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MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP: CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN THE MILLENNIUM

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Abstract

This paper revealed the complex nature of library management in general with particular reference to school library. The qualities expected of a good school librarian were carefully listed. Also, the need for efficiency in school library administration was discussed while attempts were made to identify some managerial challenges ahead of the school librarian in the present millennium. Recommendations made are as follows: adequate funding should be provided by the founding institution; ICT facilities must be provided for processing and dissemination of information; formulation of functional collection development policy should be encouraged at the school library level; school heads should locate themselves at the centre of the school library activities because such efforts are mostly rewarding hence the duo should collaborate; schools are encouraged to recruit well-trained

librarians and support them in their effort to further improve their skills and competence; and teacher/school librarians' curricula should be tailored in line with the identified millenium challenges. This paper concluded that only those librarians that are receptive to professional developments would be able to cope with the future dictates of the librarianship profession.

Introduction

School management is more complex than the administration of any other organization system. Similarly, librarians at the elementary and post – primary school level, are faced with more complex challenges. How? Simply put, because they not only provide information services but also guide students' users in decision-making regarding reading choice. This becomes very important due to the fact that they are in their formative stage and are yet to be able to think critically and rationally too for themselves. These decisions have a quite significant implication – to promote or retard development of good reading habits of the youngsters. Consequently, the children patrons, just passing through their early stages of life need to be initiated, directed, motivated and carefully handled to ensure good use of the library materials and their reading time. All these chores make the task of the school librarian a Herculean one.

The school librarian is variously referred to as Media Resource Specialist or School Library Media Specialist. This is due to the change in the services provided by the school library media centre. In this paper the destination is used interchangeably

The school librarian is also faced with some other challenges in the area of administration. He needs to strike a balance among forces surrounding his practice. Firstly, a cordial relationship should exist between him and the school management headed by the principal who coincidentally determines the fate of the school library resource centre and

to a greater extent that of the librarian. He should also be full of initiative and be willing and ready to invent new things that would make parents and pupils recognize and support his efforts. Provision of appropriate teaching-learning resources should not be taken with levity either. Conscious attempt should be made by the librarian to meet various needs of the teacher to achieve the objectives of the curricula. He must in conjunction with the management provide needed aids to stimulate pupils' interest and make learning permanent.

To successfully function in the highlighted capacity, there is need to ensure adequate funding, participate in planning of library activities, formulate policies that would ensure provision of information communication technologies, operate a focused collection building activity, and update professional competence. All these and many more functions assure the librarian of regular patronage of his library by resource centre by both staff and students.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the position of a school librarian carries with it very heavy demands of service not only to the students but to the entire school community. These demands go far beyond the day –to– day management of the library.

Literature Review

School Library Management

School library was inaugurated in the 1960s (Ogunsheye, 1998). Its service is still in the process of development till date, although several promising programmes have been initiated. School libraries are the ones found in pre-primary, primary, secondary schools, teacher training colleges and technical colleges. They are of varying sizes. The volume of their collections depends largely on availability of fund and the body that owns them. Class and school libraries are mostly stocked with just small collection of school textbooks, a few general collection and copies of the classics and supplementary reading

materials. The books are often locked up in a dingy cupboard/ locked up in shelves for safe keeping, and the students are therefore denied access to using the books as they want to.

Daniel (2001) says the school is at the receiving end in the knowledge age. The volume of information that emanate from the process and generated electronically required the expertise of the librarian to determine what is relevant to curriculum from the heap of data resources. This is why the school library is regarded as the hub of the school community and integral to teaching and learning. By providing teachers and pupils with full range print and electronic resources to support learning, the school library impacts pupils' educational attainment. If this is true of the school library, then, the custodian is also very important and should be given the much-deserved attention.

It is important if not a must; therefore, for the school librarian to systematically provide the children with facilities for obtaining more factual information than his teacher can give him. This is the purpose of this paper. He should provide for the students the tools for checking on the accuracy of the information given him in the classroom; and the school librarian should encourage them to look for views other than those given him by his class or subject teachers, perhaps in a rather confused form. Infact, the duties of a school librarian involve helping students become independent of his teachers.

In order to achieve the above – stated goals, the school librarian must discover him/herself, possess current and useful first hand information, be knowledgeable, possess better techniques and skills of dealing with readers problems. This is necessary because students are expected to experience the joy of discovery from the very beginning of their education.

The school librarian is one who systematically arranges and processes information materials wisely for storage and use. The fundamental duties of a school librarian include arranging, processing, organizing co-ordinating, controlling, facilitating and safe–guarding the information materials print

and non – print – in his care for maximum utilization.

