

THE MODERN LIBRARY AND THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION

By

E. P. UDOFIA

*Mobile Pegasus Primary School
Eket, Akwa-Ibom state*

Abstract

For a child who is learning to discover the world and to be relevant, the world of books, stories, games, puzzles, audiotapes and computers are his best playground. This paper sets out to describe strategies for effective participation of school libraries in the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme.

Introduction

The aim of education in any nation depends on the values and ideals upheld by the nation at any given time. "At any time" here presupposes metamorphosis both in the system and approach. Nigeria is not an exception as change in both is evident; all geared towards actualizing the National ideals and desires for her citizenry. Education in Nigeria has undergone a lot of evolution since independent with a lot of well defined objectives.

We can recall Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the 1970s, the 6-3-3-4 system of the 1980s and now the Universal Basic Education (UBE) launched in the 1990s. The above shows that every decade, new policies and methods are evolved with the intention of producing balanced, relevant citizens.

These are reflective in two national objectives of Primary Education which summarise the National Educational Aims.

These are:

- The laying of a sound basic for scientific and reflective thinking
- Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment (National Policy on education: 1981).

No wonder then that National Policy on education (NPE) states that:

- Government will provide junior libraries for primary school children. Libraries are already being incorporated into new Primary Schools, being put up as part of the plan for the Universal Primary Education Scheme.

Government will ensure that all schools are properly equipped to promote sound and effective teaching, and in particular that suitable textbooks are provided for schools. To this end, funds are being provided for school libraries, textbooks and equipment; and government is also embarking on a scheme for provision of inexpensive textbooks.

Fafunwa (1992) defined the school library as "the heart of the school around which all school programmes revolve". As an integral part of the educational system, the school library has the following objectives.

- i It functions to achieve greater growth and development of every child
- ii It provides a wide range of materials for individual differences taking each child where he is and helping him to grow
- iii Through its resources-print and non-print, it provides experience for the children so that they might appreciate the past, comprehend the world today and intelligently prepare for the experiences of tomorrow.
- iv The school library by teaching the use of resource materials provides the opportunity for the child to help himself.
- v Uses up-to-date resources available to supplement and enrich the teaching and learning situation... among others.

The above are completely relevant to the attainment of Federal Government aspirations in introducing the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

The universal basic education

President Obasanjo in Sokoto launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999. According to him;

In this day of knowledge, a child starved of education is like a person starved of food (Obasanjo, 2000)

Implementing THE UBE PROGRAMME:- N.E.R.D' therefore launched this highly applaud able programme which has these specific aims: To enable the individuals acquire knowledge, skills and attitude will assist them to

- live meaningful and fulfilling lives;
- contribute to the development of society;
- derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society and ;
- discharge their civic obligations competently.

For the above to be actualised, the learner requires much more than the teacher can tell him if he must have wholesome living as Fafunwa (2000) asserts that "the new Basic Education included giving the youths and adults essential attitudes that contemporary society demands for wholesome living.

The implication of this in the UBE programme introduction is based on the knowledge that the children of today are tomorrow's adults who will have to inculcate the right attitudes, right from their childhood to bring about a wholesome society in the future.

The school library as a tool for the implementation of the universal basic education (UBE) scheme

Although so much recognition has been accorded the school library as a pivot point around which all other learning activities revolve, so little has been done to enable it perform its indispensable role especially in public schools. But the truth remains that school libraries are the hearts of the mother institutions, which they serve.

Today's innovations in school library practices fit well into the attainment of the goals of the UBE Programme. These innovations include those of environments (the stock), the librarian and her new methods, which greatly enhance self-education, self-experience, problem solving and general life-long education.

The environment

Today's library is like "a big play ground waiting to be explored" (Travalline: 1997) and the librarian the best playmate; one who makes the playground worthwhile. Young children's literacy develops and emerges as they explore and participate in a literacy rich environment (Herbert: 1997). At the center of such an environment are books and other resources with contents that are familiar and fascinating to children.

In fact, in spite of all the changes in educational philosophies, aims and pedagogy that have permeated school systems in the developing countries, the central importance of textbooks and other learning resources have not been diminished. Since the second half of this millennium, empirical evidence of the importance of learning resources in academic achievement abound. (Farrel & Heyneman: 1989).

