



An Exploratory Study on School Libraries and Media Resource Centers in Nigeria

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Abstract

In Nigeria, many secondary schools both public and private are established without consideration for including school libraries or media resource centers. Education authorities who know the importance of school libraries fail to include libraries in the process of planning to establish secondary schools. This study is a literature review that seeks to explore the availability and use of school libraries and media resource centers in Nigeria. The paper is organized under the following sub-headings: the evolution of school libraries and media resource centers; the role of school libraries and media resource centers; the school librarian/media specialists and responsibilities; qualities of school librarian/media specialist; and impact of school library/media resource center on reading habits. Studies have found that sufficiently financed school libraries and media resource centers staffed with qualified school librarians and media specialists influence student's academic performance, regardless of their socio-economic status or educational background. Therefore, the study calls on students to maximize the use of school libraries to benefit from the advantages since school libraries/media centers provide favourable environment where the students can discover and develop their abilities and talents as well as improve their reading and study skills.

Keywords

School libraries, media resource centers, school librarian, media specialists, Nigeria

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Introduction

School libraries are libraries operated in primary, secondary or high schools, technical colleges or trade schools and teacher training colleges. Such libraries and media resource centers are widely acknowledged to be critical to effective teaching and learning in

these schools. They do not only provide the learning resources for total educational programme of the school but help pupils and students skills in reading, observing, listening, thinking and communicating ideas (Ojede, 2004). The former Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE)

programmes of the Federal Government of Nigeria underscore the vital role of school libraries in the effective implementation of the programmes. It is pertinent from the foregoing that school librarianship is

a very essential component of any sound educational programme and as such, the professional commitments and programmes of librarians must pay considerable attention to school librarianship.

The Evolution of School Libraries and Media Resource Centre in Nigeria

In Nigeria, school libraries developed slowly in the early years. Some government schools and a few mission schools had good libraries but other schools had none. This was due to poor financial situation of mission schools and the commercial orientation of privately owned schools. Lack of reading culture or library background also hindered school library development in Nigeria (Dike, 1991). The first major project that provided the initial impetus to school libraries in Nigeria was the federal library service which started in 1964. This was part of a UNESCO pilot project on school libraries in Africa that involved the establishment of model school and college library services. Various professional Associations played significant roles in the development of school libraries in Nigeria. First was the West African Library Association (WALA), which championed the smooth running of school libraries, especially through organizing conferences on school library development. These conferences paved the way for the development of school libraries in such that by 1960, mobile library services were provided in schools as part of the Regional Library Board Services in Eastern Nigeria (Ogunsheye, 1998).

With the break-up of WALA, the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) was born. It succeeded the West

African Library Association in the course of school library development. The Western division of the Association organized conferences with themes that centered on school libraries at which teachers in-charge of libraries, both in primary, secondary and teacher colleges, participated, thereby creating a forum for teachers and librarians to rub minds on issues boarding school libraries (Dike, 1991). The Eastern Nigerian School Library Association (ENSLA) was founded in 1963 under the chairmanship of Geoffrey Cleaver. The Association busied itself with the organization of refresher courses for teacher librarians. The British Council had also been very active in the improvement of school libraries through the sponsorship of occasional training seminars for teacher librarians mainly in the East and also in the other regions of the country. These courses and seminars had played an important role, historically, in arousing interest in school library development. These organizations, though acting independently, had in different ways contributed to the initial establishment and growth of school libraries in Nigeria.

The Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA) was founded as a professional association for people who have special interest in the development and effective operation of school libraries in Nigeria. The idea for its establishment came at the close of

the International Association of School Librarians (IASL) conference which was held in Ibadan in 1977. The formation of a national association for school librarians was mooted by participants at the conference. A proposal for a national association which will incorporate all the state branches was made by Professor F.A Ogunshye (Dike, 1991). The proposal was unanimously adopted by the participants who also initiated action towards its immediate implementation. Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA) had its inaugural conference on October 28, 1977 at the Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan. Officers were elected to run the affairs of the association with Profs. F.A Ogunshye and D.F. Elaturoti as the president and secretary respectively (Dike, 1991).

