



Utilizing the School Library Facility for Enriching Curriculum and Instruction for Diverse Learners at the Primary Education Level.

Nwachukwu, V. N. Department of Library Information Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Eskay, M. Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Asiegbu, F. N. Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to highlight the place of the school library in the enrichment of curriculum and instruction at the inclusive primary education level. In doing this, the writers tried to clarify the concept of the school libraries in inclusive education with a view of establishing their relevance in contemporary education especially at the primary level. Based on this effective strategies for the use of the school libraries in enriching the curriculum and instruction, were highlighted with emphasis on school management support to actualize these potentials.

KEYWORDS: Special education, curriculum, inclusion, library, primary school

Introduction

Over the years, there has been a rapid expansion in education, which has continued at an ever-increasing rate and has brought a realization of the need for changes in the orientation and focus of education, especially at the inclusive primary level. At the same time, changes in the modern world and in educational theory increased the impetus for educational reform. Among the cardinal tenets of the reform movement is that education should be resource-based, as observed by Dike (1993) and Davis (1984). Resource-based education in turn focused new attention on the school library, sometimes called educational resource center.

The obvious and inherent limitations of the previous educational system in Nigeria necessitated the need to include educational services in the National policy of which the school library is one. This revised national policy on Education (1981, 1998, 2009), stated that the library is one of the most important educational services. It is believed that educational services are to facilitate the implementation of educational planning and objectives and promote the efficiency of education in Nigeria, as well as help develop access and improve educational programmes. Libraries being one of these educational services have to be established and maintained in schools. But for proper functioning of libraries in schools, they have to be administered properly in terms of providing high quality human and material resources as well as harnessing them to achieve the effective goals of educational services.

In the education of youth, from the mild to the profound students with disabilities, an abundance of printed and a-v materials are essential. The resources are the basic tools needed for the purpose of effective teaching and learning. The scope of the knowledge has become so vast to be covered extensively within the boundaries of classroom instruction with the school library materials, these boundaries can be extended immediately in all areas of knowledge and at the same time, serve as a source of meeting and stimulating the many interests, appreciations and curiosities of students with or without exceptionalities.

Educational leaders stress the point that the school library is one of the requirements for quality education. The school library programme, embracing teaching, guidance and advisory service, forms a unique and vital part of quality education. The philosophy related to this is that a quality education demands the support of quality, optimal school library resources. The provision and organization of the school library as one of the educational services helps in facilitating learning through the provision of concrete experiences by providing the right books, instructional materials and other services. It is necessary to identify the students needs, interests and abilities and consider these variables when selecting and purchasing library books and other instructional materials. According to Correa (1997), no educational system can rise above the quality of human and material resources put into it; this presupposes that adequate and appropriate resources put into the school library will in no small measures increase the learning and assimilative tasks and skills of our diverse students.

Clarification of the Concept of the School Library

The school library has been conceived in several ways but the authors needs some clarifications in order to sell the potentials of the school library to the appropriate education authorities.

Basically, the concept of library is associated with the provision of books and information. The development of school libraries has largely been concerned with the provision of more books and other types of information sources particularly audio-visual and information-related services. Cleaver (1981), a former chairman of the Eastern Nigeria School Libraries Association makes this point forcefully in answering the question: What is a library? According to him:

If a house isn't lived in, then it is not really a home. And if
A child isn't played with, then it is not really a plaything.
And if the books in a library aren't read, then it is not really
a library. Libraries exist only because of books and people's
desire to read them, and if people's don't want to read there is
no point in having a library.

The definition brings in a fourth essential ingredient of any library: the users. The school library is a learning laboratory where users develop the skills required for life-long learning. It is a workshop for carrying out projects and individual small group assignments. According to Correa (1997), the library is "the place where teachers and pupils come into contact with 'the world', that is, where they acquired the general knowledge which forms the basis for all further learning". The school library also requires space to enhance information assimilation by the pupils.

On his own part, Elatuoti (2000) calls it a refuge, a port of call for readers in search of adventure, a tree for children who climb high in the process of discovering life. It is also a place for sharing and creating – a couch for good conversation, a gallery for artwork, an opportunity for relaxation. As such, the school library should be a comfortable, pleasant environment with informal seating (mats, cushions, soft chairs), a quiet atmosphere for pleasure reading but also with occasion for socialization. The school library should be beautiful – well decorated, comfortable and clean. Among the activities in this area of socialization are story hour, play activities, drama, artwork, music debate, quiz and discussions.

Wools (1985), in her contributions, holds that the concept "School Library" closely covers an extensible collection of anything which could be used for educational purpose like books, pictures, documents, films, tapes, and records. The library is no longer seen as a house of books but a building which collects recorded information in whatever form it comes. School library according to Ojo-Igbinoba (1993), is an essential organization within any type of school for the comprehensive provision of learning materials and information sources, in printed media, audio-visual resources and other reprographic formats, together with advice and facilities for their selection, acquisition, production, storage and active use.

From these views, one could infer that the school library should be perceived as an essential facility for enriching curriculum and instruction in education especially at the primary education level.

Curriculum-enriching Roles of the School Library in Inclusive Primary Education

It is of the utmost importance that all who are connected with school curricula should have a clear understanding of its role expectations of the functions it is expected to perform in the school system.

