

# PERSONNEL REQUIREMENT FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

By

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## **Abstract**

*The objectives and scope of the Universal basic Education were discussed. The functions of the School Library service in support of the education programme in the school and the staff requirement for the effective performance of the functions were also discussed. The various designations used for librarians in schools in countries of the world and their qualifications were examined, and definite designation and qualifications were for librarians in Nigerian schools. The strategies for getting qualified teacher-librarians and other school library personnel for Nigerian schools for the effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education Programme were highlighted and definite proposals were made to guide the UBE programme implementers.*

## **Introduction**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme was launched in Nigeria on September 30, 1999 and the admission of children into primary one under the programme was to be in October 2000. The objectives of the UBE programme as contained in the *Implementation guidelines* are as follows:

- developing in the entire citizenry, a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- the provision of free, universal and basic education for every Nigerian Child of school-going age;
- reducing drastically the incident of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- catering for young persons who, for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling as well as other out-of-school children/adolescents, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the

ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The scope of the UBE covers the following programmes:

- programmes/initiatives for early childhood care and education;
- education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy and life skill, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above);
- 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 youths who have not had the benefit of formal education.
- the formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

Pursuing the objectives of the UBE calls for enriched curricula in several dimensions that will accomplish the following:

- laying the foundation of 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.

All these have implications for what should be taught in schools, the way and manner in which they are to be taught, school organisation, and the classroom work. To make the curricula meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerians, a stronger emphasis would have to be put on:

- generic skills such as communication, the spirit of enquiry, team work and computer literacy;
- a deeper understanding of core subject disciplines;
- the integration of key social and life skills into formal and non-formal education activities, and
- reducing curriculum overload.

Under the UBE programme, education will be provided to five different groups of beneficiaries:

- pre-primary age children;
- primary age children;
- junior secondary school students;

- adults and out-of-school adolescents in mass literacy, adult and non-formal education, and
- nomads.

The infrastructures and facilities to be provided in the schools include: classrooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops, playfields, school farms and gardens as well as provisions for water and sanitation. These facilities are considered the physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning. The quality of school library services that will meet the requirement of the UBE programme is what this paper will address.

#### **The school library service**

The school library service has the following essential functions to perform:

- supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school's mission and curriculum;
- developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
- offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment;
- supporting all students in learning and practising skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication with the community;
- providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions;
- organising activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity;
- working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the school;
- proclaiming the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in democracy;
- promoting reading and the resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond. (IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 2000).

The school library fulfils these functions by developing policies and services, selecting and acquiring resources, providing physical and intellectual access to appropriate source of information, providing instructional facilities and employing trained staff.

### **Staffing the school library**

As a result of the changing role of the school library in the education system, many different designations are being used to refer to the school library. Such designations include: media resource centre, school library media centre, learning resource centre, and educational resource centre, all of which refer to the same concept and can be used interchangeably. For the purpose of this presentation, I will use the designation 'school library' with which the audience is very familiar.

The staff required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century school library include: school librarian, technical staff in the areas of audio-visual resources and media production, library assistant/clerk, secretarial staff, security staff, cleaners and messengers. All the cadres of staff listed above will be needed in regional and zonal school library that provides services to a number of schools in the vicinity or defined geographic area. The individual school library may not be able to afford all the cadres of staff listed above but as a necessity, it should have a school librarian and if possible a library assistant. The services of other staff could be shared with the school administration or could be staff centrally employed at the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) to provide services to all the schools in the area. For example, audio-visual equipment could be repaired at the workshop provided at the LGEA headquarters. So also instructional media could be centrally produced.

The School Librarian is the professionally and the qualified staff member responsible for planning and managing the school library, supported by as many adequate staff as possible, working together with all members of the school community, and liaising with the public library and other institutions. There are general areas of knowledge that are vital if the school librarian is to develop and operate effective school library service: resources, library and information management and teaching. To meet the varied information needs of the users: pupils, teachers, etc., the school library has to operate in a network with the public library and other information centres. The School Librarian who is to initiate, develop and operate these services must therefore be competent in planning and teaching different information-handling skills to both teachers and students and should have opportunity for professional training and development through continuing education programmes.

### **The universal basic education and school library development in Nigeria**

Within the scope of the UBE programme, the school library will have to provide services to five categories of users: the pre-school children, primary school children, students in the Junior Secondary Schools, adults in the mass literacy non-formal education sector and the nomads, depending on the location of the school library. The beneficiaries of the UBE should have access to effective library service at the following places: within the school, at the zonal school library media centre within the LGEA, public libraries within and outside the Local Government and other nearby special libraries and information centres among others. Of primary importance is the library within the school, which is within easy reach of the pupils/students and on which the

school media programmes will be based. To facilitate the establishment of libraries in the schools, at least a classroom should be set aside to accommodate the school library collection and provide the service point for media use in the school. A multi-purpose built library building is ideal and should be planned and provided as the zonal school libraries and/or other libraries that will serve a cluster of schools.

