

**THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION
CENTRES IN THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF EDUCATION FOR
AFRICA IN THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL OF
UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The paper looks at the role of libraries and information centres in the achievement of education for Africa in the millennium development goal of Universal Basic Education. It looks at the concepts of primary education vis-à-vis the new concept of Africa education in the 21st century. It views the objectives of Universal Primary Education, school libraries and information centres thereby enumerating roles of libraries and information centres in the achievement of MDGs for Africa. It concludes by giving recommendations towards the achievement of education for Africa in the millennium development goals and the enhancement of libraries and information centres' services to meet the challenges of the millennium.

Introduction

It is of great concern the challenges posed by the monumental changes in the advancement of education all over the world. This is so because human intellect is what separates us from the rest of the animal world. Human civilization itself, a product of human intellect, is propagated by the social need and requirement for older generations to pass on knowledge to the younger ones. Thus, education begins within the family as parents pass on knowledge to their children, so as to equip them for survival as respectable

members of society. Education is the ultimate tool for change. Through education, a child is equipped with the tool to change and to contribute to the society he belongs. With education, man is the subject as well as object of change.

However, Obasanjo (2000) observed that the change is of great concern to African scholars because of the developmental problems of African continent, such as abject poverty, educational inequalities, inadequate health facilities, poor housing, lack of basic requirements of life, ignorance to mention a few. The cure to these problem is education.

Education is therefore a birth right of every child and it is the duty of every community to educate its younger ones especially the primary education to be made universal and basic.

Concept of Primary Education

Primary education is the education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 11 + (NPE, 1998). It is of immense importance to any progressive nation of the world. This is because it does not only serve as the bedrock for subsequent level of education but also as a socio-economic determinant for the nation. The duration of this type of education varies from country to country. It ranges from 4-8 years depending on the country's system of education.

The primary school is seen as the place in which the child gains fundamental knowledge, skills, the right feelings and actions which are considered necessary for all citizens regardless of social status, vocation or sex. At this stage, children develop physically and psychologically to be less dependent on their parents, and are more able to take care of themselves. Their brains now allow for higher degrees of learning and other forms of intellectual work. While their muscles and other systems can be well coordinated to perform those missions that are essential for life, effective interaction with their environment, participation in plays and games for their well-being, they also acquire enough skills for the organized school learning, immediate needs and interest. At

their transitional period to the secondary level between the ages of eleven and thirteen, physical and mental development are more prominent. These will adequately equip them for the higher tasks ahead in the next stage (Orukotan and Oladipo, 1994).

Human beings are the architects and engineers of progressive change and development and they constitute the most important resource a nation can have. Internally Africa's development and progress will remain circumscribed for as long as ignorance prevails as a result of inadequate education. It follows that without that level of education internally Africans cannot begin to work for becoming part of the knowledge-driven, information-conscious and economically competitive world of the 21st century.

According to Obasanjo (2000) in his presidential address at the world education forum in Dakar, he stated that the new concept of African education should entail the following

- to produce Africans who are world citizens of the 21st century in all its technological, cultural and political dimensions.
- to produce Africans with the capacity to explore their immediate environment and to optimally exploit their physical, social and cultural resources for survival.
- to produce Africans with the ability to partake as well as contribute to the global knowledge arena.
- to produce Africans with the skills to use knowledge and insight as a transformational tool for their african communities, african societies and indeed global society.
- to produce Africans who are fully saturated with the enduring values of africa (including language, ethical and civic ideals etc) and these should serve as the window to a wider horizon of the universal human rights, and democracy.

The implication of the above is that the emphasis has to shift from the content of education to the process of education. Africa like the rest of world, should no longer ask "how much

has the child learnt” but how learning-ready and how learning-involved has the child become”

An essential element of the transformation that the educated African of this century will have to uphold is a new work ethic which places a high premium on the pursuit of excellence through enduring, hard, thinking and hard work.

Objectives of Universal Basic Education

Bray (1981) draws the historical antecedents of the objectives of Universal Basic Education. He observed that many developed countries have been striving to achieve it. It was enshrined in 1947 Indian Constitution, and was the goal of major campaigns in Ghana in 1961 and Malaysia in 1962. During the 1960s a series of meetings convened by UNESCO set target dates for achieving universal, compulsory and free education on a continent wide basis. The year 1970 was adopted for Latin American countries at the 1962 Santiago Conference, and 1980 became the target date for Asian (Karachi, 1960), African (Addis Ababa, 1961) and Arab countries, (Tripoli 1966).

Universal Basic Education remains a declared objectives in most countries. Despite the considerable diversity in economic and political circumstances to be found in the developing world, certain common objectives of the universalization programmes can be identified. Firstly, because universalization campaigns are usually very popular, they are often launched in order to gain political support. Secondly, the projects frequently seek to reduce regional, urban-rural and male-female imbalances. A hundred percent (100%) enrolment rate would automatically eliminate numerical differences, and although qualitative variations may hinder the elimination of wider imbalances.

