

School Library Situation in Nigeria: The State of the Art in Some Northern States.

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Abstract

Despite the importance attached to school libraries in Nigeria, they are still riddled with a lot of problems. These problems include funding, accommodation, staffing, rare collections and their organization, user education, computerization as well as non-compliance with the minimum standards among others. Studies by Bello and Momoh (2001) Aguolu (2002), Hamzat (2002), Saka (2004) and Oguntayo (2004) revealed anomalies in school libraries using some Northern states as examples more especially the areas of funding, staffing, library collection and their organization.; Suggestions are offered.

Introduction

School libraries are those type of libraries that are established in nursery, primary, post-primary institutions to support teaching and learning activities of teachers and students. The school libraries do this through the acquisition of learning resources either through purchase, gift and donation, inter-library loan or through distribution from parent library/body. The school libraries are managed by librarian, teacher-librarian or library officer. The need for establishing school libraries as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2004) states that:

School libraries constitute one of the most important education services; Proprietors of schools shall also provide functional libraries in all their Educational institutions in accordance with the established standards. They shall also provide for training of librarians and library assistants for this service. State and local governments shall establish public libraries and actively promote readership in the use of authority.

In order to achieve the above policy statement, school libraries must be functional i.e. they should be well accommodated, stocked with current but relevant library collection, being manned by qualified library staff capable of providing services to users. To further achieve all these, adequate funds has to be put in place so as to procure adequate learning resources. In the view of providing efficient and effective library services, (Saka 2004). This functional aspect of school library corresponds with the requirement for school libraries enumerated by Oguntuase (2003). However, the above stated conditions and services cannot be possible due to non-recognition of school libraries by the government, policy makers and institutional authorities in the areas of funding and staffing among

There are a lot of problems hindering the development of school library services in Nigeria. Thus Aguolu (2002) rightly pointed out that "in effect, a university, college or school library for example cannot be expected to fulfill its role and carry out its

responsibilities effectively if its institutional authorities fail to provide it with adequate funds, personnel and physical facilities....” From recent studies carried out and written up on school libraries by Bello and Momoh (2001) in Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Aguolu (2002) in Borno state, Hamzat (2002) in Bauchi metropolis, Opaleke and Oke (2003) Saka (2004) in Niger State and Oguntayo (2004) in Kwara central respectively observed inadequacies in library collection, staffing, funding, accommodation. The distribution of 2,870,460 volumes of books in 370 schools as contained in (Daily Trust, march 13, 2003) by Federal government seem to be inadequate. One problem area that is yet to be adequately addressed is the lack of standard for school libraries in Northern states in the areas of indigenous children literature, Library Staff, incorporation of library science course in secondary school curriculum (Daraman 2000). Assessing school libraries in Nigeria, Oguntase (2003) lamented on the deplorable condition of school libraries in the areas of funding, staffing, furniture, equipment and services.

Some of the constraints to school library development in Nigeria and some Northern states in particular are hereby itemised and discussed below:-

1. Funding

One of the major problems facing school libraries in Nigeria today is the funding issue. Government and the concerned institutional authorities are not willing to commit adequate funds for the purchase of relevant information resources, maintain library services. Where such funds are provided, they are usually in token amount (inadequate). In some cases where funds are provided they are not judiciously used by the principal or headmaster, Hamzat (2002). That is why most school libraries at primary and secondary schools (where established) stocked outdated/inadequate books. One of the findings of Saka's (2004) study on secondary school libraries in three geopolitical zones of Niger state revealed that:

The three tiers of government do not provide funds specifically meant for secondary school libraries. This has been responsible for inadequate resources in secondary school libraries in Niger state.

2. Accommodation

Most school libraries do not have adequate accommodation. Some libraries are attached to classroom in a noisy area. Some schools use small classroom, store reading corner of which books are kept in cupboard, or scattered on tables. In some cases even when books are supplied and available, structures as libraries do not accommodate them. This translates to mean that there is no building called library. From the study on “Availability and use of school libraries in Kwara central”, Oguntayo (2004) revealed that books supplied by Ministry of Education were kept in either stores or principal's office and that 63% of schools studied do not have library.

3. Staffing Issue

A good number of school libraries in Nigeria are poorly staffed both in quantity and quality. The few staff manning the school libraries lack professional training

qualification in the field of librarianship. This has negative implications on the organization of information resources and the provision of entire library services. Teaching staff are sometimes deployed to manned school libraries besides their primary assignment of teaching. In some cases, clerical staff are deployed to managed school library. The situation of school library in Borno State was viewed by Aguolu (2002) that "the existing libraries or book collections are usually managed by un-motivated, ill-qualified library assistants, some of whom have only attempted TC II, WASC or its equivalent examinations, and are erroneously called "librarians." The same misnomer is found in many other Nigerian states"

4. School Library Collection

Library collection in most Nigerian school libraries are grossly inadequate to take care of the curriculum of schools. What really accounted for inadequate collection could be responsible to inadequate funding and ill-qualified library staff, hence provision of adequate Funds and qualified library staff would help to build library collection in terms of quantity and quality as well as relevancy and currency. A study undertaken by Bello and Momoh (2001) revealed that 21 secondary schools in FCT Abuja have a total of 356,720 volumes of books with few reference titles. Usman (2003) lamented on the deplorable condition of libraries in Niger state as it affects their collections. Even with the flag-off ceremony in the distribution of 2,870, 460 volumes of books to 370 schools using 10 schools in each state of the Federation as reported in (Daily Trust of March 13, 2003), does not merit any form of adequate library collection in Nigerian schools. The reasons for these are that : (i) The collection does not cover the 36 states and FCT Abuja, (ii) The collection is not adequate in number. (iii) The collection does not cover AVM and computers.