From the conceptual analysis of the school libraries given above, it is implied that the school library can serve as a resource centre, a learning laboratory; a teaching agency; a service agency; a guidance agency and a centre in the following ways:

- a) As a Resource Centre: The school library is expected to acquire and organize for use, print and non-print materials suitable for the needs of its users.
- b) As a Learning Laboratory: It is expected to provide materials to support teaching and encourage or help diverse students to find out for themselves.
- c) As a Teaching Agency: It is used to teach diverse pupils/students on how to find information and stimulates new interests in them. It should also aid the class teacher through the use of audio-visuals and library-directed assignments. The library's provision of supplementary reading materials will also aid class teaching.
- d) As a Service Agency: Libraries are seen as service agencies and as such, the school library is expected to offer services to diverse students and teachers. Such services include reading facilities, lending facilities, reference services, etc.
- e) As a Guidance Agency: It is also the responsibility and duties of the school library to help diverse students to learn to study effectively (learn how to learn) and provide assistance to students in exploring a wide variety of materials
- f) As a Centre for Recreational Reading, Viewing and Learning: For the fact that the school library is expected to provide fiction materials, newspapers and magazines, it serves as a centre for recreational reading. Thus, helps to develop the reading habits in diverse learners. With the provision of videotapes, cassettes, films, records, etc, the library could become a centre where pupils with and without disabilities can relax, view and listen and at the same time, learn.

In all, one could make out that the school library, sometimes called 'Resource Centre' functions as a vital instrument as well as a basic requirement for the quality education by enriching all parts of the school curriculum. It is also seen as an important facility that reflects and supports the philosophy for the school, sharing and implementing the school's aims and objectives. As such, the school library is an essential facility that has the potential of enriching the curriculum and instruction processes in schools (especially at the primary level of education). In essence, the school library can help students improve and actualize their potential in their own ways, help them refine their affective domain and enhance their cognitive and psycho-motor potentials according to the characteristics and needs of each student.

Strategies For Using the School Libraries in Enriching the Curriculum and Instruction at the inclusive Primary Education Level.

i. Planning the School Library Facility

Here, in planning the provision of the school library facility of building, emphasis must be made on use. Hence, a library must be seen not as a storeroom but as a teaching and learning environment. Bearing in mind, in planning the school library, emphasis should be on putting into place an environment that will be comfortable, serene and beautiful to enhance concentration of the users. The school should be designed as a library not just a room assigned that title. Where a new facility is not possible, schools should be required to locate a suitable space within the existing structure for conversion to the library. Conversion may include combining rooms or dividing the space in ways that cater for school library use.

ii Provision of Trained Library Personnel

priority attention should be given to provision of trained library personnel to ensure that the library provides effective service and guidance

to the pupils for whose purpose the library is instituted. It is expected that with the provision of trained library personnel, the pupils will stand a better chance of better library guidance, skills exposition and training on the beauty and potentials of books.

iii Introduction of Classroom Libraries

Classroom libraries or book corners or shelves need to be introduced to serve as a focus for activity within the classroom. They serve as a viable option for nursery and junior primary classes. They offer a means of putting children into close contact with books and other learning materials and so encourage reading and resource-based education. They should be encouraged as a way of enriching the classroom environment for teaching and learning.

iv Integration of Class work with Library Use.

Diverse learners could be encouraged to make adequate use of the school libraries even during their free periods, this is not only to justify the expense involved in setting up the library but could also help the pupils in personalized/individualized instruction. It could serve as a remedial tool to correct wrong impressions, a source of independent study which would develop effective information-handling skills in the pupils.

a. Use of Story Hours/Story Telling in Association with the Class Teachers to encourage Library Use

Story hours/story telling according to Dike (1993) and Mbunda (2000), is an effective means of revealing the hidden treasures and potentials found in books. Therefore, the class teachers are association with the school librarian and the library resources could use this means to bring to the knowledge of the pupils the potential in books which they might not have known.

Summary and Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes imperative to assert that it is of utmost importance that all who are associated with curriculum planning, implementation and supervision should be made to have a clear understanding of the place of the school library facilities and services in the enrichment of the curriculum and instruction in education especially at the primary level.

On the other hand, it could be seen that curricular development can occur through the introduction of new curriculum or when teachers use new strategies to make learning more effective. As such, support may be provided by organizing the provision of learning resources or the environment within which learning can take place in the form of school libraries. In effect, it could be inferred that the delivery of the curriculum, including investigative approaches to project work, can be said to be highly dependent on the use of the school library. Therefore, school librarians will need to plan for the acquisition of resources to support course needs and additionally support information skills courses.

In all, the school library should be seen as a vital support service for learner-centered approaches like flexible or resource-based learning. This type of learning refers to approaches which:

- i. allow diverse learners to learn at their own time and pace;
- ii. include negotiation between diverse learners and teachers;
- iii. take into account the diverse individual needs of learners;
- iv. allow pupils choice;
- v. include content relevant to diverse learners;
- vi. Give diverse learners greater responsibility for learning.
- vii. Employ the most appropriate learning strategy.

How the school library provides curriculum support could vary from school to school because of the various conceptions held of curriculum support or enrichment. Effective curriculum support has, however, to be planned; otherwise it will lack coherence and is unlikely to meet the needs of teachers and pupils. Integrating the school library into the curriculum cannot be successfully attempted unless there is support from the senior management and a policy recognizing the role of the school library within the curriculum.

Some of the strategies suggested can be effected by librarians while other will require the active support of senior management. For example, one can run a book club with some support from the Head of Language Studies. Likewise, it could be within one's annual targets. On the other hands, the inclusion of the school library as part of course

evaluation procedures and the librarians' participation within course planning will require support from senior management and may take much longer to achieve. This is because time is required to change attitudes and long-established practices.

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