Studies such as those cited by Aprieto (1983) of a text-book study in the Philippines clearly confirmed the obvious fact that children who study in a literacy rich environment perform better than those who do not have this advantage.

From these it can be deduced that for the UBE to succeed schools must be provided with literacy rich libraries in both print and non-print forms.

Some of such include:-

(a) Audio-Tape Recordings

The importance of audio tape recording to children are many and varied. To begin with mere sight of the recorder and tapes especially those accompanied with readers is an excitement. Therefore with these, children are highly motivated to learn-reading.

Audio-tapes provide warm feelings to children as they do not only read letters but also enjoy the variations in the voice of the speakers. This adds to their excitement and conveyance of meaning.

Besides, they provide practice and models to children.

(b) Flash cards

Flash cards are very important source of catching attention in children. They serve both teachers and pupils. Unlike books, these cards do not expose their contents all at the same times. They therefore stimulate curiosity and retain attention.

They are also good resources for skill mastery in children e.g. while learning sounds.

(c) Beginner books

A major foundation of literacy involves understanding, appreciating and enjoying books. This should begin at infancy with books specifically designed to withstand rough handling with very thick cardboard or plastic infant-proof books.

Beginner books include lap books, concept books/counting books, picture/story books, alphabet/words/shape books.

(d) Lap books

These have colourful pictures with heavy durable pages. They carry pictures that are of familiar objects to children and appealing to their values, interests and ideas.

(e) Concept/counting books

Concept books are meant to enable children develop cognitive skills. Concept in children's books must be of children's levels. Just as the children have limited attention span and limited vocabulary, these books should be short with few words per page but interesting. Counting books should be such that will enable children acquire numerical skills and develop love for numeracy. They should be highly illustrated too.

(f) Picture/story/alphabet/word/shape books

These are pictures integrated with text of the book. These should also be brightly coloured and brightly illustrative. This will attract children to such books and the many illustrations should be such that children can talk about easily. Being the age of technology, efforts should be made to incorporate computers and educative softwares; as well as periodicals for currentness.

The librarian

Ayeni and Oyebanji (1997) quoting UNESCO defined the school library as "organised collection of published books and periodicals and of other reading and audio-visual materials, and the service of staff able to provide and interpret such materials as required meeting the informational needs of its users". The above definition agrees with Akhigbe (1996) "human resources are most important of all library resources". These, she says represent 75% of what it takes to make a good library.

Ranganathan (1988) was of the same opinion when he wrote that "a library is made big not by the number of its books but by its use". This supports the First Law of Library Science that "Books are for use".

The ultimate fulfillment of school libraries and any others for that matter, is user consumption and satisfaction.

This means that the librarian who is the manager of the school library has a lot of tasks, which she requires special qualities to carry out. Some of them will merely be mentioned here as geniality, scholarship, professional competence, and personality as well as initiative.

New challenges

The school librarian in the Universal Basic Education implementation must define his responsibilities and redefine his strategies to suit the high expectations of the national objective of the scheme if he must be relevant. Rather than playing the role of a storekeeper, he must become an interactive partner to all users.

Every library user has a need. These needs are wide and vary in purpose, width and depth depending on who needs the information. Having properly organised her stock for easy access, the school libraries need to identify these needs and levels; and being co-implementors of the curriculum with the teacher, he must be able to analyse relevant needs of users at different levels, master resources that match the needs at these levels and be able to make the user, firstly the teacher, aware of the existence of such facilities, their uses and staff service.

Teacher needs

The librarian has four major teacher needs to satisfy. They are curriculum (content) needs, resources needs, professional needs and awareness needs. At the curriculum level, it is the librarian's responsibility to help the teachers keep abreast with modern trends in their curriculum. From journals, current disks and new recourse materials in the market, the librarian can discover new trends. Some teachers are conservative and may not want to try new resources such as language drill packages and projectors. It is the librarians' responsibility to enlighten the teacher on the need to be able to use such.

Professionally as knowledge grows, so does the teacher need to grow? It is the duty of the librarian to pick up interest in and analyse individual

teacher's areas of interest and supply their information on areas that might pose some difficulties.

