

Learning Resources and Education for Living

(Key Note Address)

By

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The subject of my address, "*Learning Resources and Education for Living*", happens to be the theme of this conference. I am therefore, going to focus attention on the problems that confront the learner or seeker of knowledge when learning resources are inadequate or even absent.

Modern civilisation is based primarily on written material. No advances in civilisation would have been possible without a literary culture. Writing is undoubtedly the greatest invention of mankind. Without it, there would probably have been very little change in human society, and the great civilisations on which the present world culture is based would never have arisen and prospered.

My first acquaintance with School Libraries was as a student at the Methodist College Uzuakoli, where we had a library named after an illustrious product of the College as a Memorial to him and to learning – The Dick Ogan Memorial Library. It was just a room, with a few collection of books, mainly literature. You can imagine the small number of books in this library in my time, if I told you that I read practically all its holdings in literature at the time. I understand the library has not improved much since my time. However, the Old Boys Association is planning to build a modern Library for the College, and this is something in the right direction.

If I forget every literature I have read, I shall never forget the famous sentence in Milton's *Areopagitica*:

A good book is the precious life – blood of
a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up
on purpose to a life beyond life.

Another famous saying which, I shall always treasure is Bacon's:

Reading maketh a full man;
Conference a ready man; and
Writing an exact man.

These two famous quotations are talking about books and their importance for a full and satisfying life. Education is meaningless if there are no books to satisfy the learner's yearning for knowledge and truth.

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The famous philosopher and scientist, Bertrand Russell, wrote in his Autobiography about the things dearest to him:

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.

The search for knowledge cannot progress without books. This age of knowledge explosion, and of phenomenal enrolments in every level of education in this country has created tremendous problems for our schools and colleges, one of which is the paucity or total absence of effective learning resources. Many of our schools are without libraries or without books except the text books that both teachers and students use. Both students and teachers use the same text books with the result that the teachers have very little to offer beyond what is contained in the text books and students who want to explore further into areas of knowledge that interest them find no books to consult. Their desire for personal development and self-improvement are therefore stultified. When one's thirst for knowledge is thus quenched early, what will be left for one, but to develop undesirable habits and gradually drift towards criminal behaviour and delinquency. If we had school libraries, however modest, children could develop early in life reading habits which they will continue to cultivate throughout their life "embalmed and treasured up on purpose for a life beyond life". "Education for Living" is education which goes beyond acquisition of skills and knowledge geared merely towards bread and butter questions. Education for Living is education which makes us love knowledge for its own sake; which develops a spirit of inquiry after knowledge; which looks beyond the present; which equips us to tackle life's problems with confidence and hope.

The conference should look at the possibility of Government, philanthropic organizations, and affluent Nigerians providing libraries in every primary and secondary school in the country. Mobile libraries should be increased in number and efficiency. Reading centres should be organised for primary school children, especially in the urban centres. One such Reading Centre is organised by a staff of the Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Dr. Marthar McSwain, for children of primary school age living around the Shell Camp. It is fascinating to see what she has done for these children in increasing their appetite for reading and books. The provision of school libraries and good books is an effective weapon against juvenile delinquency and truancy. It lays a solid foundation for an enriched and satisfying life.

The provision of other learning resources in our schools such as audio-visual aids, films and film-strips, is important for effective learning. But these materials are expensive difficult to maintain, and rather sophisticated. One cannot advocate their wide use until we can afford and maintain them. We use some of these products of the

so-called educational technology to teach our students here, but they cannot replace books and good teachers. They are just what they are called — “aids”. We have not yet started to import teaching machines and programmed instruction which again are used in the technologically advanced countries as aids to learning and individual instruction. This, however, is not to underrate their importance as educational resources. The use of Television and educational broadcasting for example, not only constitute important techniques in their own right, but also serve as means of utilising and integrating all other forms of audio-visual instruction. Audio-visual techniques, in common with other instructional methods, have very specific learning effects. Films may be equal or superior to conventional methods for some areas of teaching, including training in perceptual-motor skills. Tape recorded lectures may be as effective as live teaching for limited purposes.

NON-BOOKS SOURCES:

Learning resources serve two purposes. First, they give the children access to data. Secondly, they help children draw meaning from data. These two operations cannot, in practice be separated effectively. It is clearly insufficient to present children with data (teach them the “facts”) and conclude that they have learned something. It is clearly impossible for children to develop organizing concepts, methods of enquiry and critical thinking ability without dealing with data.

When children are studying their own groups, groups of which they are members, or local problems, they should have direct access to data. The local market, store, council office, chief’s house, or Oba’s palace or Emir’s palace, the health centre, postal agency or the post office, the craft centre, the market, the harbour, railway station, aerodrome, the factory, the corn or rice mill, the farm, etc. can be studied first hand. People who are far away or events that happened long ago have to be studied with second-hand information from books, pictures, recordings and films or film strips.

