QUALITY ASSURANCE STRATEGIES FOR USER FRIENDLY SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the methods of school library services with the purpose to promote quality assurance in Nigeria school libraries. The recurring theme in this paper is the imperative that school libraries in Nigeria should be committed and contributed to the transformation agenda which is the key issues of equity and redress, quality, development, effectiveness and efficiency. Quality assurance in NPE 2004 and the minimum standards for school libraries in Nigeria (1992) should be seen simultaneously as objective of, and medium for transforming quality services in Nigerian school libraries. Problems of the school libraries were stated, in this regard recommendations were made for the best way forward.

Keywords: Quality assurance, User friendly school library, Nigeria.

Introduction

The search for quality assurance dates back to 1960s and 70s when school libraries in Nigeria were besieged with new requests, directives and mandates that ostensibly are expected to lead to improved standards in Education. This implies that, schools and their libraries need appropriate resources to support their curricular methods of quality assurance. Minimum standards for school libraries in Nigeria approved by the Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development (1992) bears credence to this notion. Nevertheless, one of the major issues that continue to plague quality assurance in Nigeria school libraries has to do with defining the concept and adhering to policy guidelines. This issue is further made complex with lack of school librarians (or teacher librarians) as well as failure of those involved in school library administration to conceptualize the essence of the school library and the extent of its potentials. In general, school library administrators in Nigeria tend to ignore the basic needs of quality assurance in school libraries. Instead of encouraging quality services, by engaging standard resources and methods, they often shy away from their responsibilities. There is also a reluctance on the part of school administration, boards of education and teachers to change current attitude. Instead of extending their present responsibilities in school to the library as suggested by the NPE (2004), which stipulates that the library is basic to schools and that education requires the library to effectively thrive, they shy away and pass the bulk to the government and pay lip service to the issue of standard resources in the school library. Very often, when asked; does your school have library? They are quick to respond 'yes', as if that solves the problem. No! they are running away from providing adequate resources to support the library.

Modern educational philosophy stipulate that child-centred and user friendly school library was critical to issues of relevance and quality assurance in the training of the school child. (Achebe 2010). Nonetheless, in Nigeria, there is a need for quality assurance in school library services because this library is the heart of students' learning and quality education. The National Policy on Education notes the school library is important in educational services of the nation, for this reason, the school library was listed as an essential component of both the primary and secondary school programmes without which learning in schools is incomplete. It is like allowing the school child to pass through the school without the child embracing any form of knowledge.

The purpose of this aticle is to promote quality assurance in school libraries in Nigeria. In 2007 the National Communication Commission (NCC) established a national network for internet use, though the main focus was the universities, the quality assurance framework, infrastructure, policies and mechanizations robbed off on school libraries. The recurring theme in this paper is the imperative that school library administrators in Nigeria should be committed and contribute to the transformation agenda of vision 2020 and the key of equity and redress, quality development, effectiveness and efficiency. The school library provides valuable opportunities for the school child to acquire the basic goals of education such as development and improvement of the school curriculum, enhancing teaching, making learning experiences more meaningful and rewarding for students and promoting effective use of innovative materials in schools, thereby leading to quality assurance.

Quality assurance according to Reitz (2004) is the degree at which the services provided by a library or library system meet the needs of its users and the standards established by the profession, usually assessed statistically and on the basis of qualitative feedback (i.e. by use of the user surveys, suggestion box etc). Nevertheless, Quality assurance has been noted in literature to be affected by budgetary constraints, management policies, design and condition of facilities, personnel decisions and employee morale. Quality assurance service is based on the notion that current useful standards are deployed in school library services to provide access to materials and information to users.

Quality assurance methods are guide to what the user expects from the teacher librarian (or library teacher). Such as: Recognition and assistance, respect, care of and responsive to individual preference, needs, values and interest, competence in acknowledging tasks, and efficiency in providing responses to queries and equitable access to resources in the school library with minimum time wastage.

In clear terms, when these qualities are in place, the school library users are likely to access the best quality resources and services. It means that the library is applying quality assurance to encourage students to learn. Unfortunately, there is indication to the fact that it is easier to accomplish the goal of extending access to education than of improving the quality, for there are more schools in Nigeria that cannot meet the standards of quality education. Indeed, "more schools, but many children aren't learning" (Emad Mekay 2006: 19).

