

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

By

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School Libraries have been assigned a wide range of roles. School library enthusiasts both librarians and educationists regard the school library as the "hub" of the school, the axis on which the intellectual life of the school revolves. Yet in practice we find school libraries are not the real centres of attention in our schools. I believe that this discrepancy arises due to the lack of guiding principles which will help towards formulating clearly defined functions for school libraries in the educational system. This paper will attempt to lay down these guidelines.

The aims and purposes of any library must evolve out of the needs and conditions prevailing in the service area. The most productive way of arriving at the roles of the School Library therefore, is firstly to define its environment, secondly to determine the nature and scope of the school library itself and finally deduce from these facts what we can hopefully expect to happen when such a school library is set up in such a school environment.

For our purpose, we can define the school library environment to consist of Teachers and Students who are engaged in activities most of which involve the use of materials. The whole setting is teaching and learning based. The foundation of this kind of service area is interaction of activities with materials that ensures effective teaching, and interaction of activities with materials that produces maximum student learning. In such an environment, the curriculum that is needed to be taught is set out; instructional strategies are laid out; and appropriate learning situations are developed which will deliberately make learning easy and interesting to all students. The school library on the other hand can be defined as a collection of materials, selected, organised and appropriately housed for use. Selection is determined by the school curriculum and the various teaching methods of Teachers and learning styles of Students. It is organised to the requirements of school librarianship and housed for easy access and easy use. The School Library is deliberately created.

If the schools' single minded objective is to educate through effective teaching and maximum learning, the school library's chief function can only be as an instrument to achieve this goal. Many of the existing roles that are

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assigned to the school library therefore, are irrelevant. The school library alone cannot educate, stimulate interest, cultural awareness or love for books. It has the potential to do this in the long run, but as an instrument it is a means to an end - the single minded purpose of the school. It is high time that when we begin to talk about functions and aims of the school library, we move away from the general romantic ideas and pay more attention on its role as an instrument and in finding something to do with this instrument in the context of the school service area.

The amount of work that the School Library can do in its role as an instrument is enormous:—

The School Library can make all types of teaching and learning materials available at one place for immediate use.

It can provide space where certain types of activities can best be performed.

Since the library stock is carefully selected and organised, the school library is in the best position to systematically introduce Teachers and Students to the proper use of books and libraries.

The School Library can become a learning centre, a learning laboratory, a resource centre and an information centre.

There is no limit to the amount of use this instrument can be put to, but whatever functions we assign to it must be realistic and appropriate to its nature.

IMPLICATIONS:

Like all instruments, the School Library has to be properly tuned in order to perform well. The school library can only become effective through a harmonious working relationship involving the library, the library staff, Teachers and Students. The Library should be tuned in its stock and services to the needs and interests of Teachers and Students; the library staff should be adequate and trained to run the library according to the requirements of school librarianship, and Teachers and Students should be educated to recognise the scope and the limits of the school library and to develop the necessary basic library skills. There is this lack of harmony in our schools, and it is a serious stumbling block towards a healthy school library development in the country as a whole.

The problem can be tackled through a series of measures. Firstly, there is a need for a division of responsibilities among all the agencies concerned with the training of all categories of school library staff and those concerned with the training of Teachers at all grades of Teacher Education.

The responsibility of train school library staff is best left to the schools of library science, polytechnics and the Ministries of Education working with the State Libraries. The need for all prospective teachers to acquire basic knowledge about the school library and its potential in teaching and learning, and the need for them to master essential library skills for the proper and effective use of the school library can best be handled by the TTCs, the AT Colleges and Institutes of Education. Secondly, there is a need for Librarians and Teachers to work out standards of school library service. Such a Statement, widely agreed upon by experts and people long involved in school library work will contribute in a great way to sound frame-work for an overall purposeful school library service.

The measures I have mentioned above can be achieved. I believe the stage is now set for us to begin to get to work. References to school libraries and school library services in the White Paper on the National Policy on Education are significant for three reasons. Firstly, they indicate what the Federal Military Government sees and understands to be the role of the library in the educational process; secondly, they provide categorical statements of commitment by the Federal Government to providing school library services in all educational institutions; and thirdly, the white paper highlighted the importance of library science in teacher education.

The white paper recognises the school library as an important service and essential to sound and effective teaching. Towards this end, the Federal Military Government will take the following steps:-

- (a) Provide junior libraries for primary school children.
- (b) Ensure that all schools are properly equipped especially with suitable textbooks and libraries.....
- (c) Establish school library service.

In addition, the white paper called the attention of every state Ministry of Education to the needs of providing funds for the establishment of libraries in all educational insitutions. We should not under-estimate or fail to see the potentials of these provisions. It is a departure from the apathy and neglect experienced by school librarians from Principals and Ministries of Education, including the Federal Ministry of Education. Training of Librarians and library assistants and Teachers in the management and organisation of school libraries will be systematically planned. The White Paper provides that "...successful attendance at a number of such courses will attract incremental credits and/or count towards future advancement..." For the first time the post of a Teacher/Librarian is a reality. His/Her type of training is specified and remuneration guaranteed.

We must not allow these provisions to remain on the white paper only.

REFERENCES

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2. Ibid, p. 8 (Para. 15; item 5).
3. Ibid, p. 9 (Para. 15; item 10a).
4. Ibid. p. 29 (Para. 84; item 9).
5. Ibid. p. 27 (Para. 74).