The Role of School Libraries and Media Resource Centers

With regards to the purposes of school libraries, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (2003) identified seven roles they perform to include:

- Leading the teaching and learning of information literacy across the curriculum;
- Collaborating with teachers to embed information literacy across the curriculum;
- Providing training for teachers and students;
- Offering a suitable environment for research;
- Affording access to a wide range of resources;
- Facilitating opportunities to browse and discover; and
- Stimulating independent learning.

Nyam and Guraji (1999) noted that the establishment of school libraries is essential as the establishment of schools themselves. School libraries found in primary and secondary schools are established for the improvement of teaching-learning situations and the total upbringing of school children. Education is a societal instrument of change and consequently it is affected by social, political, economic, scientific and technological changes. The changes invariably affect the school which in turn is undergoing drastic changes. These changes have made greater demands on the school library. It has overhauled the school library from the peripheral position in the teaching-learning programmes into the mainstream of the instructional process itself. The new educational role of the school library has prompted a proliferation of named changes such as instructional material center, learning resource center, instructional resource center, educational resource center, audio-visual resource center and communications resources center. These are some of the common substitutes for the traditional term 'school libraries. Presently, the terms school library media center, school library media specialists and school media library programme have been adopted as new terminologies for discussing primary/secondary school library programmes (Tralagba & Baro, 2018).

Fayose (1995) has described the school library resource center as that part of school where a collection of books, periodicals, magazines and newspapers, films and filmstrips, video-tapes, recording of all types, slides, computers, kits, realia and other information bearing resources are

housed for use by teachers and pupils for learning, recreational activities, personal interest and interpersonal relationships of children in the school manned by a MediaSpecialist. Nwofor and Ilorah (2006) states that the educational programme of the schools and the media resource center are interdependent and its impact can only be felt when it functions as an integral support component of the total teaching-learning enterprise, functions as a learning laboratory where the resources for thinking and the specialized techniques of thinking are fused into a coherent pattern of learning skill development, refinement and reinforcement, through the combined hard work of the library media specialist and the teacher. The media resource center should be an instructional center for enriching student's experiences and meeting the demands of the curriculum and other co-curricular activities, an informal learning center devoid of the rigid classroom situations where students and staff relations are meaningfully relaxed. It should be an interactional center where students use a variety of media, materials and equipment (Balogun, 1990). For it to achieve maximum integration of school work, Balogun (1990) pointed out that the following conditions need to be adhered to:

- a. The members of staff of the school must be convinced of the value of the educational resource center as an instrument of education.
- b. They must consider carefully how the media center will be effectively used in the teaching of their subjects.
- c. They must consider how their pupils will be encouraged to use "books" effectively.
- d. There must be a concerted effort to ensure a balanced library stock relevant to the school's curriculum in accordance with the educational goals of the larger society.

The School Librarian/Media Specialists and responsibilities

Qualified school library media personnel are fundamental to successful programs that contribute to student learning, and a program's level of professional and support staffing is based upon a school's instructional program, services, facilities, and the quantity of students and teachers. Basic, building-level staffing for an effective program necessitates at least one certified or licensed school library media specialist per building (Fayose, 1995). The library media specialist should hold a master's degree in librarianship from a program accredited by the American Librarian Association or a master's degree with a specialty in school library media from an educational institution accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (Nwofor & Ilorah, 2006). In addition to the minimum of one school library media specialist, each school program requires qualified clerical and technical support staff. The paraprofessional support staff is key to the library media specialist's ability to fulfill the position's professional roles (Nwofor & Ilorah, 2006). There is a distinction

between a technician, who works with hardware and systems software, and a technologist, who integrates people, learning, and the tools of technology.