Achebe (2010), Dike (2007:) and Davies (1981) had warned that for quality assurance to be in place in any school, the school library resources such as the following must be considered;

- **The teacher librarian:** should be identified, selected, deployed and motivated.

- **The library materials**: should be identified, selected and used.
- **The budget for funding the library** should be: planned, provided, spent and monitored for effective use.
- **Accommodation:** should be provided to house all the library resources.
- **Library programme**: should be designed, integrated in the school system and monitored.
- **Library hours**: should be provided and observed in the school system.
- **Library statistics:** should be carried out and computed for easy analysis, because this provides useful information on the relevance of this resource.

Benefits of Quality Assurance in School Libraries

In all, quality assurance in school library is about projecting the library in such a way as to create an understanding of the library to students, to make students and staff owners of the library, to instill in them a sense of pride and participation, in the use of their library, to make the library a place that can save the time of users from wastage and to encourage user friendly environment in the school library. The school library can achieve these goals through increasing educational access, enhancing learning, fostering the transition from study to work, serving as learning centres and strengthening socioeconomic and national development as a matter of fact, quality assurance and user friendly services are at the heart of the school library. They are essential not just for attaining the objectives of education but for actualizing the librarian's competence.

Why Quality Assurance and User Friendly School Library?

Why do we need to create user centred and user friendly school libraries? The answer is simple, we are awfully disappointed with the sorry state of libraries in our schools. We need to change this situation. A visit to some so called libraries in schools reveals quite an unfriendly user environment. To start with, where there is no teacher librarian, a major resource, in some schools, the visitor is ushered into a room that is dark and small like a store. Where there is a semblance of library attendance, the fellow often, sits or stands aloof in one corner of the room either eating or taking stock of his/her merchandise, with nothing educational to reflect the library environment. Where available, the library is shabbily organized. Dike et al (2007) recounts the uninviting and unattractive look of some of the school libraries in Nigeria which they describe thus:

> Like the school as a whole, the room may be dark, the walls
> pock marked, the floor broken and the roof leaking. Often
> the furniture is crudely made and two large for children.
> The books are piled on the shelves in a haphazard fashion
> and charts are tattered and soiled.

Certainly, a user friendly environment is a far cry from the above description. What facilities can the teacher librarian acquire to develop and sustain quality assurance in school library services? The answer unfortunately does not always rest on provision of facilities. Neither does quality assurance depend on luxury that only well financed libraries can afford; rather quality assurance is an ubiquitous aspect of school library services that has far-reaching effects on equity of library access and interventions in resource constrained environments. Luckily, studies show that quality can be improved with limited resources and such changes can yield tangible quality assurance in school

library services. What is more important is the teacher librarians whose responsibility it is to maintain quality assurance in their services. As librarians, we have always believed that our competence and knowledge application combined with available resources assist in better outcomes. This is why we believe in applying a number of methods in our workplace. The following are some of the known methods. Each has its merits and demerits.

Library Hours

It is essential for all school libraries to fix convenient library periods for their students to listen to stories, read books or write their assignments. Very often, because the collections reflect the curriculum, it is during the library hours that the students can make judicious use of the school library to develop reading skills. Aside from this, students acquire their language skills in many different ways and the earliest years of library life are extremely important in laying a foundation for interest in reading. Stimulus received in a variety of library based activities can play a vital role in developing student's abilities, and research shows that students who learn to speak and read both at home and in a nursery school acquire better language skills than otherwise. All students should have the opportunity to develop their reading and writing skills, if they are to participate satisfactorily in the society. In today's world, a sufficient understanding of written texts is vital to the acquisition of knowledge.

Good language development depends on early practice. It has been shown that exposure and access to books are vital factors in explaining differences in reading skills and comprehension among students. In this respect, libraries, working together with schools are central and significant partners. For this reason, library hours should be organized according to class schedule whereby one or two classes, depending on size, can attend library hours at the same time at peak periods. To maintain quality of learning in school library, the teacher librarian is expected to take library statistics to ensure that all the students participate in the instructions. Aside from this, library statistics is a veritable method of proving to donors that the library is useful in the academic enterprise.

