employed to head it. A qualified librarian is in a good position to execute library programmes as he has the knowledge to select appropriate library materials for the use of children. The children's library does not need only a teacher but a qualified degree holder in library science who will have interest in the services he offers. Gupiyem (1997)



quoted Miller (1983) as stating that students deserved to have the guidance of a well-educated and highly motivated librarian to serve their needs. Some of the roles a librarian is supposed to play in children's library are enumerated below:

The librarian should silent books for recreational reading in which the child may receive intellectual development. Reading can have a marked positive influence on personality.

It is very vital to know what books to place at a particular child's disposal, because a book will help a person only to the degree that it satisfies his particular need. No wonder, Hutcherson (1978) informed that the right book for the right child at the right time, more than just a slogan, helps to lay the foundation and erect the framework of character in childhood.

Children need more security, especially emotional security. They need to love and be loved. The role of the librarian in this aspect is great. The librarian needs to show love to the children as they come into the library. He should be a caring librarian just as their parents care for them in the house.

A good librarian will engage himself in weekly storytelling activities for children. As we are all aware, children have interest in listening to stories and that helps them develop their mental abilities.

Setting the environment for library services to children

The importance of providing a good environment in the library to users cannot be overstressed. Librarians should not overlook the use of library by children. Provision of books alone does not make the child enthusiastic about the library.

A library equipped with good sitting facilities like chairs, tables, shelves that are comfortable for the use of children can make them use the library with keen interest.

The library should be well-ventilated, effective lighting system, and possible well-carpeted floor will attract children into the library.

Storybooks that have pictures of various types that can educate the child should be selected. Others include non-book materials like filmstrip, videocassettes; books on "Sesame Streets" are

good models to children. On the whole, the librarian in charge should make the library very attractive to the children so they can pay regular visits and make the library their second home.

Other facilities include enough space to accommodate users. The environment should be conducive, that is noiseless so that the children can concentrate. Cataloguing and classification schemes should be provided so that the children can get acquainted to these schemes, even though they may not be able to handle them. The materials selected for the use of children's library should stand the test of time. Selection must also take into cognisance the broad educational policy of the nation because children are potential students.

The changing role of librarians

The librarian's role in the use of the library in this technological era cannot be overemphasized. The librarian is more important than the library building. He/she is more than a mere custodian of books stocked on library shelves. Without the librarian, the world of information is dead. It is the role of the librarian to marry information with people. In the past, people had the notion that the librarian was a storekeeper, a caretaker, or a "security man" in charge of books and other materials. People should be told that the librarian's primary job is to organize for easy retrieval those materials he is the "Storekeeper" or "caretaker" for. In librarianship parlance it's called Cataloguing and classification. Today, the librarian's role has changed. The world has changed. The world today has become a global village where every family is expected to have access to information. That is today, if there are computers in the family where they can retrieve information, what then is the need for a librarian who will sit tight in his office expecting clients to come for this volume of collections in the library. The librarian's role in this present age is to go to the streets and proclaim the existence of information to people (Dakur & Gupiyem, 2000).

The Librarian's role or services to children in this modern world is to inculcate to the children the habit of using computers. The librarian of



children's library should make provisions for the use of computers by children. A major way to attract children to the library is to ensure that there is opportunity to allow children play computer games. It is the duty of librarians to teach children how to do computer search, so that when these children grow up to adulthood they will have become acquainted with computers.

The efforts of the librarian in this task in changing world become very imperative because our children will grow to love computer machines and develop with the changing time.

On the whole, the librarian in charge of children's services should understand the children's needs and interest.

Suggestion for the improvement of children's library services in Nigeria

In Nigeria, children's library service is often neglected whereas it should be one of the areas to be given adequate attention. The following suggestions could help improve children's library services.

- i. In the public library service, the children's section should be handled by qualified librarians whose roles should be recognized by the body establishing the library.
- ii. Financial allocation to public library service for children's collection development should be properly utilized
- iii. Each public library should acquire computers where children should be taught the use of computer from the early stage.
- iv. The Librarian should select suitable books for the children. Books on heroes and indigenous or local culture could be helpful
- v. The atmosphere created by the Librarian and his staff should be that of friendliness and good humour because harshness will drive the children away from using the library

Conclusion

If Nigeria is serious about ensuring that all children of school age are ready to learn in this century, then a framework for establishing comprehensive, integrated library services for children must be developed and instituted rapidly. The fact remains however, that many children in Nigeria today are yet to be exposed to the use of library but it is a general belief that there is hope for the future since the government, professionals and like-minded people have recognised the indispensability of the library as a service agency, a teaching agency, a resource centre, a reading centre and a meeting point for intellectual and social activities.

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