One of the most important things to bear in mind about a classroom is that it can easily be removed from most aspects of life. Our primary schools still give the impression that they are not part of the community, that education given in primary schools is to prepare pupils for some foreign type of life. The schools teem with a life of their own, but the political and social life of the country and the world, the commercial life of the city or urban centre, the economic life of the rural area, the impact of industries and changing technologies on the society, these usually remain outside the walls of our classroom. It appears as though the walls of the classroom constitute an iron curtain between them and the larger society outside the school.

It is in an attempt to break these walls that we use a varied assortment of resources. Consider the first purpose of learning resources: *to give the children access to data*. Learning resources should bring children the data of life as it is. The study of power, for example, requires examples of men wielding in making decisions, defending their rights, making governments and overthrowing them. The study of the market requires examples of markets and visits to them, and the materials of instruction have to be selected in such a way that the child encounters the facts of the importance and functions of the market.

CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF LEARNING RESOURCES

The overriding criterion for the selection of learning resources is that they provide authentic data about the most significant aspects of the subject of inquiry.

(i) *Authenticity*: When children are studying their neighbourhood, the crucial question about learning resources and materials is, what is the best way of revealing to the children the real neighbourhood?

(ii) *Relevance*: The second criterion for selecting resource materials is *relevance* to the objectives involved. Thus, one turns to the postal clerk to learn his duties, to the dictionary for the meaning of a word, or to the atlas for the location of a place on the map.

(iii) *Usability*: The third criterion is usability. This criterion has two meanings. First, the resource must be accessible at the time it is needed. Secondly, a learning resource material must be usable in terms of its appropriateness to particular learners. The material must be in a form which will have meaning for the age group concerned.

(iv) *Economy*: Other things being equal, the most economical resource should be used. For example, an excursion may be costly in terms of money and time, and an alternative cheaper resource that may do the job equally well can be used. Films, slides, televisions may be out of the question for most schools, so teachers have to find other resource materials relevant for their purposes.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:

The second purpose of learning resources is to help children to draw meaning from data provided by the resource materials. It is not enough to expose them to these materials. They should be helped to interpret these materials. They should be helped to build concepts from the instructional materials that explain the events or groups being studied.

Instructional materials can offer the child information and ideas, but only the instructional strategy can ensure that the children will interpret the data meaningfully, understand the concepts fully, and develop the ability to use the modes of inquiry of the scientist.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR LIVING

(a) *The Teacher:* The first source of learning is the teacher himself. Since this is self-evident, we need not belabour it. Suffice it to say that the teacher's role as a resource person is seen in the type of activities he provides for the children, serving as a source of information.

(b) *Pupils as Resources for Each Other:* It is often realised that pupils learn a great deal from one another. In general, the character of the relationships among the people involved in the learning situation is believed to have more to do with the nature and quality of learning than any other single factor. Hence, it is important for the teacher to capitalize on the fact that individual pupils can act as resource persons for other pupils, and for liaison with outside resources.

(c) *Outside Resource Persons:* In every community, no matter how small, there are people who know something of the locality, have travelled somewhere, or done something about which children should know. The local chief, the local blacksmith, the dance leader, the merchant, the retired government official, the local council official, the retired teacher, the insurance agent, the health officer, the postal clerk, telephone operator, — all these are resource persons. So also are elders who can tell stories about the local heroes, local storekeepers, policemen, political officials, the local fire brigade (where this exists), the train driver, the municipal clerk, the company director or manager, etc, the list is limitless. In fact, it is inconceivable that a study could effectively concentrate on a local community without the involvement of resource persons. The teacher cannot possibly possess the varied information and insights required to do an adequate and honest job of instruction, and there are no reading materials on community affairs at the moment, except in newspaper reports, and these are beyond the grasp of children at the junior section of the primary school. In the school pupil is to compare his own culture with others on the basis of authentic data, the active citizens of his community must be involved.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made above to discuss various types of learning resources. What is important to note is that, these resources, to be effective, must have relevance and meaning to the lives of the pupils using them. There is no need to use sophisticated resources which do not promote learning and effective living, and which cannot help pupils to make meaning of their environment. Apart from the well-known and more frequently used resources such as books and audio-visual aids, there are a variety of resources which the enterprising teacher can discover within his environment and which if properly used will make learning more relevant and meaningful and therefore contribute to effective living. Teachers should do well to explore these resources. They are invaluable aids to learning and education for living — education which will enrich not only the life of the individual but also of his community. This, and this only, is true education.