THE LIBRARY USE PATTERNS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Teachers' library attitudes and the library use patterns of secondary school students in Nigeria are summarily discussed. The common assumption by some teachers, librarians and school authorities that positive library habits are more inadvertently caught or developed by students than consciously taught once good library facilities have been provided was empirically studied and the findings and implications are reported. The major finding of the study is that students can only display a remarkable disposition to use the school library when bibliographic guidance is provided and classroom instruction is integrated with school library resources. The role of teachers and librarians in creating library awareness in students is emphasized.

Introduction

School libraries have been interwoven, however limited, with Nigerian secondary education for well over three decades now. The provision of such library services has been based on the often-exaggerated notion of their importance and goodness. Many teachers and librarians readily accept that the school library is a desirable part of the school, having a valuable role to play in the educational programme. Based on the same assumption, official government position regarding school libraries as evident in the National Policy on Education (1981) is positive indeed. As a result, many secondary schools in Nigeria presently have libraries of 'some sort'.

Although school libraries in Nigeria have improved over the years, the entire national educational system is still a distance from being fully 'learner-centred' or 'resource-based'. In other words, widespread school libraries are yet to be the norm or ideal all over the country. In many instances, the libraries are neither properly staffed nor stocked with relevant resources and they are hardly closely related to the school instructional programmes. Because of such attendant bottlenecks, the libraries have not been able to fully provide the required impact on the total educational encounter.

The problem

As is traditional, Nigerian schools operate with official lesson time schedules, within which there re 'library period' slots for teaching students Library and Information Skills (LIS). In some cases, the staff, usually classroom teachers or library assistants, teach rudimentary LIS to students, although the skills instruction is isolated from the rest of the instructional programmes of the school. For most students, however, such minimal opportunities do not even exist and the 'library period' is simply a free period to visit the school library for any reason whatsoever. There is rarely any guidance or direction for them on how to effectively utilise the library. Many students and teachers, therefore, view such programme periods as unimportant.

The school librarian is hardly involved in curriculum planning with teachers and the library resources are rarely regarded as essential aspects of the teaching/learning process. Furthermore, lessons are rarely designed around the library and its resources and students are not fully encouraged to use the library to pursue their own interests. Generally, many teachers and librarians tend to assume that students will inadvertently formulate positive reading/library habits once the school library facility has been introduced. Thus, for many of them the major type of library use education for students is the brief library induction or orientation usually given to new entrants at the beginning of each academic session.

There is little or no important attempt to make the students aware of the library services relevant to their needs or the benefits of such services. There seems to be a widely held notion that secondary school students already possess the required skills to use a library. The result of such approach is that the 'silent' library period or minimal LIS instruction programme (where one exists) is regarded by students as an 'optional extra' and rarely taken seriously. Thus, students' reading/library habits and learning outcomes resulting there from have not been impressive over the years.

The problem identified above was an impetus for this study recently conducted to ascertain the relationship between students' awareness of good library materials and the amount of voluntary reading done by them in Nigeria. The intent was to test the validity of the null hypothesis that "there is no significant relationship between students' awareness of good library resources and the amount of non-required reading done".

Methodology

The study was restricted to Borno State as a sample. The State is divided into six educational zones but only one (Maiduguri zone) was used because it possessed all the elements considered crucial for the study, such as good schools and public libraries. Four secondary schools with good library facilities and resources were randomly selected for the study. Only an arm of the fifth grade (Senior Secondary Two or SS II) in each of the four selected schools was involved in the study, thus bringing the total number of sampled students to 160 – the average number of pupils per class in Borno state

secondary schools is 40. The third stream (SS II C) students in the four schools were arbitrarily chosen as the actual sample subjects.

Table 1 presents the distribution of screened and selected subjects by school and class.