#### **The school librarian**

The designation used for the school librarian varies from country to country. While in countries like Canada, Sri Lanka, Botswana and Hong Kong, they are being called teacher-librarians, in the United States of America, they are being called school library media specialists and in Great Britain, they are being called school librarians. Sri Lanka also uses both teacher-librarian and school librarian designations depending upon the size of the school where he/she is employed. In all the education systems, school librarians are recognised and employed on the basis of their librarianship qualifications acquired through formal courses on full-time or part-time basis. The qualifications recognised for school librarians as entry qualification vary from Diploma in Library Science as in Botswana, Bachelor's degree in Library Science as in Iceland, to Master's degree in school media programme as in the U.S.A. In Hong Kong, to become a teacher-librarian, first, one must be practising teacher for two years. After being employed in a school as the teacher-librarian he/she would be sent by the school to complete two years of part-time in-service training to obtain a certificate in librarianship. In Iceland, teacher-librarians have up to Master's degree in library science. There are also refresher courses for teacher-librarians who have more than 5 years experience to update knowledge. Teacher-librarians in Iceland are paid as much as the subject teachers (Hannesdottir, 1998).

In Sri Lanka, those who are recruited as school librarians should at least have completed the first year course in Library and Information Science conducted by the Sri Lanka Library Association or have completed the Certificate Course in Library and Information Science conducted by the University of Kelaniya. The Draft Policy formulated by the Sri Lanka National Library Services Board under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education identifies three types of school librarians: professional librarians, para-professionals and teacher-librarians. The Policy recommends that professional librarians be appointed to other schools according to their requirements (Yapa, 1998).

In the United States of America, the designation school library media centre is used for school library and the professionals in-charge are called school library media specialists. They are trained under the numerous (200-250) library education programmes in the U.S.A. Fifty-three of the programmes by 1998, are graduate programmes accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). The remaining programmes range from those that offer major or minor concentrations at the undergraduate level leading to a certification as a school library media specialists to graduate programmes leading to the Master's degree in education, educational media, instructional

technology and library and information science. The ALA recommends the graduate degree as the entry level for the school media specialist. State requirements for certification as school library media specialist range from a Master of Library Science degree with specified competencies to a requirement of any 12 credit hours of library science and audio-visual course (Zimmerman, 1998).

In Nigeria, the Nigerian School Library Association has recommended that the designation school librarians be used for professionals, para-professionals and teacher-librarian appointed to run the nation's school libraries. A minimum qualification of Diploma in Library Science is recommended for school librarians in primary schools and a Bachelor's degree for librarians in the secondary schools. School Librarians with higher qualifications at Master's Level should be attracted to work in our secondary schools and zonal school libraries. A background in education is also considered relevant. To facilitate these desirable changes, the government is being advised to establish positions of school librarians as career posts in the nation's schools making it possible for holders of the Nigerian Certificate Examination (NCE) and Bachelors of Education (B. Ed.) with qualifications in Librarianship who are qualified as school librarians to secure jobs in the school system. They will also be paid salaries equal to that of their teaching colleagues whose qualifications are at par with them. The time to consider this recommendation is now with the take-off of the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE). The library schools in Nigeria can train all the school librarians needed in Nigerian schools within a reasonable period if the government so desires. The Abadina Media Resource Centre, a research and public service centre for schools and children's libraries, University of Ibadan, is working in collaboration with the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies to train school librarians at Diploma level on part-time basis. By this approach, we can produce qualified school librarians within a relatively short period. The existing programmes in the Library School in Ibadan and other places at the Bachelor's and Master's degrees levels with concentrations on school library media courses will be able to produce qualified school librarians for Nigerian schools.

One may ask why is it necessary to establish career positions for school librarians in our school system? The experience at the Abadina Media Resource Centre, University of Ibadan, in training teacher-librarians for Nigerian schools over the years supports this position. Since 1975, the Centre has been offering training programmes for teacher-librarians through workshops and short-term courses, the impact of which is hardly noticeable today in the schools, as studies have consistently revealed. The teachers identified to be in-charge of school libraries, in the research reports, were found to have no training in Librarianship. The obvious reasons for this situation have been that the trained teacher librarians leave the schools with their skills when they are promoted to higher posts as departmental heads, which carry recognition and allowances. Even when they do not leave, they give very little attention to the school library as, often, they are responsible for other areas of the curriculum for which remuneration is paid. Also, the

Federal and State Teaching Service Management Bodies transfer teachers **without** consideration for their librarianship training to duty posts or on need basis thereby making training given wasted. Similar experience was also reported in Botswana public schools whereby trained teacher-librarians were not allowed to stay long on their job thereby closing down the pace of school library development in that country (Baffour-Awuah, 1998). Making the appointment of a school librarian a duty post with career prospect will put an end to the persistent poor staffing of school libraries and bring a new dawn of school library development in Nigerian Schools.