Developing Collections of Resources for Topics in the Curriculum

Quality assurance in school libraries often rely on relevant quality collections that are useful to students' learning. Creative display and use of the collections assist students to gain useful knowledge. Useful knowledge lead to quality education. This type of knowledge can also be acquired through story hours, for example, during story hours; the teacher-librarian can invite a story teller. Let us use the model from South Korea to illustrate our point with the use of storytelling granny.

The Storytelling Granny programme, which received a lot of attention at the 2005 Oslo World Library and Information Congress, is a training course for senior citizens funded by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Through this programme, public libraries can not only secure supporters for their children's libraries but also produce volunteer 'Storytelling Grannies' (Seoul National organizing committee for IFLA, 2006). The purpose of the programme is to create opportunities for communication between the old generation (the 'grannies') and the new (children) through the medium of old tales, picture books and children's stories. The anticipated effects or goals are as follows:

- The Storytelling Grannies promote good communication between the old and new generations and fill some of the gaps left by working mothers.

- The Storytelling Grannies are based on the role and image of grandmother at home. They give happiness to children and families and serve as an intermediary in making happy homes.
- By telling stories to children, the Grannies can create an image of a loveable grandmother. The women who take part in this program can spend their senior years in a meaningful and rewarding way, fulfilling a new role in the family and society.
- The Storytelling Grannies can volunteer to work at libraries, kindergartens, schools, day care centres and other social and educational organizations.

Under the Storytelling Granny programme, senior women are trained in various methods such as storytelling, reading aloud, singing songs, and reciting poems. They are encouraged to meet with children by taking part in meetings with children's book authors, storytelling time at libraries, and book camps. In addition, they take part in a library event called 'Family Storytelling Festival' and provide enjoyment for all with various kinds of storytelling (stories from the olden days, picture dramas, story plays, slide shows etc).

Application of Teaching Methods

This is where the provision of qualified teacher-librarian is highly required for school libraries that are for quality assurance. With the assistance of teacher librarians, the school is able to meet required standards in education and expand resources and unmeasurable learning opportunities to students. The position of the teacher-librarians with dual qualification as a teacher and librarian as well as teaching and library role is most ideal. According to Bothma, Underwood and Ngulube (2007), the competencies required by these groups in the 21st century include: computer literacy, knowledge reconfiguration skills, information skills, problem solving, teamwork, mediation skills and social sensitivity. The skills, though transferable, relate both to the academic sphere and to the world of work including library practice.

Application of Evaluative Methods

Proper methods for evaluating learning outcome and for measuring learning processes should be adopted by the teacher-librarian. For this purpose, application of quiz, oral questions, project works and reading aloud based on learning content are highly recommended. This is because each evaluation method says something slightly different about learning process and outcome. It is advisable for the teacher-librarian to apply all the methods as parts of a tool box to be used to also determine cost and workplace practice. For example, some of these methods are useful in comparative assessments where they are important to standardize evaluation. Some are relatively easy to administer in rich or poor environments (work place), while some are useful for evaluating nonverbal communication and ability to use the library. For example, quiz and oral questions are useful in resource – constrained settings where library collections are not available. Thus, some methods measure knowledge better than practice, others measure attitudes better than efficiency and some are more appropriate than others depending on the environment. Performance based remuneration can also be carried out by the teacher-librarian, aimed at directly encouraging students' learning outcome. A little incentive in the form of clapping for successful performance, gift of a book (s), a token amount of money as present, appear to have significant effects at ensuring quality

assurance in Nigeria school library services. Elsewhere, especially in developed countries like U.S. and U. K., modern quality management techniques such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Collaborative Improvement Model (CIM) and Plan-do-study-act cycles have been adopted from the management sector for improving the quality of school library services. When effectively applied, these methods result in increased coverage of school learning content, students learning, improved teaching and adherence to library practice. Reason teacher-librarians should learn to apply quality assurance measures in their services.

School Library Innovative Programmes

Just as education strives to be student-centred, so is the school library, because both aim at improving the lot of the students" learning. The answer to the problems of quality assurance is provision of user-friendly school library that must have quality library materials that relate to the school curriculum, comfortable accommodation, the size of a classroom (Federal Ministry of Education and Youth development (1992). The library should be sited at a strategic position that encourages easy and quick access. The room should be painted with light attractive colour so as to attract and sustain the attention of students and to bring in more natural light. Also good cross ventilation with ceiling fans or air conditioners, if possible, are required for some comfort to students.