Table 1: Distribution of Selected Schools, Classes and Subjects

Schools	No. of Classes	No. of Pupils	Class Selected	No. of Pupils Selected
Govt. Girls' College, Maiduguri	6	240	SS II C	40
Govt. Girls' Sec. School, Yerwa	5	196	SS II C	40
Govt. Sec. School, Goniri	6	230	SS II C	40
Govt. College, Maiduguri	7	278	SS II C	40
TOTAL	24	943	4	160

Attempts were made to ensure that the students in the chosen schools were of fairly similar abilities and character. Besides, the nature and quality of instruction in the chosen schools were similar in all respects.

Of all the subjects offered in the schools, the largest library collections were in the areas of English Language and Literature. Thus, English Language was chosen as the sample discipline for the study. The researcher made further efforts to enrich the school library collections by borrowing additional resources from the Borno Public Library for the study. All materials obtained were those considered relevant to the English Language curriculum and within the levels of SS II students who had to use them.

The study period was a total of 26 weeks (8 weeks of Pre-test, 12 weeks of Test, and 6 weeks of Post-test) during which the library use habits of the students were studied. During the initial pre-test period, no attempt was made to encourage the students to use the library. The usual library use patterns were simply allowed to prevail and the circulation records were carefully recorded. It was considered appropriate to ascertain to what extent the students made use of the library without encouragement and publicity from the teachers and school library staff. Although the use of English-related

materials was the main consideration in the study, all types of library materials loaned to the students were checked and recorded (whether for regular or reserve, home or room use) in order to determine students' complete library use patterns.

The three-month test period was dedicated to the provision of functional school library services and bibliographic backup (i.e. the 'treatment') for the students, observation and continuous circulation record keeping. The English Language teaching/learning programme for the students was essentially library-based during this period. Weekly short lists (bibliographies) of relevant and valuable English reading materials were provided by the researcher for introduction and publicity in the individual students' classes (i.e SS II C). Such items were always kept in the school library on reserve and all the students were encouraged to read them because they could benefit from such exercise. They were, however, not coerced into reading the materials provided. Circulation record also continued to be kept just like during the pre-test.

During the six-week post-test period, the encouragement and bibliographic guidance services given during the test period were consciously withdrawn completely. This was simply to ascertain whether the students will continue to use the library, and to what degree, without encouragement and guidance. Circulation records were also kept throughout the post-test and then compared with those obtained during the pre-test and test periods.

Results and discussion
Testing the hypothesis involved a critical examination and analysis of the circulation data gathered over the three periods of study. The library circulation for all the periods were compared, thus:

- Total circulation during pre-test and test periods.

- English Language and Literature materials used during pre-test and test periods.

- Total circulation during the test and post-test periods.

- English Language and Literature materials used during the test and post-test periods.

Analysis of the circulation records indicated that throughout the eight-week pre-test period, the students borrowed only 87 materials, covering English Language and all other subjects offered. These items were used by just 24 (15%) of the total SS II C student population (160), who withdrew at least one book each during the period. This means that some students borrowed more than one book during the pre-test. The mean weekly circulation figure for the students as a whole was 10.88 titles. Of the 87 items used 29 were English Language-related and these were utilised by only 17 (10.6%) of the sampled students. Thus, English Language items accounted for 19.54% of the overall circulation – a seemingly impressive proportion within the circumstance since all other subject materials (15 subjects offered)

constituted the remaining proportion (70 items or 80.46%). Result of the analysis of the pre-test circulation figures unveils one important characteristic of the students – that is, that they were not avid readers or library users. This is because only 15% of them borrowed library materials throughout the eight-week pre-test period. This conclusion is, however, restricted to the small group studied.

During the experimental test period, the bibliographic awareness of the students was highly promoted and this led to an extra-ordinary change in their reading habits. In fact, before the end of the three-month test period, all the 160 students (100%) had borrowed at least one book each from the school library. The students utilised a total of 976 items covering all the subjects offered. Thus, the mean weekly circulation figure for the group as a whole was an improved 81.33 titles. A greater proportion of the items circulated during the test period (659 books or 69.52%) were English Language-related, borrowed by 134 or 83.75% of the students studied. For the students to show such a dramatic change in their library use patterns was rather surprising. Although a change was anticipated, the magnitude at which it occurred was not.

