

CAREER IN SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP: A NECESSITY FOR PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS.

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Abstract

The paper cited the relevant section in the National Policy on Education on the provision of school library/resource centres in Nigerian schools and adjudged the document far less than a legislation thereby making the provisions not enforceable. The present state of school libraries/resource centres, personnel wise, was reviewed while the required qualifications for qualified school library media specialists (school librarians) are identified. The paper draws attention to the practice in the United States of America, where some states have established career for school library media specialists in the education system with the desirable result of job prospect and retention for school library personnel. The paper recommends same strategies for adoption in Nigeria education system. Suggestions for implementation are offered.

Key words: Career, School Librarianship, Provision, Library Media Programme, Nigerian Schools, School Library Media Specialist

The existence of library in the education system has begun with the introduction of Western education in this part of the world which explained why all the colonial schools had libraries. The *National Policy on Education*, (2004) provides for the establishment of school libraries/ resource centres in Nigerian schools under section 11 as follows:

Section 11(e): The library is at the heart of the education enterprise. The virtual library as a platform for sharing knowledge is aimed at rejuvenating Nigerian schools through the provision of current books, journals and other information resources using digital technologies.

Section 11(f): Since libraries constitute one of the most important educational service, proprietors of schools shall also provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions in accordance with the established standards. They shall also provide for training of librarians and library assistants for this service.

Although libraries exist in some Nigerian schools, there has been no enacted law to enforce the provision of libraries in schools and the compliance with any established standards. Even schools owned by government have no standard libraries. The *National Policy on Education* popularly referred to as the government position on provision of libraries in our schools, is not more than a statement and not a law that can enforce any form of compliance.

Advocacy for the provision of effective school libraries in Nigerian schools has existed since independence and yet, there has been no appreciable progress in the level of development of effective library service in our schools due to absence of enforceable legislation. In the Nigerian education system most school library media centres (school libraries) are managed by staff that have no qualifications in library science and school

media programme. From the available data, teachers of English language or literature-in-English are usually put in-charge of the school library media centres (school libraries) and they have little time to devote to school library work. In many schools only Library Assistants/Clerks are put in-charge of the library. Both cadres of staff don't stay long on the job for reasons of deployment or search for other highly paid ventures. The Nigerian librarians have also realized the significance of the availability and employment of qualified school library personnel to run effective school library media programmes in schools and have developed formal courses in school librarianship in the universities to produce qualified personnel to meet the dearth of qualified school librarians/media specialists.

The existing qualifications that are considered suitable for the work of the school library media specialists (school librarians/teacher-librarians) include : Bachelor or Master of library and information science (BLIS, MLIS) with teaching qualification such as: Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Bachelor's Degree in Education (B.Ed) or Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE); Bachelor of Library and Information Science with Education combined (BLIS Ed.) and Bachelor of Education with library science combination among others. The efforts have not yielded the expected result because the positions the qualified personnel, with any of the qualifications listed above, will occupy have not been created in the schools coupled with the problem of retaining them on the job for lack of career prospect in the education system.

The Abadina Media Resource Centre was founded in 1974 to promote development of school libraries/ media resource centres and the reading culture of the Nigerian child. Over the years the Centre has through workshops, seminars and formal courses in school library media offered at Diploma and Postgraduate levels produced qualified personnel for the Nigerian school library media centres (school libraries). The graduates of these courses offered at the Centre: Diploma in School Media, Master in School Media (MSM), Master in Media Resource Management (MMRM) and Master and Doctor of Philosophy (M.Phil, P.hD) in School Media are considered qualified to be employed in our schools as school library media specialists/school librarians/teacher-librarians which ever designation is adopted by the education system. I will like to remark here that various designations are given for this post but the one that has gained wide acceptability is 'school library media specialist' (SLMS).

Who is the SLMS?

- He/she is a teacher who holds classes a few times a week or month on proper library use and research techniques, on use of AV equipment and other multimedia resources and on their operations.
- He/she is an instructional partner who works with teachers and the school administrator to determine students' information needs and to select relevant multimedia resources.
- He/she is an information specialist that works with students, teachers and school administrator to evaluate, plan, and equip the school library media centre.
- As the school media programme administrator he/she works with the communities to determine policies and priorities for school library media centre activities.

School Library Media Specialists (SLMSs) are professionals and as such professional credentials are important. The job is not an easier job than teaching rather it

is teaching and teaching everyone. It is not a shorter workday, far from that if it is done right. It is a people job replete with professional challenges that require lots of energy, communication skills, excitement, reality and probably a good sense of humour.

