

SCHOOL LIBRARY FACILITIES REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UBE PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper discussed the objectives of the UBE and the library facilities. The roles of the school library play in the school system were identified, and the space requirements as well as functions to be performed in the school library were also discussed. Recommendations were made for the provision of effective library service for the UBE programme.

Introduction

This paper will consider the issue of the library facilities required for the Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria. When we speak of facilities we are talking of the supporting structure, the space, the building that will accommodate the library resources, both material and human. These three elements the materials, the personnel and the accommodation are basic components of any library. While in common parlance we may equate the library to the structure, which houses it, we realize on second thought that this is a fallacy. Facilities can never be seen in isolation—they have no meaning apart from the services they make possible. 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's not really a home. And if a child's toy isn't played with, then it's not really a plaything. And if the books in a library aren't read, then it's not really a library. Libraries exist only because of books and people's desire to read them, and if people don't want to read the books, there is no point in having a library. The final criterion of a library is not how many books it has, or how nice it looks, or how big the room is, but how well it serves the community it is there for....Fine buildings and equipment are very desirable, but they must result in better use of books or they are wasted. (p. 1)

This definition brings in a fourth essential ingredient of any library: the **users**. The library—house, collection and staff—exists to serve a community of users: they are its *raison d'être*. Emphasis, therefore, should not be on the library facility as the place materials are kept, as a kind of storeroom for the collection, but on the use made of the library in teaching and learning.

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Volume 4, Numbers 1 & 2, 2001.

The "Implementation Guidelines for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme (Nigeria, 2000) call infrastructures and facilities (including classrooms, libraries etc) "the physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning". Woolls (1988) makes the point another way when she states that "although the media centre, as facility, exists to house the staff, materials, and equipment, its main function is to provide an environment which will encourage and support teaching and learning within its spaces. (p. 42)

"if facilities are the physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning, if the main function of the school library as facility is to provide an environment for teaching and learning, then we must first consider our educational objectives. Before proceeding, therefore, let us look briefly at the objectives of the UBE programme and consider the implications of these for school library facilities.

UBE OBJECTIVES AND SCHOOL LIBRARY FACILITIES

Basic learning needs

According to the World Declaration on Education for all (UNESCO, 1992), basic learning needs:

Comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. (p.69)

The document goes on to state that satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals, fosters positive social values, and lays the foundation for lifelong learning and human development. These sentiments are echoed in the Nigerian Implementation Guidelines (Nigeria, 2000), which gives as objectives:

- laying the foundation for life-long learning;
- the inculcation of appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy;
- developing an aptitude for practical work; and
- the acquisition of socially desirable life skills. (p.11)

According to the Guidelines, stronger emphasis will be placed on "communication skills, the spirit of enquiry, team-work, and computer literacy." (p.11)

This should sound familiar, since many of these ideas are also found in the National Policy on Education and in educational literature in general. Indeed, it was the above educational philosophy—that education should be learner-centred, self-directed, active, resource-based, skills-oriented, functional, etc--that brought the school library from the periphery to the centre of education (Dike, 1993).

We know that the school library is the learning laboratory par excellence. In the library, learners find the world of knowledge, interact directly with resources, acquire information literacy and develop research skills for lifelong learning. Moreover, the library encourages active and participatory approaches to learning, another recommendation of the National Policy on Education and UBE documents. The library environment also facilitates teamwork and cooperation, sharing and dialogue. Its role in encouraging voluntary reading and personal development through literature is well known. While a structure alone can never make a library, one can hardly have an effective library service without a location, a facility, a space for learners to interact with resources and persons.

Education for all

Secondly, we usually think of school libraries in terms of primary and secondary schools, a library within a formal educational institution. But we have learned that UBE is an inclusive programme, encompassing:

- programmes/initiatives for early childhood care and socialization;
- educational programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life-skills, especially for adults;
- special programmes for nomadic populations;
- out of school, non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning;
- non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education, as well as
- the formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school. (Nigeria, 2000. p.3)

This list should provide cause for reflection. If UBE includes all these, then we truly need an expanded vision of school library service and facilities. Can there be a school library service without a school? Nursery schools can have school libraries, yes; but if we are concerned with all programmes/initiatives for early childhood, we will also be concerned with home libraries and services to community and daycare facilities. School library service for nomadic populations will necessarily be mobile, calling for a different kind of facility from the traditional library in a permanent structure. Serving the basic education needs of out-of school adults and youth will likely call for cooperation with public libraries, with school libraries as access points or providing shared facilities.

