

## EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP THROUGH TRAINING OF PERSONNEL FOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Oyinkepreye SAWYERR-GEORGE CLN

Head of Library, Bayelsa State College of Education , Okpoama,

Brass-Island, Bayelsa State

oyinkepreyegeorgesawyer@yahoo.com

08035409760

### **Abstract**

*The paper discusses the importance of school library media centres in education. It discusses the concept of school library media centres, concept of school Librarianship and goes further to discuss how personnel of school Libraries can be trained to run school library media centres, challenges faced and the way forward in overcoming these challenges. It concludes by stating the importance of training personnel to run school library media centres in Nigerian schools, and that school libraries should avail themselves of the new media so that a favorable reading culture can be developed in our schools.*

**Keywords:** *Training, School library personnel, School library media centres*

### **Introduction**

Different designations are being used for the staff in-charge of the school library such as teacher-librarian, school library media specialist, school librarian etc. In this paper the designation teacher-librarian is used and it refers to other designations when used. A good teacher librarian and other school library personnel can change a student's life. They can be the difference between the kid who matures into someone with a career and a home and a sense of accomplishment, and someone who spends their adulthood nagged by a sense of what might have been. The kids in this regard are the school children, whom the teacher-librarian contends with during their pre-tertiary schooling. School children today are growing up in a world that has changed significantly over the past ten years. They are comfortable around technology that they have known all their lives. The changes going on today create an opportunity and a necessity for a transformation in the education system and in the way children are taught. The school librarian performs four main leadership roles: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. In the teacher role, the school librarian develops and implements curricula relating to information literacy and inquiry. School librarians may read to children, assist them in selecting books, and assist with school work. This can only be achieved by training school Library personnel to meet up with contemporary challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Concept of school library and school library media centre**

According to Rosenberg, (nd), the school library is a resource centre where there are collections of books, periodicals, magazines and newspapers, films and filmstrips, video-tapes, recordings of all types, slides, computers, study kits, media and other information

resources for use by teachers and pupils or students for learning, recreational activities, personal interests and interpersonal relationship of children in school.

It is a library, usually in school, that contains and encourages the use of audiovisual media and associated equipment as well as books, periodicals, and the like. The school library exists to provide a range of learning opportunities for both large and small groups as well as individuals with a focus on intellectual content, information literacy, and the learner. In addition to classroom visits with collaborating teachers, the school library also serves as a place for students to do independent work, use computers, equipment and research materials; to host special events such as author visits and book clubs; and for tutoring and testing.

The school library media centre programme is a collaborative venture in which school library media specialists, teachers, and administrators work together to provide opportunities for the social, cultural, and educational growth of students. According to Morris, (2004) activities that are part of the school library media programme can take place in the school library media centre, the laboratory classroom, through the school, and via the school library's online resources. They contain books, films, recorded sound, periodicals, realia, and digital media. These items are not only for the education, enjoyment, and entertainment of the all members of the school community, but also to enhance and expand the school's curriculum.

#### **Challenges Facing School Library personnel**

There are many contemporary challenges facing teacher-librarians as they strive to develop their multifaceted role. This is an era of change brought about by the introduction of information technologies. Teacher-librarians have come a long way from the time when they were considered caretakers of the book collection. The implications for teacher-librarians suggest a re-examination of their roles and responsibilities. The teacher-librarian must fulfill many varied roles and responsibilities. Now they are information providers, consultants, curriculum activists, instructional designers, instructional leaders, production specialists and most important, teachers. Educators must ask themselves what kinds of skills are needed for students to be prepared for these employment trends. These jobs will require critical thinking, higher order thinking and inquiry skills.

A challenge also exists for teacher-librarians to act as catalysts for the alterations of the perceptions of what is practiced in their profession. Professionalism implies taking ownership for change and actively joining in professional activities. It demands a paradigm shift on the part of professionals who are charged with the responsibility of leading students into the 21st century, (Ilomo, 1985).

Traditionally, school libraries have been vulnerable to budget cuts. This is another challenge facing teacher-librarians. Ocholla, (1992) also opines that as schools move technology into the classroom, there may be fewer funds available for the resource centre. There is also a perception by some administrators and teachers that there is no longer a need to develop the school library collection because of the use of the Internet and CD-ROM encyclopedias. They must highlight the importance of books, magazines

and encyclopedia sets. Another threat with decreased funding is that the position of teacher-librarian could be reduced or eliminated.

A further issue facing teacher-librarians in Nigeria is access to library training courses. One more challenge is for the teacher-librarian to work together with the library technician as a team to make staff and students knowledgeable about resources in the library. When the teacher-librarian and a technician are not in place, many schools turn to student volunteers for help. Teacher-librarians then must spend most of their time with clerical duties and they do not have sufficient time to spend working with teachers and students.

