

# ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIAN IN THE DIGITAL AGE IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The paper focuses on the role of school librarian in the digital age in Nigeria. School librarian has a vital role to play in the school library most especially with the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) in library services world-wide in order to meet the changing needs of students and staff in the school environment. The paper discusses existing roles of the school library, school library and the digital age, roles of school librarian in the digital age, challenges confronting the school library in the digital age in Nigeria. The paper concluded that school librarian roles in the digital age in Nigeria are enormous and challenging but compulsory if effective school library and information services are to be achieved in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the school library system. Lack of qualified staff, library information bearing resources and facilities are the major challenges confronting school library development in Nigeria. The following recommendations among others were made as solutions to the challenges of school library in Nigeria: stakeholders in library and information science in Nigeria (Library Schools, Centre for Educational Media Resource Studies, Nigerian Library Association and Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria) should come out with a document and sponsor a bill to the National Assembly on school library development which will spelt out the standard to be maintained in all school libraries in Nigeria and Federal, State and Local government should support the school library*

*development in the provision of needed funds, laws and other facilities and resources needed for school library in the digital age.*

**Keywords:** *School librarian; Role; Digital age; Nigeria*

## **Introduction**

The emergence of computers has revolutionized modern society. One wonders how life was conducted prior to computers and their peripherals. Like other fields of human endeavor, there is no aspect of library activities that digital processing is not applicable. Digital technology is of particular importance when information is to be selected, gathered, stored, retrieved and evaluated (Kennedy & Davis, 2006). The importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in school libraries is no longer an issue in contention. The issue in contention is how school librarians can ensure their continuous derivation of the benefits from new digital devices afforded by ICT. According to Obadare (n.d), in the digital age librarians can no longer be simply information providers or the keepers of knowledge. Technological changes and the use of electronically stored and retrieval information systems have changed the way students and researchers are able to access, retrieve and use information. Obadare went further that the instantaneous access to information through the internet has made vast amounts of information and data available to anyone with a computer, a modem and a provider.

The rapid development in ICT generally has given a solid foundation for revolutionary changes in the information handling capabilities of school libraries and other information centres in the world. It has become an indispensable tool for information selection, acquisition, organization and dissemination in libraries generally in this digital age. Emojorho (2012) opined that the 21st century has witnessed an outburst of information. In the bid to ensure that the information explosion is properly handled researchers and scholars seek ways for easy assembling, processing, storing and disseminating of information. Hence, the advances in digital facilities have brought hope to modern librarians and information managers.

Without question, the Internet has changed the way we think and learn, and will continue to do so as technology evolves. In particular, the ability to access enormous amounts of information at any time from almost any place is forcing schools to redefine the idea of a classroom and the way we approach teaching. It is also reshaping the notion of school library services, what libraries look like and how they and librarians best serve schools. In recent times, the methods of service delivery in our school libraries have changed from what it used to be. This was affirmed by Atinmo (2000) who stated that "the traditional methods of providing information services are changing, and also, the performance of library tasks is undergoing a major change process. According to International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) School Library Guidelines (2015), a school library is a school's physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to students' information-to-knowledge journey and to their personal, social and cultural

growth. School libraries are thus being transformed from book centred to information centred institutions, and emphasis is shifting from book collection and storage to access and provision of electronic information services. The changing trend in the digital age has made it imperative for librarians to now develop ways on how to manage access to materials available in electronic format and effectively share them, since the digital age has provided a platform on which they have to share their resources in the 21st century.

## **Literature Review**

### **School Libraries**

A school library (or a school library media center) is a library within a school where students, staff, and often, parents of a public or private school have access to a variety of resources. The goal of the school library media center is to ensure that all members of the school community have equitable access to books and reading, to information, and to information technology. School libraries are distinct from public libraries because they serve as learner-oriented laboratories which support, extend, and individualize the school's curriculum.