Thirdly, a minimum level of education is widely seen as a basic human right for all citizens and finally, education is commonly seen as an investment in “human capital” which is an essential component of development.

Objectives of School Libraries and Information Centres

Onanuga and Okeh (1996) observed that the school library is usually a collection of books and other resource materials organized and placed in a silent environment in the school for the use of teachers and pupils. According to them, its collection are maintained with the funds provided by the school through gifts received from the Ministry of Education, information service, philanthropic organization and Parent Teacher Association (PTA). School libraries can be regarded as libraries attached to primary and post primary schools. For the purpose of this study, only primary school libraries, as the focus of this paper, shall be referred to as school libraries or libraries.

Pupils go to the library, singly or in small group to satisfy their information needs, identifying sources of information, extracting the required information, evaluating sources, organizing their findings for presentation thus giving them experience in research or use of scientific and reflective thinking. The primary school libraries provide pupils with a variety of resources required for learning. Pupils encounter books of various types, periodicals and the ranges of audio-visual materials. The variety of resources help individualize instruction by providing materials at different levels of difficulty and in different formats to cater for individual learners – gifted, average or slow.

The primary school libraries encourage pupils to develop the habit of reading by exposing them to a variety of interesting and pleasurable pictures, folktales, fictions, topics, books and magazines. If children have opportunity to read a varied collection of books they may develop reading skills that will enable them to read with pleasure and profit in school and after leaving school.

Libraries and information centres perform the functions. The two concepts can also be used interchangeably. The objectives of libraries and information centres are the same all over the world.

The Role of Libraries and Information Centres in the Achievement of MDGs for Africa

Olorundare (1993) opined that since the past twenty years the question of role perception of position has generated considerably amount of investigation within educational research. Role can be defined as an individual action in a formal organization, community or group to which one belongs. Consequently, specific actions of individuals are organized around positions, thus having organized system of role expectations by other members of the group. The primary responsibility of school libraries especially in the achievement of education for Africa in the millennium development goal of a Universal Basic Education is to organize, plan effectively how to run their school libraries. A beautifully equipped library for UPE programme in Africa would not be utilized without a qualified school librarian to organise the collection and guide pupils in its use. On the other hand, a knowledgeable and dedicated school librarian can do very much with limited resources. Fabunmi (2003) quoting Dike (1992) identified a number of studies to show that qualified staff do make a difference in the quality of school library services.

All in all, the achievement of education for Africa in the millennium development goal of Universal Basic Education, the school librarian is a sine-qua-non.

According to Ukeje (2000):

“One of the prime functions of the school setting within which boys and girls can grow intellectually....This can be accomplished through the learners association with information, knowledge and facts. Books can help”.

Dike (1992) quoting Hannesdottir also identified two types of competencies required by school librarians to function effectively. Administration of library and teaching competencies. School libraries in the MDGs of Universal Basic Education need to organize, supervise and formulate policies and budget, these are administrative competencies.

Librarians also need library competencies such as how to select and acquire books and other materials, how to organize the collection, how to meet the information needs of users. The school librarian should be part of the teaching team both in guiding student in using the library, teaching them learning skills, giving them reading guidance and advising and working with the teacher in developing the curriculum in so doing the MDGs of Universal Basic Education would be achieved.

The school librarian cannot do it alone, there must be cooperation and favourable attitude of staff of the school for making the school librarian effectively perform the roles.

Libraries and information centres also play active role in the achievement of education for Africa in the millennium development goal of Universal Basic Education through information technology. Ajibola (2000) recognized the impact of computer communications in library operations. This could also apply to MDG in the development of UPE in Africa. The world has become a global village. Computer networks, internet interactive networks to mention a few could apply in this regard.

In order to enhance MDG goal of UPE in Africa, the following service could be provided by libraries and information centres.

- (a) Audio: radio, audio tape / cassette, compact disc, telephone, disc recording.
- (b) Visual: photographs, maps, illustrations, graphs, charts, posters, diagrams, globes, slides, film Strips, micro Films, transparencies.
- (c) Audio-Visual: television, video-recordings, motion pictures.

Libraries and information centres have a sensitive part to play in this respect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The world as a global village cannot afford to watch while Africa would not meet the MDG of Universal Basic Education. The

developed countries of the world should come to the assistance of other developing countries especially in the area of the millennium goal of UPE.

African countries are still pushing for the regeneration of the Universal Basic Education. The challenges of the new century are quite daunting. The international community should come to the aid of poorer African countries to meet these challenges so that Africa will early in the century rise educationally to be part of the great world momentum of the current century. Libraries and information centres should be the priority of government especially in the implementation of UPE in Africa. Librarians should be properly trained in the management of primary school libraries in Africa. There should be African cooperation in Universal Basic Education.

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