Fayose (1995) specified what makes a good school librarian to include collection building, services provision, possession of good public relation, academically and professionally qualified, be a person of wide interests and sympathies, enthusiastic and energetic. Also, he must love children and willing to work with them. He must be polite, patient and must be a good organiser. Other qualities include his ability to make the library achieve its goals viz.;
- He must have good knowledge of the school curricula.
- He must acquire all needed library materials from time to time.
- He should be able to ensure integration of the library into the school activities and support the development of good library skills by the students.

Mention must be made however, that, the teacher librarian can do but little since most of the major decisions affecting the library's organisation and administration are made and communicated from the school Head. To this end, if the twenty-first century school librarian would at all be relevant, and carve the best image for the profession at the school level, some degree of autonomy is a must. If the Librarian in the academic set-up is a chief executive, managing director and the overall boss, I see no reason why a school librarian should not be given a similar status in the 21st century if at all meaningful changes would be recorded. Infact, fellow teachers and school administrators would take school librarians more seriously and would in turn enhance their performance.

Organisational Efficiency of the School Librarian.

Kuhn as reported by Fayose (1995) sees the school librarian as the "catalyst for learning". She equally sees a good school library resource centre as "inconceivable without a well-qualified librarian". It is only when a librarian works well and do things right that he can be said to be efficient.

Olukoya (1998) says when a mechanisms or organism fulfils purpose for its existence, it is efficient. Therefore,

efficiency could best be seen, as a function of efforts or activities and resources combined in a system to produce desired effects. Without mincing words therefore, an efficient school library system is one which provides a good climate for the realization of the earlier stated objectives through better utilization of the acquired learning resources, cordial working relationships among the children, teachers and the librarian to improve the quality of education for all.

Attaining efficiency apart from being dependent on the availability of resources partly rested on the managerial ability of the school head according to one school of thought but the bulk of the job is hinged on the administrative acumen of the school librarian. Opeke (1995) confirmed this when she submitted that the school library media center has been acknowledged as the heart of the school around which all school programmes revolve. Arguing further, she states that the best-equipped library would be a colossal failure without a well-trained librarian.

Nigerian School Library in the Millennium

In order to better understand the state of Nigerian school libraries, it is better to concentrate on what ought to be rather than what have been. This is because at present, there is a scarcity of data on the state of school libraries in Nigeria. This assertion is based on personal observation as a member of the profession. Infact, the school library is still poorly developed considering attention received by the academic, national, even, public libraries in the present day Nigeria. Mention must be made that government's insensitivity to the plight of school libraries is not helping matters. For instance, there is no government legislation on the formation and improvement of school libraries.

However, not too long ago, the Federal Government through its Education and Youth Development Ministry published a document on minimum standards for school libraries in Nigeria. It is behooved that this will not be a lip service. Why? Simply because since 1993 when the document

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came to being no meaningful progress has been made for almost two decades. Regrettably too, up till now few schools in Nigeria can boast of what might be referred to as libraries.

The emphasis of the national policy on education is placed on the availability of learning resource materials in adequate quality and quantity. To identify the current management issues in school librarianship, a study was undertaken.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

· Identify management issues in Nigerian school libraries
· Determine the challenges for school librarians in the present millennium
· Find out the distribution of librarians in school libraries
· Evaluate factors affecting efficiency of school librarians (such as funding, policy and planning, Information Communication Technology etc)

Methodology

Sample for this study was purposively drawn from the primary and secondary schools libraries in Benin city, Edo state, Nigeria. Also, the library caretakers found in sixteen private-initiative elementary and post-primary schools libraries were included. Of the forty-two (42) libraries visited, thirty-five (35) were provided with questionnaires and these were recovered after one week. This decision guaranteed 100% response. Each structured item had a 3-point rating scale. Respondents were instructed to choose one out of these three alternatives, which best represents their opinion.

The structure of the set of questionnaire used was simple and the diction easily understood considering the background of the respondents. The Biodata of the respondents made up the first part while questions in library administration, management and use were asked in the second part. Simple percentages based on frequency count of the respondents were used to clearly present the data collected for the study.

Findings and Discussion of Results.

Table 1: Distribution of Librarians/Library staff.