Fayose (1995) defined school library as that part of school where a collection of books periodicals, magazines, and newspapers, films and filmstrips, videotapes, recording of all types, slides, computers, study kits, and other information resources are housed for use by teachers and pupils for learning, recreational activities, personal interest and inter-personal relationships of children in school. This range of information resources are necessary to enable the school library fulfill its functions among which are: to systematically provide information resources required for the school's educational programmes and to assist in improving and increasing the reading skills and learning habits of students. According to Elaturoti (2000) the school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's in and knowledge based society

School libraries are generally seen as libraries found in nursery, primary, secondary and technical colleges. Obada (2004) stresses that it is that organ of the school where a collection of books, periodicals, magazines and newspapers, films and film strips, video tapes, recordings of all tapes slides, the computer, study kits and other information bearing resources are housed for the use of teachers and pupils for learning and recreational activities. Edoka (2000) affirmed this by stating that the objectives of school libraries is to acquire, process and make available to pupils and students, a wide range of books and audiovisual information to supplement and enrich the teaching and learning situation in schools.

#### **Traditional Role of the School Library**

According to Beatwick (1997) cited in Obada (2004), the functions of school libraries includes to:

- a) identify and provide resources for both environment and leisure needs
- b) meet the information needs of the school.
- c) encourage and promote reading.
- d) provide opportunities for pupils to develop learning skills.

- e) provide facilities to support a range of learning activities.
- f) support the development of independent learning.
- g) liaise with other information provider.
- h) identify support for curriculum development.
- i) support staff development needs of teachers.
- j) To participate in the evaluation of courses.

In the digital age, the school library role goes beyond what Obada listed.

### **Role of the School Library in the Digital Age**

According to International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) School Library Guidelines (2015) in the digital age, the school library operates as:

- a) dedicated physical and digital space in a school that is open and accessible to all;
- b) an information space providing equitable and open access to quality information sources across all media, including print, multimedia and curated digital collections;
- c) a safe space where individual curiosity, creativity and an orientation toward learning are encouraged and supported and where students can explore diverse topics, even controversial topics, in privacy and safety;
- d) an instructional space where students learn the capabilities and dispositions for engaging with information and for creating knowledge;
- e) a technological space providing a diverse range of technology tools, software and expertise for the creation, representation and sharing of knowledge;
- f) a literacy center where the school community nurtures reading and literacy development in all its forms;
- g) a center for digital citizenship where the learning community learns to use digital tools appropriately, ethically and safely, and learns strategies to protect identity and personal information;
- h) an information environment for all in the community through equitable access to resources, technology, and information skills development that are not always available in homes;
- i) a space open for cultural, economic professional and educational events (e.g. events, meetings, exhibits, resources) for the general community.

There are distinguishable features of the school library, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) School Library Guidelines (2015) listed the features of school library as follows:

- i. It has a qualified school librarian with formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching that enables the professional expertise required for the complex roles of instruction, reading and literacy development, school library management,
- ii. It provides targeted high-quality diverse collections (print, multimedia, digital) that support the school's formal and informal curriculum, including individual projects and personal development, and

iii. It has an explicit policy and plan for ongoing growth and development.

In critically examining these features of school library as stipulated by IFLA, it is doubtful if half of the established school library in Nigeria will be qualified to be called a library. Some of the school library in Nigeria lack qualified school librarians and material resources. IFLA School Library Guidelines (2015) stated that research shows that the potential of a school library for having an impact on student learning is dependent on the extent to which these features are present in a school. It is highly essential that school library in Nigeria operates in such features for greater achievement of students' learning outcome in the school.

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- literacy centre where the school community nurtures reading and literacy development in all its forms;
- centre for digital citizenship where the learning community learns to use digital tools appropriately, ethically, and safely, and learns strategies to protect identity and personal information;
- information environment for all in the community through equitable access to resources, technology, and information skills development that are not always available in homes; and
- social space open for cultural, professional and educational events (e.g, events, meetings, exhibits, resources) for the general community.

School libraries that are able to operate with these listed resources and facilities will be haven for students, staff and community members where they are located. The students will be willing and interested to make use of such libraries. It may be noted that such school library will definitely have impact on the teaching and learning activities in the school environment. School library activity is dependent on the human resource employed to take care of the library.

### **The Role of the Traditional School Librarian**

The School Library Association (2016) believes that the School Librarian has an essential and unique specialist role to play in supporting pupils' learning and their development into effective, independent learners and readers. The Association states the role of traditional librarian as the following:

- a) a partner with teaching staff in the education process
- b) a partner in supporting individual learning styles
- c) an acknowledged expert in resource and information provision and management
- d) a leader and partner with teaching staff in the collaborative design and implementation of information literacy programmes throughout the school
- e) a leader in creating and developing a climate to promote and support reading for pleasure across the school
- f) an acknowledged partner with all departments to effectively support and resource each key stage
- g) a partner in out of hours learning.