Career in School Librarianship

In the developed countries of the world, particularly, the United States of America (USA), the positions of school library media specialists (SLMSs) are established in the schools as members of the teaching staff. There is also state certification requirements for their employment. Although the requirements vary from state to state, an initial teaching licence or registration, is common and it is also a prerequisite for some SLMS certification programmes. This implies that all certified SLMSs have teaching qualifications and practice experience that enable them perform their teaching role effectively in the education system. Job prospect and perceived job security have been observed to have contributed to the retention of SLMSs in the education system in some states in the U.S.A. Also positions have been created for SLMSs at the building (school level), School Media Coordinators at the District level, and as Library Media Administrators at the state level. At the school level, School Library Media Specialists (SLMSs) can advance with additional qualification(s) from small to bigger schools attracting enhanced pay. In some districts, two or more school media centres may be managed by one SLMS for enhanced job prospect. Classroom teachers that are interested in the SLMS job can opt for SLMS certification programme to change their job to that of SLMS within the education system. Both the American Library Association (ALA) and Association of American School Librarians (AASL) produce guidelines for the certification and recruitment of school library media specialists in the American schools.

The Situation in Nigeria.

The Nigerian constitution puts education on the concurrent list, that is, provided by federal, state and local governments, private organizations and individuals as it happens in the USA. The government has the power to legislate or provide guidelines for the education system in which the school library media centre is an integral part. The equivalence of building, district and state levels of school media administration are already in existence in represented by Nigeria represented by school, Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB).

The provision of school library media centres (school libraries) in schools is at the discretion of the school proprietors and no particular qualification or certification has been recognized for the job of the school library media specialists (school librarians). In schools where libraries/media resources centres exist, all sorts of personnel have been assigned the responsibility to manage them irrespective of their qualifications as earlier mentioned. As a result of this practice, the effectiveness of school library media programme in curriculum delivery is far from being realized in the nation's schools thereby contributing to the persistent poor academic performance of students and the disturbing examination malpractices in our schools.

The Way Out

The school library media specialist (SLMS) has a teaching function in the school that complements the work of the subject teachers in producing students that are

information literate and equipped with the appropriate life-long learning skills. The following actions are necessary to improve the present situation in Nigerian schools:

i. As it is done in the developed countries of the world, government at all levels in Nigeria should establish the positions of SLMS in all schools to be filled by personnel with certified qualifications in school library media programme. There are available qualified personnel to appoint to the positions who have graduated from the nation's universities. The Nigerian School Library Association working in collaboration with the Nigerian Library Association will accredit certification programmes for the job of SLMS in Nigerian schools. Provision should also be made for classroom teachers interested in SLMS job to undertake certification programmes in school media in the existing tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

(ii) School library media specialists (SLMSs) in schools should be able to earn promotion along with their classroom teacher-colleagues as they are both performing teaching functions in the education system; each having teaching license/registration qualifications. SLMSs in small schools can be moved to bigger schools or asked to manage two or three library media centres for job security and prospects. A SLMS could be promoted to position of principal in the school system when qualified, as done to their classroom teacher-colleagues to brighten their job prospect the more.

(iii) The position of School Media Coordinators should be created at the LGEA level as career prospects for experienced and efficient school library media specialists at the school level. Similar positions should be created at the state level (SUBEB) as State Director of School Library Media Programmes. This approach has been found to have contributed to retention of and career prospect for SLMSs in the education system in the developed nations of the world.

(iv) The Nigerian education system is ripe for legislation on school libraries. Bill on this subject should be sponsored for enactment in the legislative houses at federal, state and local government levels. Such legislation when enacted will also guide the private school proprietors in the provision of school library media programmes. The Nigerian School Library Association in collaboration with Nigerian Library Association will be willing to contribute to the draft bill and the sponsor of the bill for enactment.

(v) Support staff should be employed in the nation's school libraries/media resource centres to work with the SLMSs. Such staff include: library assistants/clerks, audio-visual technicians, student aide/assistants and volunteers. Opportunities should be provided for the support staff, particularly, the library assistants/clerks to have qualifications in school media/librarianship for upward movement to boost their career prospect.

(vi) Opportunity for continuing education should be made available to the serving school library media specialist to update their knowledge and keep abreast of developments in the field of educational media through, workshops, seminars, conferences and formal short courses.

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