According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, the library media specialist accomplishes the program's primary charge, to "ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information" (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p. 6), by fulfilling four roles: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. The four roles focus on instilling nine student information literacy standards across the school's curriculum. According to the AASL standards, young people should be able to:

- Access "information efficiently and effectively"
- Evaluate "information critically and competently"
- Use "information accurately and creatively"
- Pursue "information related to personal interests"
- Appreciate "literature and other creative expressions of information"
- Strive "for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation"
- Contribute "positively to the learning community" and recognize "the importance of information to a democratic society"
- Behave ethically "in regard to information and information technology"
- Participate "effectively in groups to pursue and

generate information" (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p. 9).

Nwofor and Ilorah (2006) reported that the Library media specialist has the major responsibility of implementing the educational programmes by working directly with teachers to facilitate and expedite their teaching, and the students to effect and enhance their learning. He is but an active participant and a teacher and librarian by training, certification, attitude, functions and commitment. He maintains and organizes the media collection. He is the energizing force that powers the educational thrust of the instructional media programme and should be capable of finding challenges and satisfaction in learning and helping others to learn by establishing objectives, giving guidance to students, planning systematically, selecting suitable materials, and varies teaching aids, maintaining conducive reading environment, working with teaching staff and motivating students and pupils. He collaborates with teachers, actively helping to plan curriculum units of instruction learning/teaching methodology and implementing curriculum. In the leadership role, he is that teacher in the school who works with all teachers, all pupils/students, all curriculum, and coordinates teaching subjects across the curriculum, and grade levels

Edoka (1992) explains the place of the school media resource center. He indicated that the whole range of information resources provided by the school media resource center enables it to perform the following functions: Systematically provide information resources required for school educational

programmes; assists them to broaden their knowledge horizons through provision of extra-curricular materials; enables young children develop the habit of using the library, later in life; assist in increasing the cultural awareness of the pupils; provide them with transformational skills; help children develop the habit of reading for pleasure and actively assist in improving and increasing the reading skills and learning habits of pupils. However, he observed with dismay that media resource centers are yet to be institutionalized in most of our primary/secondary schools. The Abadina Media Resource Centre, Ibadan is a model resource center which proto-type is expected to be made a part of every school's library.

Studies continually validate the idea that quality school library programs significantly impact student achievement, especially vulnerable students (Kachel, 2013). Some states in United States of America have cut the number of librarians they employ in their schools, and their standardized scores have suffered for it. In those states that have added librarians, average reading scores for all students have increased by 1.5%, an increase of almost three times more than states that lost librarians, 0.5% (Lance, 2011). Moreover, schools that allowed librarians to use flexible scheduling saw writing scores improve. With flexible scheduling students were four times more likely to earn an "advanced" writing score, and Hispanic students were almost seven times more likely to earn that high designation. Students who were poor, minority, but who also had a fulltime certified

librarian, were at least twice as likely to earn an "advanced" writing score as their counterparts in schools without full-time librarians (Kachel, 2013). Over the years the institution of the library has developed into several different types of libraries. An effective school library provides students with more than just books; they are now sophisticated learning environments and provide the education and necessary skills to succeed in college and in the workforce. Research repeatedly confirms that a well-funded library with a state-certified school librarian is an integral component of students' education (Korte, 2015). The modern school library media center has a professionally trained school library media specialist who manages a central collection of diverse learning resources to support a school's curriculum, meet individual students' needs and interests, and ensure that young people develop information literacy skills within the school's curriculum (Sue & Hawley, 2016).

Qualities of School Librarian/Media Specialist

The school librarians help people access and use information for education, school or pleasure. To become professionally qualified as a librarian, one must obtain a degree in librarianship or information science (Cragg, 2011). While anyone can obtain a library science degree, the field is obviously suited to those with a certain set of personality traits and natural skillsets. There are several core competencies that are needed to become a successful media specialist. Some are taught in efforts to obtain a library science degree, some are mastered on the

job, and some are innate personality attributes. According to Schliff (2013) one must possess the following basic personality traits and skills: a love of knowledge and learning, a desire to work around people, an obvious love of books, overall knowledge of the world, solid organizational skills, good with numbers, friendly, mythical, personable, tech savvy, and a basic affinity for working with large volumes of information. While these are personality traits, other competencies are needed or can be learned and developed on the job. Librarians need to be team players and problem solvers as well as be able to juggle several tasks at one time. They must be able to promote reading, communicate well with staff and patrons of all types, speak effectively in front of groups and present information clearly and in an interesting manner. The ability to use technology is now an essential component of the job.