It is also necessary to provide beautiful decorations in the library. Decoration of the walls with art work such as pictures of renowned authors or artists, tapestries, local ornaments like big spoons, keys, calabash, maps, posters, charts and wall clock can brighten up the library and make it more user friendly and corresponding improvement in quality of library service. According to Dike et al (2007), other resources that can be considered are: student artworks, crafts, models, albums, books, essays, stories and poems. There is also need to change some of the deep held notions on library guides especially with regards to subject areas. It may be necessary to be creative by developing unique artworks for installation in the school library section according to subject areas. This could be; comic pictures, cartoon pictures, graffitis and films were relevant or necessary.

These efforts are to make the library more inviting and sustaining attention of students especially during reading sessions. Recognizing a need to generate new and innovative ideas for our school libraries, the researcher has located, through literature search and documentary evidence some models of school library innovative programmes that support reading and quality assurance in library services around the world beginning with Uganda. Others are Ethiopia, Canada, South Korea, South Africa, Norway and Denmark as can be seen in the following experiences culled from literature.

Innovative Programs for Supporting Reading in School Libraries Around the World

Uganda Experience: Tapping into local knowledge and language, a school library in Uganda uses two strategies to support a reading culture.
- Ask students to get stories from adults at home. They come and relate the stories in the library. They draw pictures to match the stories. The stories are written out and simplified. Learning activities are developed to further improve student literacy skills.

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- Students discuss topics of their interest and choose a secretary among them to keep a record. The notes are them simplified. Pictures relating to the discussion are taken with the community and matched with the final pieces of work. Learning activities are developed for students to take ideas further. A simple booklet based on this was produced, called 'Farming in Kabubbu'.

Ethiopia Experience: Local publishing for local libraries. In this, *Ethiopia Reads* publishes high-quality, multilingual books for children in English as well as several Ethiopia languages. Highlighting original texts and illustrations as well as traditional folk tales that derive from Ethiopia's rich culture, these books allow Ethiopia children to see their lives and languages reflected in the pages of books for the first time. The books are placed in the network of school and donkey libraries across the country. See: *http://www.ethiopiareads.org/programs/publishing*.

Throughout the countryside in Ethiopia, large signs encourage reading and promote the importance of literacy and staying in school, especially for girls. Code Ethiopia with the support of CODE Canada has built over 65 reading rooms throughout the countryside. According to Doiron and Asselin (2011), these reading rooms provide access to books for students and community members and they distribute books donated by international book agencies and many that are produced by Code Ethiopia.

Canada Experience: Modeling book reading in local languages. Libraries in major urban areas of North America offer children and their families story times in languages of the community. In Vancouver, Canada, for example, story times are regularly scheduled in Mandarin, Cantonese and Tagalog. (See *http://www.vpl.ca/cgi-bin/api/calendar.cgi?audience_idx=9*). This exercise assists in improving quality education.

South Korea Experience, Miracle library: The miracle children library project sponsored by a television company and a library related NGOs. The services of the library raised public awareness of children's library. This is because more collections and reading facilities were added to the project. This miracle library is a school library which provides improved services to students more than most public library offer and it showcases latest technology. This library is user friendly as it provides comfortable accommodation and cozy environment for the comfort of students who use the library.

In line with Korea's democratization, the proliferation of NGOs made a substantial contribution to developing school libraries. NGOs such as the National Teachers' Union and some NGOs exclusively devoted to encouraging reading activity sought to improve quality of education of the school child. Often working in units based on geographic locations and sometimes voicing out alternative education methods. Because of this movement, attention has been increasingly drawn to libraries as learning centers, if not an important auxiliary to the learning process. Departing from the traditional teaching method, more emphasis was placed on so-called 'open education', which began to invite greater parental involvement, teaching ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills, promoting reading and inducing character development. This environment was directly linked to new library launches at schools and enhancing the

quality of existing ones. One prime example was the 'Campaign for Creating Better School Libraries in Gyeonggi Province', which began in the late 1990s.