Type of school	Number (N)	Libraries with professional Librarian	Libraries with paraprofessional	Libraries headed by teacher Librarian	Libraries without trained professionals	%
Primary school	17	2	3	4	8	100%
Secondary school	18	3	4	5	6	100%
TOTAL N =	35	5 (14.3%	7 (20%)	9 (25.7%)	14 (40%)	100%

. From the above table, seventeen (17) primary schools representing 48.6% and eighteen (18) secondary schools representing 51.4% took part in the study. The table shows the distribution of library staff in these libraries. Only five (5) that is, 14.3% libraries have qualified librarians and seven (7) representing 20% can boast of Para-professionals. Table 1 also reveals that nine (9) or 25.7% libraries were manned by teacher-librarians while the remaining fourteen (14) representing 40% were without trained/professional librarians

Table 2: Factors affecting efficiency in managing school library resources

S/N	Responses				
	FUNDING	Relatively Adequate (%)	Relatively Inadequately (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)
1.	Funding of school library in the last four years	08 (22.9)	22 (62.9)	05 (14.2)	35 (100)
	POLICY AND PLANNING	Actively involved	Passively involved	Not involved	
2.	Librarian's level of involvement in planning of the				

	library/ decision making	05 (14.3)	09 (25.7)	21 (60)	35 (100)
	INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES	**Adequate**	**Inadequate**	**Not Available**	
3.	Evaluation of library's information communication technologies	03 (8.6)	21 (60)	11 (31.4)	35 (100)
	COLLECTION BUILDING	**Demand-led Method**	**Traditional Method**	**Both Method**	
4.	Criteria determining the collection development management of the library	08 (22.9)	25 (71.4)	02 (5.7)	35 (100)
	SCHOOL LIBRARY USE	**Well Patronized**	**Poorly Patronized**	**Undecided**	
5.	Rating of school library in the area of patronage	10 (28.6)	18 (51.4)	07 (20)	35 (100)
	MANAGEMENT ISSUE	**Regular**	**Occasional**	**Non inter-ference**	
6.	Interference of the school head in the affairs of the school library	19 (54.3)	06 (17.1)	10 (28.6)	35 (100)
	MAN POWER DEVELOPMENT / CAPACITY BUILDING	**Desirable**	**Not Desirable**	**Undecided**	
7.	Request for further education/ training in librarianship?	24 (68.6)	06 (17.1)	05 (14.3)	35 (100)

Going through Table 2 above, it can be deduced that eight (22.9%) of the library staff see funding of their school library in the last four years as relatively adequate. Physical assessment of these libraries revealed this claim and respondents showed some level of confidence in the professional expertise of their librarian. This is not unconnected with the fact that the school librarian has the required tools to work. About twenty-two (62.9%) submit that funding has been relatively inadequate in the last four years (that is 2000 – 2004). Therefore, it has taken a toll on the efficiency of the school librarian since he is not sufficiently provided with the needed materials to function well. Only five (14.2%) were undecided and the scene at their libraries is quite revealing. The library is mostly underutilized and the librarian assigned extra-curricula activities most of the time. Findings also revealed that library staff involvement in planning and decision-making is very low. Twenty (60%) respondents are not involved in decision making and planning of their libraries while only nine (25.7%) claim partial involvement while five (14.2%) play active role in planning and decision-making. Infact, only the professionally trained librarians take active part in decision-making and planning. This is why most of the libraries used for the study are always at the mercy of the school head for the provision of needed resources.

The findings of the study also showed that availability of Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in school libraries in Nigeria in the present millennium is very low. Only three school libraries representing (8.6%) can provide seemingly adequate Information communication technology (ICT) facilities. A careful analysis revealed that these few schools were those founded and maintained by private individuals. Twenty-one (60%) of the respondents submited that they have inadequate ICT facilities both in quality and quantity. Regrettably too, eleven (31.4%) respondents revealed that they do not have any Information Communication Technology facilities in their respective libraries. This

development portends a serious threat to the survival of school libraries in the present information age. Probably, this is why Cybericafes are breaking even while librarians' relevance in schools is gradually diminishing.

The determinant of collection development management according to the findings in Table 2 cuts across the two main methods: demand-led and traditional method. Eight (22.9%) respondents based their collection development on demand-led acquisition. This means, they only acquire on request by users. This is a very good practice since the hard-earned fund will be effectively appropriated and wastage is reduced to the minimum. Some twenty-five respondents (71.4%) reiterate that their selection and acquisition is based on the traditional method of acquiring all that is available whether relevant or not. This is not good enough because collection building is expected to be purposeful and not umbrella acquisition where anything goes into the collection. An acquisition policy is needed by all school libraries to regulate their activities so that the library can boast of a balanced collection that can withstand the test of time and support curricula implementation. Also, two (5.7%) of the respondents make use of both methods. This is interpreted to mean if a book is recommended for the library, it will be acquired and whenever there are no such recommendations; they buy whatever they feel is useful for their libraries. Both methods could be used if there is sufficient fund and a functional policy that supports acquisition exercise. The era of running a library without ICT facilities is over in Nigeria.