Librarians must have a vast knowledge of books, ability to archive and file information, maintain databases, evaluate sources, and have a strong ability to adapt to new tools, systems, and situations as they arise. This has always been a constantly evolving field. Some of the unique competencies that library information science professionals need to possess are grouped into 10 basic skill areas (Ahmad, 2009). First, technical skills are essential in the 21st century. The ever-growing access to information is largely based on emerging technologies. Online media manipulation and the ability to troubleshoot new technologies are commonplace now. With the evolving technologies, it is also important to be able to easily learn new technologies and

embrace them as they arise. Second, time-management skills are also important. Being able to address everyone's problem effectively and efficiently while still completing library maintenance is vital to staying approachable to patrons. Presentation skills also are needed to make the library welcoming, obtaining material for the library, and assisting patrons in their use of the library. Communication skills are vital as the librarian is the advocate for information hub, the library. Fifth, a librarian must now possess customer service skills. The librarian must strive to be aware of customer needs and continually design and improve programming to meet the needs of the community the library serves. Sixth, a librarian must possess evaluation and assessment skills to avoid focusing on the needs of one group of patrons, to update services to new needs to bring programming up-to-date to meet current needs and to be abreast of new technologies. Managerial skills to not only manage the vast amounts of various information sources but to also manage the workers and volunteers in an efficient manner. Eighth and ninth, a librarian must have skills in the areas of policies, procedures issues and standards related to the institution where the library is located and also knowledge of the informational sources and services to be provided. The librarian must be the protector of the library information science guidelines and the institution guidelines and be an advocate for the library as well as defend information policies (copyright law). Finally, a librarian must have a commitment to life-long learning—a skill that

encompasses all the others (Ahmad, 2009).

Impact of School library/Media Resource Centre on Reading habits

The library, more than any other place, provides ideal environment and vital information resources for students to develop and sustain good study habits necessary for excellent performance in academic works. Adesoji (2007) posited that libraries have been associated with the concept of life-long reading and learning. He further stated that, school libraries are desirable in order to inculcate into the students very early in life the habit of reading for various purposes such as education, pleasure, information, and culture. For students to be successful in their academics, they must cultivate an effective study habits. Study habits are the ways students study on their own. According to Azikiwe (2008), it is the adopted way and manner a student plans his private reading after classroom learning so as to attain mastery of the subject. Ayodele and Adebisi (2013) also stated that good study habits produce positive academic performance while inefficient study leads to academic failure. According to Subair (2015), "Students with poor study habits should be encouraged into library use from a young age in order for them to develop appropriate and effective study habits that will go a long way with them to university level" (p. 2). Baro and Eze (2016) studied 356 students from all over Nigeria admitted into Federal University, Otuoke in the 2015/2016 academic session, to know the availability of school libraries in secondary schools they graduated from and to know the skills or

knowledge students gain from using the school library. The study revealed that out of the 356 respondents, almost half of the respondents (N=151) indicated that they had no school library in their secondary schools. As for those who said their school had a library, were asked the skills/knowledge they gained from using the school library. The majority (188: 91%) of the students see that using the school library has increased their reading habit, and the majority (187: 91.2%) also mentioned that it enabled them make their career choice by reading different books in the library. Baro and Eze (2016) recommended that in every primary and secondary school, school libraries need to be established. This will help to inculcate reading habit among the students for lifelong educational pursuit. This can be implemented by the necessary stakeholders such as the government, education authorities, the principals, the librarian, and teachers.