It is not an overstatement to say that the success of the UBE implementation depends on teacher's information literacy which Amuchieze (1998) described as "a set of skills and strategies which include the abilities to recognize a need for information, to retrieve the required information and to evaluate and utilize it effectively to solve a particular problem".

This means that the school librarian primarily owes the UBE teacher a responsibility of educating, enlightening and informing him not just of what is available but also what they answer to and how to access them.

Learner needs

The needs of the learner pose even a greater challenge to the school librarian. According to the third law of Library Science "Save the tempo of the reader", there is need for the librarian to work in such a way as to sustain the desire of the learner to love and enjoy using, exploring and discovering in the library. According to this law "physical hunger for food is compelling and physical thirst for water is inexorable, but the tempo for reading is momentary and not compelling, therefore dies out unless satisfied immediately.

Considering the general aim of the Universal Basic Education programme which is to "ensure sustainable life-long learning... and acquisition of functional literacy" (UBE Blue print: 1999), it is imperative that the learner needs to be stimulated to find information independently, study beyond the class, search to answer specific questions and of course enjoy himself. This way he will develop functional literacy. To attain this, the school librarian becomes an indispensable resource.

Strategies for the development of sustainable life-long learning

Reading is the spring board on which learning takes off, Ikoh (1996) defines it as "a process through which a child's cognitive development can be furthered, and a child becomes aware of events around him and in other lands. This part of the paper shall therefore concentrate on print seeing that in the Nigerian context we are surrounded by print. With print street signs and bill boards on highways tell us what to do, what to buy and even how to conduct ourselves. Developing literacy behaviour and enjoying reading at the early stage therefore becomes a sine qua non in the actualization of the ideals of the UBE programme.

Some ways are through creating literate interactions, using interactive phonics stands and using attribute web.

Creating literate interactions

Literacy can basically be defined as the ability to read and write. Beginning literacy consists of those experiences that lead to literate behaviour such as reading and writing (Silvern and Silvern: 1997).

Functional literacy requires a lot of interactions. So rather than the dry boring routinal reading by children, guided reading using conversations and puzzles could form good interaction. Here's a conversation to be read by two children.

Daddy: What did you have for lunch at auntie Udoh's?

Daughter: You know?

Daddy: No, I don't. I'm asking because I want to know

Daughter: (Smiling): You know?

Daddy: (Stern): No, tell me.

Daughter: Spaghetti

Daddy: Did you enjoy it?

Daughter: Yes, but...

Daddy: But what?

Daughter: I hadn't enough

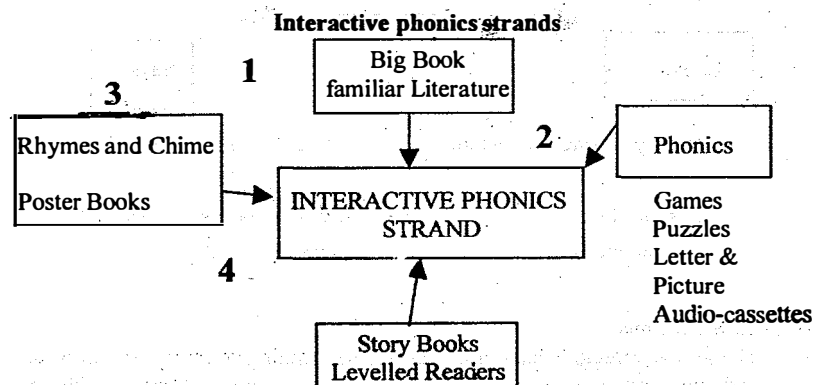
Daddy: That's a pity. Did you tell your aunt?

Daughter: No, I thought it wasn't right.

As children take turns to read aloud after the librarian's model, they certainly will enjoy the fun and reading becomes a life-long worthwhile activity.