One may also wonder for how long do we have to wait to get the **qualified** school librarians to employ in Nigerian Schools. We don't need to delay action for any period. I am therefore suggesting that the government takes records of teachers with some form of qualifications in librarianship obtained through regular courses offered for degrees in library science or as part of teacher education programme. Teachers who have attended workshops or short courses in librarianship should also be included. Such teachers could be appointed as school librarians to develop library service in the schools and be given the opportunity for in-service training to update knowledge. Graduates in education and NCE holders could be employed into the school system as school librarians and be given in-service training in librarianship at Bachelor and Postgraduate levels on part-time basis. Holders of teachers grade II and Senior Secondary School Certificates could also be appointed as school librarians for primary school and be given in-service training in librarianship at the Diploma level on part-time basis too. Professionally qualified librarians with background in education should also be attracted to take appointment as school librarians in our school system. Many of the graduates of the library schools will like to take appointment in schools if there is a career prospect for school librarians. With this approach, school library service could commence with the take-off of the UBE programme as same approach has worked well in other countries earlier discussed.

#### **Other cadres of school library staff**

Other cadres of staff required in the school library include: library assistant who will be doing the non-professional jobs in the school library like accessioning, stamping, shelving and shelf-reading and circulation of library materials among others. He takes charge of the library when the librarian is on other assignments outside the library. Where there are volunteers among the parents or residents in the neighbourhood, they should be encouraged to offer some hours of service at agreed times. Staff from the school administrative pool could perform other services required. The qualification of the Library Assistant should be the Senior Secondary School Certificate or equivalent. The Abadina Media Resource Centre runs a four-week Library Assistant Course which is designed to train on-the-job, Library Assistants for libraries. Other institutions like the State Library Boards could provide similar training singly or in collaboration with other institutions. In the LGEA's zonal libraries or in school libraries serving a cluster of schools, an audio-visual technician should

be employed to assist in the use of audio-visual media, production of instructional media, carrying out of minor repairs to audio-visual software and hardware and do other jobs that require technical skills. All the above listed cadres of staff will be given on-the-job training in their areas of specialities and on library functions and their role in the school library system. The minimum qualifications of the technician should be the City & Guilds Certificate or Certificate of an approved technical institution with specialisation in electronics.

The library service in the UBE programme will have to be provided for different users, and to a variety of users – pre-school children to adults. It will also have to be provided beyond the conventional school hours to evenings and on weekends to meet the needs of the adult classes and out-of-school beneficiaries of the programme. There is therefore the need to employ the aforementioned cadres of staff who will work under the direction and supervision of the school librarian.

#### **School library legislation**

For the establishment of effective library service in our schools, it is essential that the provision of the library services be backed-up with a legislation. The legislation on school libraries will make it mandatory for all schools to have libraries through grants to be given annually for the service. It will also specify the standards to be met by each school library, in terms of personnel, collection, functions, funding and criteria for evaluation of service among others. In countries where school libraries have been integrated into the school's systems and are functioning well, we found that there are school library legislations that guide the provision of libraries in the school system. The Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA) in 1978 produced the *Guidelines for Legislation on School Libraries* copies of which were submitted to Federal and State Governments for adoption to guide school library development in Nigerian schools. The instability that characterised the past governance of Nigeria and the apparent lack of the will on the part of the government to provide libraries in our schools, have contributed to the neglect of the document prepared by the NSLA, the effect of which is the persistent poor state of school library service in Nigerian Schools. In the present dispensation, where Government is taking the education of the citizenry more serious than any period in the nation's history, the enactment of legislation on school libraries will be timely and be a right step in the right direction. The Nigerian School Library Association will be willing to assist the Government to provide the professional input for the draft and help to see the faithful implementation of the legislation when enacted.

#### **Conclusion**

School libraries in developed countries of the world have been considered important to the education mission of schools. The recognition that today's students must be technologically literate and must be skilful consumers, users and producers of information has prompted increased attention to the roles the



school libraries play in the academic achievement of students. Over time, the focus of school library media programmes has moved from resources to students, to create a community of life-long learners. The Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria will achieve greater success if effective school library service is made an integral part of the schooling system. The Nigerian School Library Association is willing to assist the Government and other agencies of education in making the UBE programme a huge success through the provision of effective school library service.

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Volume 4. Numbers 1 & 2, 2001.

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