According to Mizzi (2008) properly funded and sustained school libraries have great potentials role to play in improving literacy and reading habits amongst children. They are the training ground for students' academic achievement and are able to make learning interesting, colorful and effective. School libraries give children a broader perspective of concepts more than the postulations of their teachers on various subjects while their absence in schools introduces mediocrity in the education sector. Jam (1996) observed that the library as a dynamic storehouse of knowledge and does a lot to encourage reading. Media resource centers provide various information resources which allow for viewing, listening, writing and reading, and

conducive reading environment for their users. Facilitating the optimum development of both formal and recreational reading programmes is a constant concern and a continuing challenge. Reading is the most important of all subjects. It is the road to learning. It is the basic tool for continued self-education and intellectual renewal. Those who do not learn to read and write effectively are not only deficient in the basic tools for further learning, they are often lost in the mainstream of the educational process. They cannot identify their potentials nor develop them (Ugwoke, 2004). Moreover, the symbols on the pages of a book are not fleeting and evanescent. The reader may proceed at his own pace, may pause to reflect, to question, to clarify his thinking, to weigh his own values and to agree or disagree on issues. Thus for the skillful reader, books can be a charging of the mind and spirit, a pleasure that needs no defense or explanation. Reading does not stand in danger of being obsolete although people are increasingly entertained and informed by such mass media of communication as television, radio, movies, newspapers and magazines. Though, they are users of time, they cannot provide as much as books do; the complete record of man's best thinking or the story of his cultural heritage are embedded in books.

Obah (1981) believes that the reader must have basic reading skills to be able to follow the writer's line of thought, creating mental images of what the writer wants to transmit. Researchers and experts in the field of reading have frequently stressed the primary importance of the media resource programmes to the success of the

school's reading programme and attainment of basic reading skills required for optimum exploitation of information resources in printed form. Studies such as those carried out by Nwosu and Nwosu (1992), Okpala (1992) and Madu (2000) all highlight the place of the media resource center in enhancing the reading skill of pupils/students for exploitation of information resources in printed form. The interest of the library is to help the pupils develop an ever increasing control of those specific skills that will enable the pupil/student read well independently and also develop an enthusiastic and ever broadening interest in reading. The skills required of such a pupil are: decoding skills, comprehension skills, reference and study skills (Nwosu & Nwosu 1992). The reading activities should encourage lifetime reading interest, reading competence, and independent reading. In order to achieve this goal, it is recommended that a central media resource center be established in every elementary and secondary school (National Policy on Education; 1998). For the media library to facilitate the reading programme and pupils' acquisition of reading skills, a suitable stimulating environment; and a reading atmosphere must be provided. Teachers and children must have access to a good collection of children's books and sound recordings selected by a committee headed by a teacher librarian. They should be introduced to the riches of the library through a variety of planned experiences and by this, be encouraged to follow their interest, and share a variety of information resources. The formation of informal groups and peer groups who come to use the

library should serve as a social center for integration of informal education into school systems by forming reading clubs which will influence their enjoyment of reading.

The absence of reading culture in the primary and secondary school system has become a source of concern to all stakeholders in the education system. The school librarian can be the teachers' most important assistant in organizing reading programmes. The necessity of the teacher working and planning with the school media specialist in order to meet the needs of all children – the language gifted, the language deprived, underprivileged and the disadvantaged have been stressed (Tralagba & Baro, 2018). The above specialist roles expected of the school media specialist underscores the urgent need for teacher librarians in primary and secondary schools. If the equipment of pupils with adequate reading skills and functional literacy are to be realized, educational planners and policy makers should begin to address their minds to the integration of library education into teacher education programmes and school curriculum. The school media center should be equipped to cater for the individual interests and differences so that students can learn to read on their own. The provision of elementary computers and programmed learning devices to students will cater for the cultural, emotional and intellectual development of the students and make them more functional readers. However, where materials are not available the school media center could provide, in liaison with the Educational Technology Department.