5. Organization of Information Resources

This entails accessioning, cataloguing, classification, indexing/abstracting as well as compilation of bibliographies for easy access by readers. Majority of school libraries neither catalogue, classify nor index and abstract learning resources due to lack of qualified library staff. From the findings of Hamzat's (2002) study on secondary school library resources in Bauchi Metropolis revealed that:-

Library materials in some of the schools were not properly organized. A lot of books were not properly catalogue and arranged on shelves for easy retrieval. There were no shelf guides. Their accession registers lack continuity and there are no card catalogue and cardboard...Because of low educational qualification of those assistants, library materials are not properly arranged and organized for easy retrieval...

6. User Education Programme

This involves three (3) methods namely: Library orientation, Library tour and Library use instructions otherwise known as library use skills. Users of school libraries are supposed to benefit from the acquisition of skills or instructions on how to effectively use library and its resources. It is unfortunate that almost all libraries at primary and secondary schools do not provide this service as a result of its non-inclusion in the

curriculum of primary and secondary schools. This consequently leads to ineffective utilization of library resources by users. This phenomenon was viewed by Elaturoti, Shyllon and Udoh (2002) in the following ways:

The essential library use skills are not taught as part of the curriculum in school to make the pupils independent learners and equip them for life long learning. The library period does not exist in most schools' time-table and where it is created, the period is not utilized for the purpose it was intended.

This problem of ineffective utilization of library resources by the users which was further caused by none existence of school library or lack of library user education programme during primary and post primary school days has negative implications even when students entered the tertiary institutions: thus Aguolu (2002) observed that: Most students in Nigerian universities had never used any type of library before entering the university; some of them had never even seen a library. Yet to be able to undergo a meaningful undergraduate education, they must learn how to exploit the resources of the university library-this skill, if acquired, is essential to life long education. This is an age when the knowledge of a subject has become no more important than the knowledge of where and how to find information upon the subject.

7. Minimum Standards for School Libraries

The need for the above underlined document came up in 1992 with the setting up of 12-man committee drawn from National Library of Nigeria, Nigeria Institute for International Affairs, State Library Board, University of Ibadan, Federal Ministry of Education and Federal Unity Schools. Federal Government felt that "few schools in the country have libraries that are worthy of the name" and that "lack of acceptable minimum standards for school libraries has dully identified as one of the fundamental problems militating against the emergence of a viable school library system in Nigeria". The blue print covers the areas of accommodation, furniture and equipment, library collections, staffing requirements, services, funding and highlights. Daraman (2000) as well as Bello and Momoh (2001) observed that there is lack of standard school libraries in Northern states and FCT Abuja respectively.

8. State of Computerization in School Libraries

When one talk of computerization of school library services in Nigeria, it is zero. Apart from inadequate funding, lack of technical know-how in the field of library computerization; the quantity of school library resources does not merit/warrant computerization. Apart from few academic and special libraries that have attained the stage of computerization, others (school and public libraries) have not exhibit any form of computerization. There are few university and research libraries that are in the fore front of computerization. Aguolu (2002). The computerization of school libraries in Nigeria is being militated by a number of predicaments which among them include inadequate and ill-qualified library personnel, inadequate library collection and its maintainance problem, funding and lack of electricity in some schools. These predicaments are summed

up to form financial, materials and human resources problems and hence meaningful progress is yet to be achieved in terms of computerization of school libraries in Nigeria (Opaleke and Oni 2003)

Conclusion

The policy statement on school libraries being supported by the "Minimum Standards for School Libraries in Nigeria" is a good starting point. The problem lies on their implementation in terms of funding, resources, staffing, services etc.

Today one can confidently say that there are good numbers of school libraries that are not functional. This is attributed to the indifferent attitude of government, curriculum planners and institutional authorities, who fail to accord recognition to school library in the areas discussed above. Thus Fafunwa in blue print (1992) states that:

"Despite their inestimable importance, school libraries in Nigeria are still clearly in their embryonic stage of development, displaying inadequacies in funding, staffing, collections, furniture/equipment and services provided."

Recommendations

- i. Alternative sources of funds be explored. These include library fees, over-due charges, photocopying services, endowment funds etc. These alternative sources would help save school libraries from over-dependence on government grants/budget to school libraries (if any.)
- ii. There should be school library legislation which will commit government and institutional authorities in the areas of funding, staffing, provision and utilization of resources as well as adequate accommodation.
- iii. Inclusion of "Library use skills" in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. While school libraries on their plight should implement the curriculum by providing user education as one of services of library.
- iv. Appointment of library staff with BLS degree or at least DLS certificate to head school libraries.

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