School librarians are expected to perform these roles in Nigeria and go beyond that in the digital age in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **The Role of the School Librarian in the Digital Age**

The highly technological environment of 21st-century schools has significantly redefined the role of school librarians by presenting the opportunity to assume leadership through technology integration. Despite the abundance of literature that has suggested the needs for and the importance of school librarians to be a proactive leaders in technology integration, this role is one that has been ignored in the research arena and left undefined for school administrators, teachers, and the school librarians themselves, leading to uncertainty concerning how school librarians enact this role in practice. The school librarian is responsible for the school's physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to teaching and learning. The new school library working environment has automatically generated new roles to librarians (Johnson, 2012).

According to Kumar (2010) and Hashim & Mokhtar (2012), ICT has undoubtedly conferred new role on the library by bringing about the revolutionary journey from traditional to the digital libraries with new technology. It has been possible to access a variety of information and knowledge sources in a manner that would be simple, easy and independent of time and place. As schools change from passive learning environments into active ones, the role of the librarian has to adjust as well. School restructuring requires that the librarian venture from the library to collaborate with teachers and administrators. The addition of technology into the learning environment enhances information retrieval and offers the librarian a new entree into the classroom curriculum. New, more student-centered teaching methods demand the support of information resources and training in their use. Library technology reaches beyond the library walls via computer networks to put information resources into the hands of end users at the point of need. With networks linking all areas of the modern school, the best place to access information may no longer be within the walls of the traditional library. Simpson (1997) gave the following roles of a school librarian in the electronic age:

### **From Warehousing to Consulting**

School librarians expand their areas of influence to include the classroom when they collaborate with classroom teachers to meet the information needs of students. Moving beyond the "warehouse concept" of traditional libraries, librarians strike out into classrooms/departments to consult with classroom teachers. Suggesting resources, locating and acquiring needed materials, recommending strategies, facilitating use of technologies, and instructing students and teachers in optimal information-seeking methods replace the traditional librarian tasks of material circulation. Many traditional tasks may be assigned to clerks, leaving the professional free to work directly with students and teachers.

### **Creating Multiple Access to Information**

As more teaching aids and topical information sources are made available in electronic formats, school libraries find themselves lagging behind in print acquisitions. Librarians look more to online and other electronic sources to meet the information needs of students and teachers. Also, librarians now create multiple accesses to these information resources. Access to information, whether by CD-ROM, Internet, online database, video, microform or traditional print, is overtaking ownership of information as an evaluation benchmark.

#### **Information Centre Manager**

The information explosion has created more information than one school library could possibly contain. The school librarian is responsible for locating, acquiring, organizing, disseminating and tracking information resources of many types. This job might include database searching, interlibrary loans, monitoring Internet newsgroups, or maintenance of a computerized library information system. All these tasks involve managerial expertise equivalent to that required of corporate information center managers. The school librarian manages the budget and evaluates and selects new materials for purchase or access.

### **Teacher role**

Emphasizing the necessity of teaching staff and students to operate in an electronic milieu, it is important to note that guiding patrons to select the most appropriate source is a sizeable task requiring concentrated analysis. This analysis is not unlike that done by a classroom teacher in trying to determine which instructional methods will be appropriate for the different learning styles in a classroom. Fitting electronic resources into the patterns of information location and application is a task particularly suited to the training and skills of the librarian. Teachers constitute a significant portion of the school librarian's instructional time. As the campus expert in information location and management, the librarian is in the best position to be on the forefront of information technology and to train others in its use.

More so, Ramos (2007) highlights the roles of the modern librarian as follows:

- a) Information Broker for both print and electronic media- Identifies, retrieves, organizes, repackages and provides electronic access to digital information sources.
- b) Change agent, i.e Technology application leader-Collaborate with IT services

to design and evaluate systems that would facilitate e-access.

- c) Facilitator- Makes access easier, e.g provides network access purchases
- d) Educator: Train client on internet use: tools, search engines, online databases and catalogs, electronic journals; use of web-based instruction and online tutorials.