Teacher-librarians are expected to have technological expertise, and to share that expertise with teachers as well as students. There are many technological trends that impact the job of the teacher-librarian. Alemna (1994) states that the automation of the library, the use of CD-ROM's and the Internet has dramatically changed the role of the teacher-librarian, making their job more demanding. The use of technology has placed increased demand on teacher-librarians' time to teach information technology, to learn new technologies, to troubleshoot, and to learn which Internet resources can assist students and teachers. Library resources have changed from books and audiovisual resources to resources that include new technologies. Libraries have automated their book collections and have added computers that students can use to search the catalogue, CD-ROM databases, or the Internet, or to work with presentation and word processing software.

Managing student access to work stations adds new demands because students are using technology not only for information retrieval but also in the creating and presenting stage of their research work. For teacher-librarians, the changing technology has made locating resources much harder task. It is possible to pull books and magazines from a library collection for a teacher in a short amount of time. Incorporating electronic resources takes longer, because it takes more time to identify worthwhile sites.

Other challenges include: Lack of defined training policy for school library personnel, haphazard nature of library provision, poor staff situations in school libraries, lack of commitment and interest by government, lack of Legislation, and lack of reading materials in school libraries due to lack of viable local publishing industries producing such reading materials in sufficient quantities.

### **Changes Facing Teacher-Librarians Today**

This is an era of change brought about by the introduction of information technologies. Teacher-librarians have come a long way from the time when they were considered caretakers of the book collection. Now they are information providers, consultants, curriculum activists, instructional designers, instructional leaders, production specialists and most important, teachers. Educators must ask themselves what kinds of skills are needed for students to be prepared for these employment trends. These jobs will require critical thinking, higher order thinking and inquiry skills.

There are many technological trends that impact the job of the teacher-librarian. The automation of the library, the use of CD-ROM's and the Internet has dramatically changed the role of the teacher-librarian, making their job more demanding. The use of technology has placed increased demand on teacher-librarians' time to teach information technology, to learn new technologies, to troubleshoot, and to learn which Internet resources can assist students and teachers. Library resources have changed from books and audiovisual resources to resources that include new technologies.

### **The Collaborative and the Curriculum Leadership Role of the Teacher-librarian**

This position builds a community of learners with colleagues through collaborative programme planning and teaching. The teacher-librarian works with other teachers to provide instruction, evaluation and production of information. It must be in conjunction with other instructional programmes, and it involves planning and teamwork. Collegiality can show improvements in student achievement, behavior and attitude. Teachers are better able to consider new ideas and are better prepared to support one another.

Research evidence indicates that integrated library programmes impact positively on collaboration, leadership and student achievement when the teacher-librarian has experience as a classroom teacher, qualifications in teacher-librarianship and information studies and learning resources management, preferable at the graduate level, and works collaboratively with teachers in flexible scheduled programmes to integrate information problem-solving skills and strategies in the on-going instructional plan.

Teachers and teacher-librarians collaboratively plan and teach in order to develop and implement curriculum and to try new teaching strategies. Teacher-librarians provide leadership in bringing about some of the major curriculum changes in schools today. They become teaching, learning and assessment partners who maintain strong curriculum and instruction involvement. Teacher-librarians interface and intertwine with the schools broader instructional programmes. They can design, implement and evaluate a plan for teaching information skills. Teacher-librarians can use cooperative planning and teaching to develop curriculum.

Teacher-librarians can exhibit leadership skills that move schools forward in addressing the complex issues of the information age. They have strong values and a vision for their school. They are positive role models for other teachers and students because they understand the school and the curriculum as well. They have contact with all teachers and administrators and they can promote communication within the school. Teacher-librarians can lead professional development activities and be involved in many ways with teacher education.

### **The Instructional Role of the Teacher-librarian**

Teacher-librarians help instruct students, staff and parents in their schools. They become instructional consultants who are involved with all grades in all subjects and who bring a unique perspective to curriculum development. They become coordinators of activities, events and curriculum because they can make connections between grades and subject

areas. Working with teachers, they are instructional designers. Their expertise with information resources can assist teachers' exploration of curriculum topics and help them in locating the materials they need. As instructional leaders, they help create resource-based learning activities with a team of teachers in the schools, using a variety of teaching methods. The teacher-librarian takes the initiative, places a priority on cooperative programme planning and teaching with colleagues and encourages team planning. They work with educators to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers and teacher-librarians need to work more closely than ever before. They need to design meaningful activities, to incorporate thoughtful processing time throughout the experience, and to modify their instruction. In a way, this approach means more work but it can be intellectually stimulating, learning can be richer and more original.