From the above, one can see why patronage is generally low in school libraries. The Table 2 above shows that eighteen libraries (51.4%) experience poor patronage while only ten (28.6%) are well patronized. This is because students are forced to use the library during free period. Seven (20%) can not even determine whether or not they are well patronized. Personal interview revealed that the school libraries in this category allow the use of their accommodation for other

administrative and extra-curricula activities ranging from meetings to seminar and as reception venue to mention but a few. One can conclude by saying that even school library patrons are looking for challenges in this millennium and if new things are not coming forth, then, readers stay away from the library environment.

Table 2 also shows that nineteen (54.3%) respondents were of the view that the school head regularly interfere in the affairs of the library, while only six (17.1%) record occasional or irregular interference and ten (28.6%) remain neutral. The heads of administration oversees their activities and relates with school head. This is a welcome development since the school head is the chief executive. The interference should be with good intention – to know the challenges and be ready to attend to all. In fact, regular negative interference of a school head that is not trained in the profession could slow the pace of development and militate against performance of the librarians in the school library. Some level of freedom should then be given to all school librarians like their counterparts in the academic world if the school librarian would meet the millennium challenges.

In the same vein, table 2 reveals that twenty-four (68.6%) respondents desire further education/training in the field of librarianship. This is probably due to the fact that they found themselves somehow deficient in some areas of library routines. On the other hand, some of them must have developed so much interest in the profession that they are no longer satisfied with their paraprofessional status. Some of them might want to attain greater height where their impact would be felt – academic and public. This is good for the profession if all members are desirous of further professional education in the field of Librarianship. In fact, some of the already trained professionals wish to study further to increase their productivity. About 17.1% representing six respondents sees no reason why they should obtain further education. This group can be divided into two. Firstly, those that would found

it difficult to learn new things or improve their ways of doing things. The second category are those that were probably forced into the profession and may opt out anytime. Some of them disclosed that they were trained as teachers not school librarians. Only five (14.3%) remain undecided. These are prospective librarians if the profession offers irresistible offer and it's ready to take up the necessary steps towards accepting the millennium challenges. Only those professionals that are ready to embrace ICT would survive in this information age.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to achieve effective and efficient management of school libraries in the present information-driven age:

- The managerial ability/efficiency of the school librarian could be effectively enhanced through adequate funding. Inadequate funding of school library however, is a crisis in the education sector.
- For school libraries to enjoy continuous relevance in the present information age, ICTs should be embraced without further delay. Libraries need to perform other roles other than their traditional ones. Legislation on the minimum standard for school library media centres should be formulated, implemented and enforced by the government. This should as a matter of fact start from the government-owned institutions in Nigeria.
- A collection development policy is needed by all school libraries so as to regulate their acquisition exercise. Available minimum standard should be reviewed to reflect new challenges in the educational information provision and utilization.
- School heads are encouraged to regularly interact with school librarians so as to identify areas where their attention is needed. Also, they should be willing to solve any problems so identified promptly in accordance with the school librarian's advice as trained personnel.

Well trained school librarians should be employed to man our school libraries. If otherwise, avenue for periodic training should be provided for them since many of them are desirous. Available opportunities should be communicated accordingly. Conscious efforts should be made by relevant bodies to further sensitize the school heads on the advantages derivable from such training exercises. School librarians should equally be provided with opportunity to develop professionally so as to enlist their interest and dedication. This will definitely have a lot of positive effect on their overall managerial ability.

School Librarian/Media Specialist could benefit from Abadina Media Centre's Part-time Diploma Programme in School media; Master degrees in School media and Media Resource Management as well as Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

It is also recommended that the onerous task ahead of the school librarian should be used to tailor the nature, scope and arrangement of the curriculum for the librarian-in-training that wishes to work at the school level. From the foregoing, there is no doubt that the curricula of school librarians-in-training be diversified and enhanced to meet up with public expectations. The emphasis here is on the effective management of resources to ensure a high academic standard in our schools. Courses such as Marketing strategies for Media Resource Centres, Information centres cooperation and Networking and the role of psychology in learning should be included in the curricula for Media specialist at all levels.

Conclusion

The 21ˢᵗ century which marked another millennium could best be regarded as information age. There is observed information explosion everywhere. We noted a lot of challenges the information providers such as school media specialists faced. Incidentally, Media resource centre is just one of the

available options for the learner. Challenges that characterize the new age demand that only the professionals who are adequately prepared would be able to "retain their relevance". Where the school media specialist has been well integrated into the various managerial challenges highlighted in this paper and gets resolute to face the future ones, the school library will occupied its right place in the school.

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