The training of school librarian in the library school will determine how effectively he/ she will be able to perform such roles as specified by Simpson (1997) and Ramos (2007).

Kumbar and Pattanshetti (2013) gave the following digital competencies for school librarians in India which are essentially needed by Nigerian school librarians in order to be relevant in the age of computer based information services to the school library users:

- basic skills of information technology
- awareness of communication
- knowledge of Web based tools & technologies
- knowledge of different types of databases like the bibliographic databases non-bibliographic databases, statistical databases, full text databases, etc
- library automation in-house operations
- knowledge of all types of e-resources and Web based resources
- exposure to library networks, consortia
- skills of using information retrieval tools and Web based tools
- knowledge of design and delivery of web based services
- the flair for creating digital content
- the awareness of open educational resources
- some experience in creating learning object repositories
- knowledge of e-learning tools and technologies
- skills of designing library web site
- aptitude for integrating digital content with school curriculum
- information literacy skills with regard to digital resources
- awareness of multimedia tools
- knowledge of Web 2.0 and Library 2.0
- awareness of social media
- skills to keep track of recent trends in information technology, digital resources

These competencies listed by Kumbar and Pattanshetti (2013) are germane for school librarians in Nigeria. Library and information schools with the Centre for Educational Media Resource Studies in Nigeria need to review their curriculum in consonance with the competencies and roles needed to be performed by school librarians in the digital age.

#### Challenges School Librarians Encountered in the Digital Age

There are challenges confronting school librarians in performing their roles in the digital. Itsekor (n.d) cited Adetoro (2004) noted that the development of school libraries in Nigeria has been fraught with problems. Problem areas in the



development of school libraries in Nigeria have been identified as lack of legislation, shortage of funds, poor infrastructure, unavailability of trained staff, lack of relevant material, and apathy on the part of school administrators and government. Udoh-Ilomechine (2008) found that there was no professional librarian, reading room was not enough for the students, audio visual materials were not provided by the library in a private secondary school in Delta State.

Similarly, Adebamowo (2011) reported lack of government recognition, accommodation, qualified personnel and finance as the problems militating the use of school libraries and resources in secondary schools in Ogun State. In their own findings, Owate and Iroha (2013) it was discovered that none of the selected secondary schools in River State met the prescribed standard for established school libraries at the secondary school levels. It was also, found that where spaces were provided for the library, the materials were not only scanty but poorly organised for effective library and information service delivery. In her paper titled “issues and options in selected secondary school libraries in Akure South local government of Ondo State, Daramola (2013) found small library size, lack of audio visual materials, lack of internet facilities, lack of qualified staff, shortage of books and power outage as the major challenges confronting effective library and information services in those selected school libraries in Akure South, Ondo State.

From the empirical findings from various school secondary school libraries in Southern Nigeria, lack of qualified staff, library information bearing resources and facilities are the major challenges confronting school library development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century while school libraries in advanced countries in the World are enjoying effective digitalized school library services. When a clerk is employed to do the work of a librarian in the school library, it is not possible for him/her to do the professional duties required of him/her. In an environment where there are no appropriate information resources and facilities in the library, there will be little or nothing the school librarian can do in rendering expected library and information services in the school library system.

## **Conclusion**

School librarian roles in the digital age in Nigeria are enormous and challenging but compulsory if effective school library and information services are to be achieved in the nation in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made in view of the challenges confronting school library and information services which are hindering the performance of the role of school librarians in the digital age in Nigeria:

1. Stakeholders in library and information science in Nigeria (Library schools, Centre for Educational Media Resource Studies, Nigerian Library Association and Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria) should come out with a document and sponsor a bill to the National Assembly on school library

development which will spelt out the standard to be maintained in all school libraries in Nigeria.

2. The bill when it becomes a law should be followed up for implementation in all primary and secondary schools in Nigeria by the stakeholders in library and information profession.
3. Library schools and Centre for Educational Media Resource Studies should review their curriculum in tandem with requirements needed for librarians in the digital age.
4. Federal, State and Local government should support the school library development in the provision of needed funds, laws and other facilities and resources needed for school library in the digital age.
5. School librarians should develop themselves in attending conferences, seminars and workshops on the use of digitalized resources and facilities in the libraries.

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