### **The Instructional Technologist Role of the Teacher-librarian**

Teacher-librarians must have a broad knowledge of resources, hardware, networks and trends in technology. Troubleshooting hardware such as laser printers and VCR's, and serving on technology committees have become a part of many teacher-librarians' job description. Teacher-librarians who have embraced technology can be key leaders in integrating technology into the instructional programmes of their schools. Without an understanding of how technology can and should be used, the addition of technology by itself will not work. To be successful in the future, library programmes will need to continue to emphasize the integration of information technologies and electronic information access. Teacher-librarians can be leaders by keeping up-to-date with the latest in computer hardware and software applications and by working with the teachers to integrate technology into the school's curriculum. They could seek out and take advantage of every opportunity for training in current and emerging education. It is essential that teacher-librarians and technology staff maintain an on-going dialogue and have an extremely close working relationship to be successful.

### **The Library Management Role of the Teacher-librarian**

Automation of library clerical functions has been increasing in schools and teacher-librarians have had to adapt to these changes in technology, simplifying their role. School libraries now have online catalogues, and access to district wide networks and presentation software. The use of this new technology by staff and students has to be demonstrated and procedures put into place. Besides this, teacher-librarians manage a budget, a support staff and a set of learning resources. Collection development has become an increasingly more complex task as teacher-librarians must not only familiarize themselves with the latest and best in children's literature. They must also know how to evaluate software and web-sites to recommend to students and staff.

Though libraries have gone through tremendous physical transformation in the last ten years, their basic purpose as providers of information has not changed. Teacher-librarians provide intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats. They ensure that a balanced collection of learning resources exists to meet the needs of the school population.

### **The Information Specialist Role of the Teacher-librarian**

The teacher-librarian is the keeper and distributor of instructional media for the school. As an information specialist, they help assure equity of information by working with teachers to help them and their students learn the necessary skills to identify access and use the appropriate resources. Being a provider of teaching resources means anticipating needs and improving the quality of resources in the library. Resource-based learning is an educational model which, by design, actively involves students, teachers and teacher-librarians in the meaningful use of a wide range of appropriate print, nonprint and human resource. Libraries are no longer quiet places; they are the centres of activity. The library is the centre for this kind of learning and teacher-librarians are the facilitators. Teacher-librarians coordinate the sharing of resources with other information centres in the school system. They can ask the initial questions that help students develop focus for inquiry. They are familiar with district and school resources and have the technology skills to expose students to resources in a variety of media as well. They can assist students in their efforts to develop technology-enhanced products and presentations.

### **The Advocate Role of the Teacher-librarian**

The teacher-librarian, teachers and the school administration must work closely together and it is the teacher-librarian who must take the lead in fostering this relationship. They champion the cause of school libraries through various advocacy programmes to promote the library and resources. They can communicate news about the school library through newsletters, web sites and memos to parents and staff. Their job is to keep principals and teachers up to date on what is happening in the library and to promote school library activities and special projects. Teacher-librarians must communicate the mission, goals, and objectives of the school resource centre to the entire school community. It is appropriate to play a role in public education because the library is the only part of the school that cuts across all discipline areas.

### **The Information Literacy Role of the Teacher-librarian**

Information literacy will have a central role in the curriculum programmes of the future. Technology innovators are recognizing that this concept needs to be integrated into their goals of having learners use technology in more meaningful ways. Teacher-librarians are very comfortable with the concept of information literacy and recognize it as a natural progression in our understanding of resources-based learning, research and information skills.

The modern day teacher-librarian must not only be proficient with the wide range of information technologies available today, but they must still be able to work with teachers to instill information literacy skills in their students. Information literacy is the key to lifelong learning. Information literacy is the ability to access and evaluate information that promotes both independent learning and social responsibility. Today's students must possess information skills or research and study skills that will lead to critical thinking, effective problem solving and decision-making. Information skills taught in isolation are of little value. They must be integrated with subject specific skills and content in resource-based programmes in which teacher-librarians are working partners with the classroom teachers and administrators to plan, develop, implement and

evaluate units of study. It is the teacher-librarian's job to show students how to analyze information critically and use it wisely. Students must know how to plan, locate, and retrieve information. They process what they find to create a product and the final step is evaluation.

Electronic resources are second nature to many young people. That is the dilemma. The kids are technologically literate from the manipulative sense and technologically illiterate from the process point of view. They can get to it, print it, highlight it, clip it, and regurgitate it. Students must be taught to use the library and the computer for research and to find answers. They must also be taught when a book or the Internet is the most appropriate resource. Teachers need to be shown other possible assignments to give students to ensure that they are not merely copying and pasting together their assignments from CD-ROM encyclopedia or online sources. They need projects that do not lend themselves to copying from resources. Students confuse data with knowledge. Now Internet resources seem to have replaced print as an infallible resource. Internet increases the likelihood for unquestioning acceptance of facts as it brings vast quantities of data into every library. We need to teach the overriding literacy skill: the ability to reflect on information, to select what is useful, and evaluate its value. Teacher-librarians must work closely with students to design, implement, and revise research skills. The classroom teachers cannot keep up with all the search strategies and the best resources.