But the circulation records obtained during the post-test period revealed a very serious fall in the school library use activity of the students. The remarkable disposition to use library resources exhibited by the students during the test period was almost completely absent when the independent variable of bibliographic promotion and guidance was stopped. In fact, the rate of resources utilisation almost reverted to the initial pre-test level.

For the whole post-test period, only 29 (18.1%) of the students borrowed items from the school library. Thus, 131 (81.9%) of them readily forgot or stopped using the library as soon as the promotion of available resources therein was terminated. The few (18.1%) who continued to use the library borrowed just 72 books (i.e. mean weekly circulation of 12 loans), out of which some 35 (48.6%) were English Language-related items. These 35 English Language books (i.e. about 5.83 loans per week) were used by 21 (13.13%) of the entire sampled students. A glance at the records shows that the students' post-test library use patterns had almost fallen back to the pre-test use level. The explanation for this is that immediately the publicity of the library as an educational aid was discarded the students forgot its probable significance in their learning process. Tables 2 and 3 present a clearer picture of the students' library use attitudes throughout the entire study period.

Table 2:   Distribution of users and non-users of all materials over the three periods

Period	Users		Non-Users		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Pre-test	24	(71)	136	(89)	160
Test	160	(71)	00	(89)	160
Post-Test	29	(71)	131	(89)	160
TOTAL	213	(213)	267	(267)	480

Table 3:   Distribution of users and non-users of English Language resources over the three periods

Period	Users		Non-Users		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Pre-test	17	(57.3)	143	(102.7)	160
Test	134	(57.3)	26	(102.7)	160
Post-Test	21	(57.3)	139	(102.7)	160
TOTAL	172	(172)	308	(308)	480

These tables show that only during the test period was there a very significant difference in the number of students who used the library. The difference in the number of users between the pre-test and test periods on the one hand, and the test and post-test on the other were more than 130 (over 80% of the students) for both cases. Similarly, the difference in the total number of loans for both instances, as earlier indicated, were very high indeed. To prove whether the difference in the numbers of users and non-users of the library were statistically significant and to test the postulated null hypothesis, the chi-square test was employed.

Using the appropriate formula and the data in Table 2 in respect of the distribution of users and non-users of all categories of materials over the three periods, a computed chi-square (x^2) value of 301.161 was obtained. With a degree of freedom of four (4 df) and a 0.05 level of significance, the critical table value or entry was found to be 9.488. Thus, the obtained sample result or x^2 value (161.4) is much larger than the read table value (9.488) and, therefore, highly significant. Employing the same statistic for Table 3 in respect of users and non-users of English Language resources, a chi-square value of 239.934 was computed and at 4 df and 0.05 level, a table value of 9.488 was again obtained. Here again, the computed chi-square value is much larger than the table value and, hence, highly significant. Such higher levels of significance in both tests call for the rejection of the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between students' awareness of good library materials and the amount of non-required or voluntary reading done was therefore rejected. The most plausible explanation of the changes noticed is that the students responded to the library awareness and promotion programme introduced during the test period positively by borrowing at least one book each. In fact, as another major study revealed, the heightened library use habits of students studied, led to a significantly improved academic performance (Shaibu, 1994).

Conclusion

The results of the study have shown that the students will display a remarkable disposition to use the school library if they are made aware of the availability and value of the library resources. The reverse is very likely to be the case if no attempt is made to publicize the library and encourage students to use it just

as the students in this study merely reverted to their usual non-avid library use habits as soon as bibliographic guidance was halted during the post-test period.

The findings of the study are consistent with the result of other previous research efforts, which acknowledged the importance of the teacher in helping the students to realise the educational gains of using library materials. For example, studies by Woods (1963), Hostrop (1966), Blazek (1975), and Davies and Murdock (1991), have indicated that the major factors in determining students' library use are the instructors and teaching methods employed. The findings of the present study have serious implications for the methods of instruction and the provision of library service in Nigerian schools. Nigerian teachers must do more than mere routine classroom pedagogy. They need to consciously integrate their teaching/learning programmes with the library and provide close and continuous bibliographic guidance in order to raise students' library gains or performance.

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