The responsibility for maintaining the reading skill programme should be a joint responsibility of the library media specialist and the English teacher. In selecting reading materials, the library should choose tales, myths, legends and favourable stories. These will serve as strong motivational devices and spring board to independent reading. In this respect, the librarian will arrange for scheduled classes or group associational reading experiences in the school media center (Tralagba & Baro, 2018). The librarian and classroom teacher who realizes the importance of the motivational power of the reading will capitalize on this. The library media specialist will welcome the opportunity to acquaint the children with the unexpected wealth of reading, viewing and listening experiences in the school media center appropriate to further exploration. This offers the children an exquisite exposure of the wonderful information and recreational resources that might never be discovered if the children were denied these associative reading experiences. In this regard reading, programmes should not be compartmentalized into free, voluntary, recreational and required or reference reading. This has resulted in categorization of reading activities which has made pupils develop the impression that while the former is interesting, the latter is dull and difficult.

In planning reading programmes, skill and interest must be regarded as interdependent factors in the development of reading tastes, habits and skills. The library media specialist must realize that knowledge of the pupils/students as an individual is a pre-requisite for effective reading guidance. Before

he recommends a reading text, a film to be viewed or recording to be heard, he must be conversant with the pupil/students' reading level and interest. This is because most students do not master the skill of reading at the same rate. Part of the preplanning must involve identifying special students' needs and interests. This knowledge could be obtained through observation and day-to-day contact. Vital statistics such as individual interests, goals, concerns, special needs, abilities and disabilities will be helpful. Based on these, the media specialist could personalize the child's introduction to the world of reading and books and consequently foster his delight in reading. However, to affect this, the library media specialist must love and know the literature of childhood, understand curriculum child development theories and carry out a planned developmental guidance programme in the library. This also applies to the English teacher who should realize that without exciting the child's interest, you cannot start the child on his way to sustained love for reading. The resources to be used in supporting the teaching of reading should be well evaluated before selection.

Providing illustrated editions and non-print formats of reading texts are useful alternatives. The library media specialist should also take cognizance of those who are socially, culturally, emotionally, and intellectually disadvantaged. The task facing the library media center is to provide instructional media, which are uniquely suited to their personal needs. Information repackaging in the form of pictures, drawings and synchronizing tapes with pictures or film strips and slides, reproducing words in the

local language, the use of radio and television are required. Materials which speak directly to the child's perception and imagination will help the disadvantaged child overcome his inadequacies. The materials and equipment in a library media center should provide information that supports active, authentic learning, and thus ensures that young people develop the information literacy skills crucial to their success as students and as lifelong learners. The 21st century library media collection includes printed materials, realia (the "real thing," i.e., living, synthesized, or preserved animal, vegetable, or mineral objects in their natural state), hardware and software, online databases, production equipment, and adaptive resources for students and others with special needs.

Conclusion

School libraries and media centers occupy a significant position in discussions on learning and many international studies have asserted the positive role school libraries have exerted on education, linking them directly to the improvement of students' academic performance, also in secondary education. School administrators, library media specialists and teachers must continue their efforts to equip pupils/students with basic reading skills is *a sine qua non* for all round development through exposure to books and other non-directive reading guidance techniques. Reading/learning situations, which take into account the readiness, usefulness of learning experiences and availability of learning resources, are sufficient motivations for a larger number of children who will learn to like reading and develop the skill of reading. A child who is an independent learner is

usually information literate. He appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information. Such a child strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge. He recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society. The librarian should, therefore, move from his role as a keeper of books and assume the role of facilitator of library centered reading guidance programmes in schools by exploring the potentials of the teachers and the library media center.

Library media specialist value information literacy as the foundation of lifelong learning, and they emphasize the process of learning rather than the accumulation of information. By collaborating with diverse individuals within and beyond the school, by building awareness of the programs and applying and introducing instructional and information technologies, library media specialist promote a clear vision for successful library media programming.

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