There is so much we can do to assure our students are using electronic resources as a part of a processed completed product. We are ever evolving in our profession. And, one of the most evolving components is the total commitment and physical involvement we must establish with our students. The most important part of the job is the kids. The ability to access, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources is central to successful learning.

### **Training Methods for School Library personnel**

There are different methods of training school library personnel. According to Ocholla, (1992), school library personnel can be trained through workshops for school librarians, which is an avenue to advise schools on the organization and running of their libraries. This can also be done through regular visits and other professional visits. During such visits school library personnel can be taught methods on how to upgrade their collections by building up standard collections, methods of loaning out materials and the provision of reading list.

They can be trained by organizing seminars, workshops and in-service training for school library personnel. Kolade, (1998) affirms that this training will assist them to order, process and distribute books and journals. They will also have knowledge of current booklist and recommended titles, and manuals on the organizations and operations of school libraries.

Through annual general meetings and conferences, school library personnel can be trained on how to develop and maintain professional minimum standards and how they can collaborate with the ministry of education on school library design, selection of

library materials, accommodation, furniture and equipment for good school library organization. They could also be trained in the use of modern technologies such as the use of the internet, e-mail, and the use of social media to impart knowledge to the students through professional conferences and seminars.

### **Why train school library personnel?**

School Library personnel should be trained so that they can learn skills to assist students. According to Okiy (2004), when school library personnel are trained, they can assist the students in the following ways:

- Exposing students to a variety of materials to extend their knowledge and meet their needs for recreation, inspiring reading, viewing and listening skills, as teachers do not have enough time in their lessons to teach everything they would like pupils to know about a subject. Materials for further reading are thus provided in the resource centre.
- Developing in the students the positive attitude towards learning, habit of enquiry and skills
- Encouraging the use of learning resource materials by every student at school and borrowing them to use at home.
- Teaching appropriate skills of using the print and non-print materials available in the centre.
- Enriching the curriculum content through cooperation with teachers in resource selection and provision and adequate materials for preparing lessons.

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- Providing a conducive atmosphere in the school library media centre to stimulate the required skills in reading, research, listening and viewing.
- Adjusting the programme when necessary to meet changes in the curriculum such as methods of teaching and/or increases in the student population.
- Providing required information for teachers on new materials for more effective delivery of instruction.
- Assisting students to develop required reading skills.
- Preparing students for learning after they have left school when the assistance of the teacher is not available; developing the appropriate reading techniques to enhance the reading skills appropriate for their study, (Udoh, 1998)
- Developing appropriate skills in the use of books in finding specific information.
- Providing vocational information to assist in the choice of future career.
- Developing the habit of reading for pleasure to gather experience, especially through imaginative literature.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

There are many aspects to the role teacher-librarians. Teacher-librarians are curriculum development leaders as well as a collaborative teaching and planning partners for the classroom teacher. They can be leaders into integrating technology into instruction in the school. They are the information specialists who provide both physical and intellectual access to material through teaching the knowledge, skills and values required to use information and to communicate knowledge ethically and effectively. Teacher-librarians



must also be involved in revising and rewriting policies and procedures that are important to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. They are resource managers and must be up to date in reviewing new materials in order to develop their collections.

The teacher-librarian must be a catalyst for change and be involved in their changing role by continuing to provide quality resources for teachers and by becoming a positive role model for using technology. They can both support and help to train teachers. They have the knowledge of the school, the school collection of learning resources, what is best and how to use it. They have gained the trust and confidence of the teachers in the school and they can become the human touch that is needed from integrating technology in schools.

Teacher-librarians have an important role to play in helping schools meet the challenges of the next century. They need to be lifelong learners who seek out new answers and solutions to educational problems and to put their vision into practice. They must keep it simple to act as a catalyst for change, but to retain the human touch...change is about people. The role of a leader and change agent may not be one for which many teacher-librarians feel prepared, but assuming such a role may be critical for the future of the school library programme. Teacher-librarians will need to reach and collaborate with all sectors of the school community in planning, implementing and evaluating programmes. By choice and demand, technology is restructuring education, and changing teaching and learning in ways that impact on everyone. Roles are changing, new expertise is required, and new skills must be learned all at a faster pace than ever before.

Library Resource centres and teacher-librarians are really at a crossroads. They are called on to play an increasingly important role in information literacy and electronic information retrieval, analysis, and synthesis. The teacher-librarian must become a technology role model and leader. Failure of the school library media Centre to meet this new mandate and failure of teacher-librarians to embrace the challenge of this new role will inevitably lead to obsolescence. School library personnel should be trained to run school library media centres in Nigeria, so that they can expand the frontiers of school libraries in Nigeria.

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