The implication of UBE for school library facilities include expansion of our definition of school libraries to encompass libraries in educational institutions other than primary and secondary schools, enlargement of our view to include portable, moveable library facilities, and strengthened partnerships with other libraries and institutions to provide library service in support of education for all. This is indeed a tall order! Having at least raised

the issue, let us turn to the specifics of the kind of school library facilities we require to support Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

What kind of facilities?

Paterson, according to Elaturoti (2000), has described the school library media centre rather poetically as a many sided place:

For a reader in search of adventure, it is a port of call. It is a galleus for exhibiting children's work. It is a tree for children who climb high in the process of discovering life in its rich and varied forms. It may be a refuge, also, to a child escaping from classroom life that has become tedious and boring. For teachers and children who need kind word and warm smile, it is an open door. For children undertaking a project, it is workshop. For teachers, it is a lounge after school where one can relax with colleagues. It is a couch for good conversation. For children who want to work, it is a comfortable chair and table. It is an arena for those who enjoy the thrill for pursuing and debating ideas. A school media centre is a unique place, not because of the resources contained therein or because of the services implied by the label, but unlike any other place in the school, the media centre is a public place. It belongs to all the children, all the teachers, and all the parents. (p. 90).

What varied uses we see in this brief excerpt! What a challenge this vision poses for provision of library facilities!

The first thing one might notice is that the school library requires many kinds of space. These include the following:

Accommodation of the collection

We are likely to first think of school library facilities in terms of an accommodation to house the collection, as well as staff users. While this represents a limited view of a library, it is very necessary. It is very difficult to develop a library without a location. Even an undeveloped room reminds people that a library is supposed to be part of a school and provides a place to begin storing library materials. If the space is to function as a library, it needs to be devoted to only that purpose, as we've seen above the variety of uses it can have.

The accommodation should have conditions favourable to the maintenance of the collection, such as good ventilation, enough light but protection from direct sunlight, temperature and humidity controls as far as possible, a reasonably quiet location. In addition to the structure, collection needs include shelving for books and journals, display racks for magazines, filing cabinets for pamphlets and clipping files, storage for large graphic media, audiovisual resources and equipment, etc. one also needs space for viewing and listening to certain media: large tables for maps, computer stations, carrels, chairs, etc.

An information centre

According to Correa (1997) the library is "the place where teachers and pupils come into contact with the 'the world', that is, where they acquire the general knowledge which forms that basis for all further learning". The school library also requires space as an information centre. Users come to the library in search of information and materials for various purposes. Reference and information services are a basic function of any school library. Reference materials, catalogues and indexes, and circulation would likely be in close proximity and near the entrance. The school librarian should also be on hand to answer questions and guide users.

A learning laboratory

The school library is a learning laboratory where users develop the skills required for lifelong learning. It is a workshop for carrying out projects and individual or small group assignments. It lends itself to active and participatory methods, enquiry, teamwork and problem solving, as advocated in UBE. As a learning laboratory the library should be buzzing with activity, not silent as a tomb. Ideally, there should be a separate space for group work. Alternatively, in some circumstances, the resources might be transported to the classroom rather than the class to the library.

An oasis of informality

Roe (1965) refers to the school library as an oasis of informality in a generally formal system. Paterson (Elaturoti, 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.

A place for sharing and creative expression

Although touched on above, school libraries can play an important role in socialization. Among the activities in this area are story hour, play activities, drama, artwork, music, debate. Some libraries, especially public libraries, overseas have a special room or corner for story hour. They may also have a small theatre or puppet theatre for dramatic presentations, or a courtyard. In other cases, creative activities can spill outside, as for instance with stories under the mango tree.

What Form of Library:**Central, classroom, portable, combined?**

A question, which remains, is the best form of library facility for our circumstances. A number of authors, among them Obi (1977), Ogunsheye (1978), Elaturoti (1990), have provided specifications for school library

accommodation and furniture. It is generally agreed that a central School library is more effective. This is because it can offer many more resources and more varied accommodation than a size of two classrooms, in a separate building. It should have good natural lighting and ventilation and well-landscaped surroundings with flowers and shade. It may have the following areas:

Reading Room: The basic area is a large reading room to accommodate the collection and the users. This area is multi-purpose; it should, therefore, be planned with more active, public areas and more quiet reading areas. It should also be a mix of formal and informal, with areas for both solitary and social activities. Furniture would include bookshelves, tables and chairs, card catalogue, circulation desk, etc.

Workroom: This is another essential space, required for the processing of library materials. This may also serve as an office for the school librarian.

Multi-purpose room: This room, while not essential, is very useful for the more social library activities, such as class project work, story hour, club activities, drama, and the viewing of films, video or other media.