In March, 2000, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development formed the 'Comprehensive Library Informatization Plan'. For the implementation of this plan, the Digital Library System (DLS) based on Application Hosting System (AHS) was developed in 2001. Two local education boards began pilot testing the DLS program at 96 schools. DLS is standardized school library information system that automates all individual school library operation in the districts managed by one education board. The purpose of this system is to manage the creation and distribution of information among libraries to raise the efficiency of overall library operation and management, and at the same time to pave the way for Web-based reading.

During 2003-2004 period, 13 local education boards across Korea added DLS to their school libraries. As of the end of 2004, a total of 15 education boards assimilated DLS. Currently, out of the 9, 649 schools across Korea that have libraries, 57 percent or 5, 504 schools are using the DLS system. Korea's education system has adopted many recent changes, including new curriculum and evaluation methods. These changes lead to a growing demand for a multitude of teaching tools and more and more students are using libraries as a key centre of learning. To meet the changing needs and to lead self-led quest for knowledge, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development in 2002 formed the 'Comprehensive Plan for Improving School Libraries'. This plan allocates 60 billion Won (US$ 6.4 million) annually over 2003-2007 period to equip all elementary, middle and high schools in Korea with their own libraries. The plan contains four specific details of facility and collection improvements, enhancing overall library programmes, hiring of full-time library staff and honing their professionalism, and forming private and government joint efforts for supporting school libraries.

South Africa Experience: The survey in 2004 gathered baseline information to guide the implementation of the new policy document. The findings make for sober reading: 19 percent of the responding 5156 schools have a central library; 31 percent have a storeroom or box library; 20 percent have no library at all; and 7 percent did not reply to the question. It is noteworthy that half the schools without any kind of library have no spare room that might be converted into a library. Confronted by these figures and by on-going evidence of the demands of the new curriculum, the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department in 2005 undertook to start up 1000 school libraries in that year and to provide every school in the province with a library by 2010 (Bolewana, 2005). Support for this comment lies in the more positive position of school libraries in South Africa's independent or private schools, 50 percent of which have libraries. Indeed, many of the libraries in schools within the fold of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) rival the best in the world. They are well equipped, have adequate annual budgets and are staffed by full-time professional librarians. Also South Africa government took an important quality assurance project in six school libraries involving a user survey, using the Web-based LibQUAL+[TM] survey instrument developed by the Texas A & M University Libraries, in partnership with the Association of Research Libraries. The decision by the school libraries to collaborate was prompted by the need to benchmark their services against those of other South African school libraries and

Overall, a user-friendly library environment should have a rich variety of resources, suited for different users and different types of learning. It provides materials to support resource-based learning. The resources here include; books of various types and levels, audio-visual materials, ICT and community resources (Dike et al 2007: 49).

Challenges to School Library Quality Assurance in Nigeria

With all the examples given across the world state of art in school library services, it is expected that the Nigeria school library and library teachers should rise above its numerous problems which include: Budget constraints, inadequate staff, inadequate library collections, space shortage, lack of user friendliness, lack of school library policies, non career progression in school librarianship, inadequate utilization of ICT in school environment, lack of school library programme in the time table and curriculum and lack of cooperation between teachers and the school librarians or teacher librarians; and imbibe quality assurance in their services.

The way forward

It is expected that all the stakeholders in the school library should follow the path of honour by turning a new leaf. Specifically, the Federal Government of Nigeria should enact a new policy on school library. There should be a school library law or act to solve related problems in the Nigerian school system especially with regards to budget shortage. For now what we have is National Library and State Library edicts (laws). If the school library law is in place, it is expected to dramatically improve the quality of school library services.

Adoption of new technologies (ICT) to make a vast array of information easily accessible to users through the internet. The Federal and State government should bring the school libraries under the control of a national or state body e.g. National library of Nigeria or by creating another body to control the school library at the national or state level as in the case of schools which Local Government are given direct allocation from the federal government to fund. Such body will see to the following:

- need to create career position for teacher-librarians in the school library.
- need for cooperation between the teacher and school librarians,
- need for proper nomenclature of the school library professionals,
- creation of special salary level for teacher-librarians,
- instituting 10% of the school annual budget to the library just as in the case of academic libraries in Nigerian Universities counterpart.

In all, application of quality assurance in the Nigerian school library requires the cooperation of librarians, educators, various arms of government and the community leaders. All play a vital role in the development of quality school library services in the country.

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