Using interactive phonics stand

Phonics are important tools that help readers develop fluency. Manipulative, audio-cassettes, big-books and games are needed to create an exciting fun environment for children to explore sound/symbol relationships and experiment with spelling patterns and built phonemic awareness. These are some of the interactions:

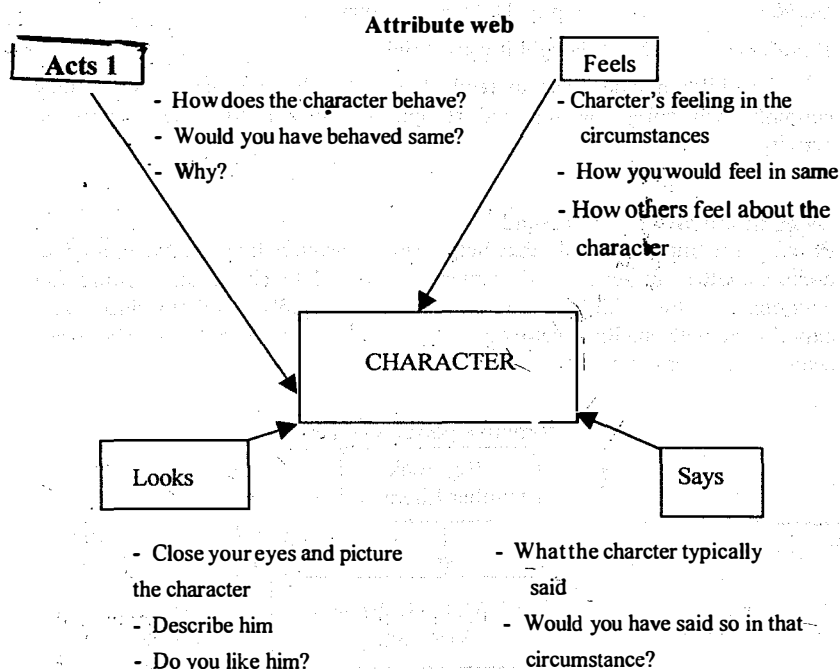


Adapted from Scholastic Supplemental Catalogue (1998).

Phonic awareness is the ability to hear rymes and alliteration, orally blend and segment words, split syllables, and perform manipulations. Big books, audio-cassettes and games will help improve children's skills and make library and reading enjoyable and meaningful. Using poster books through choral reading, dramatization and visual interpretation will also make reading an exercise to desire; and learning enhanced.

Using attribute web

Children need to be guided to pick facts books, to appreciate the trend and flow of information and to be able to analytically examine charcters-attributes that determine the trend of their reading. They should be above to read critically when the need arises. Using attribute web will greatly enhance the skill of analytical reading and recapping of the author's message. Group discussion following the web and finally the librarian's discussion will add inferential feelings to it.



Recommendations

- The above strategies have implications for training of all school librarians and not put any unskilled person in the school library with the designation "Librarian" which is what obtains in most of our schools.

- For the professional librarian to function effectively and optimize her relevance, there is need for retraining through short courses, workshops and seminars on new strategies.
- Government needs to move from the obvious terminal level of policy making and planning to the level of implementation and its monitoring of the supplies.

References

- Adewale, O. & Olanlokun O. (1990) Library Education for You. Abeokuta: 'Kunle Pub. Co. Ltd.
- Akhigbe O.O. (1996) "Professional Skills Required by Nigerian Library/Information Centres of the future". Paper Presented at 34th National Conference of Nigerian Library Association, Kaduna.
- Amucheazi, Oyo (1998) Information Literacy for Life-long Education: The Role of the Classroom Teacher & Librarian in Elaturoti D.F. (1998) Nigerian school librarianship: yesterday, today and tomorrow. Ibadan: NSLA.
- Fafunwa, Babs A. (1992) Minimum Standards for School Libraries in Nigeria Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education.
- Fafunwas, Babs A. Newswatch, Jan 17, 2000, p11.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). National Policy on Education. Lagos: NERC
- Grinnel, Paula C. (1984). "How can I prepare My Young Child for Reading". International Reading Association (Monograph).
- Heibert, E.H. (1997) Kindergarten Works Program Guides, Needham, Silver Burdeth Ginn.
- Obasanjo, O. (2000) The Guardian, Jan. 20 2000 p 20
- Olanlokun, S.O. & Salisu, T.M. (1993), Understanding the Library: A handbook on Library Use. Lagos: University of Lagos Press
- Ranganathan, S.R. (1988), Library Manual for Library Authorities: Librarians and Library Workers. Bangalore: SRELS.
- Travaline, K.A. (1997) Explore the Playground of Books. International Reading Association.
- Universal Basic Education Blueprint (1999) (monograph).