Audiovisual room: Audiovisual materials and equipment often require special handling. They are more vulnerable to environmental conditions (such as humidity, heat, dust) than book materials. They are generally more costly and require greater security. Many need special conditions for viewing or listening. The same conditions generally apply to computers as well. Some audiovisual materials can also be produced in-house. For all these reasons, it is desirable to have a separate room to house the audiovisual collection.

Classroom libraries: An alternative to a central library is to have classroom libraries. These consist of a book corner or library shelf with resources for use in the classroom. The argument in favour of classroom libraries is that they bring books and reading very close to the children, especially younger children in nursery and primary school, and so encourage reading. Having resources within the classroom can also make it easier to integrate the library with the curriculum. Where security is a problem, small classroom collections can more easily be stored in a safe place overnight. The main disadvantages of classroom libraries are their limited resources and the need to duplicate materials. In addition, where primary school classes are held in large halls, the environment is hardly conducive to the learner-centred methods advocated by educational reformers and the UBE programme.

However, given the right physical conditions and especially as an addition to the resources of a central school library, classroom libraries have encouraged voluntary reading in Israel and transformed teaching and learning in South Africa (READ, 1993 & 1994).

Portable Libraries: Portable libraries represent another attempt to extend school library services to the unserved. A noteworthy success with portable libraries has been in Thailand (CREDA 1989), where they have brought library services to rural schools, community centres, markets, daycare centres

and homes. The wooden boxes contain about 250 books and open into a display unit. The opened box might be placed anywhere conducive to reading, in a quiet corner or in the shade of a tree. The box is locked and secured for the night, or transported to another location for use.

Another type of portable library, in the form of a hanging canvas bag, has been used in Venezuela, where many rural primary schools have no building (Banco del Libro, 1988) and in the Feed the Minds project with adult learners in Tanzania (Dike, 1997). Portable or mobile libraries have been transported by buses in many countries, (including Nigeria), by boat (in Nigeria and Venezuela, among others), by camel (in Kenya) or donkey (in Peru and Zimbabwe) and by cart (Nicaragua), as portrayed in the Books for all calendars (1997, 2000). Portable school libraries would seem to offer real possibilities of extending library services in support of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria—to nomadic populations, remote communities, rural primary schools, community and daycare centres.

Combined libraries: Combined libraries, joint libraries, or shared facilities offer another approach to the problem of expanding library services. In this case a school and public library share facilities. It has been tried in many places, with varying degrees of success.

Combined libraries are not common in countries with small-scattered communities such as Norway and Australia. They have also been introduced in several African countries, including Botswana, Mozambique and Cote d'Ivoire (IFLA-ALP, 1995). In countries without an extensive network of public libraries, schools often offer the most viable facility for community information services. Combined libraries would also seem to offer the most viable facility for community information services. Combined libraries would also seem to offer promise in the implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria as it relates to adult learners and out-of-school youth.

Recommendations

We have seen that the focus in planning school library facilities must be on use. A library is not a storeroom—rather, it is a teaching and learning environment. And the resources and learning opportunities libraries offer are absolutely essential for realization of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education Programme.

I would, therefore, recommend the following:

1. A school library must be planned into any new school. And by planning I mean that the library should be built and furnished to specification. Taking account of its manifold uses. It should be designed as a library, not just be a room assigned that title. A school library should be a requirement for approval of any new school, public or private.

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Volume 4, Numbers 1 & 2, 2001.

2. Communities should take up school library development in existing schools as part of their contribution to the Universal Basic Education programme. This is in line with the UBE emphasis on community-oriented education and partnerships between all segments of the society. There have already been notable examples of school libraries built or developed by communities, PTAs or philanthropic individuals: we need to build on these.
3. Where a new facility is not possible, schools should be required to locate a suitable space within the existing structure for conversion to the school library. Conversion may include combining rooms or dividing the space in ways that cater for school library uses.
4. In the entire above, school library development must be an integrated process, including facilities, resources and staff. An empty space is not a library, neither is a storeroom for books. The school library must be stocked and put under the charge of trained personnel, if it is to provide effective service.
5. Classroom libraries, a book corner or shelf as a focus for activity within the classroom, are 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.
6. Portable libraries, stocked from a central library or agency, conveyed by a vehicle, box or display device are a powerful tool for extending library services to the unserved: or primary schools, rural communities, places of work, literacy and skills centres, remote or mobile populations. These should be developed under the UBE programme to make it truly universal, making library services in support of education accessible to all.
7. Combined libraries, or shared facilities, pooling the resources of schools, public libraries, and communities, should be explored as a means to serving learners inside and outside schools and of bringing schools closer to the community.
8. The task of developing library facilities for the successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme is formidable. Yet by exploring and adapting varied means with determination and imagination, I am confident we can rise to the challenge and provide genuine, library-supported education for all.

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