

PREPARING OUR LEARNERS FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTRES IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Gloria ELONYE

Yaba College of Technology Library

Yaba College of Technology

gloriaelonye@yahoo.com

Abstract

The 21st Century has ushered in the knowledge economy where information, access to it and the ability to use it to create new knowledge becomes the most important skill that students need to acquire in order to succeed. The field of education has been affected by ICTs which have greatly impacted on teaching and learning in schools. The paper describes the current situation in school library media centres in Nigerian Secondary Schools where available data indicate that the computer is not part of the classroom technology, in 90 percent of Nigerian Public Schools. The article highlights the role of the school library media centre in preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century to include, acting as instructional partners or consultants in supporting and expanding existing curriculum; collaborating with classroom teachers to teach and integrate literature and information skills into the curriculum; partnering with classroom teachers on projects that will help students use a variety of resources and present their findings; and assisting students to search out their information needs and use technological means to synthesize their findings into new knowledge. Recommendations were made to facilitate the integration of ICT into curricula delivery in schools.

Keywords: *School library media centre, Learners, ICT project*

Introduction

The new millennium which is the 21st century was ushered in by a dramatic technological revolution that has led to an increasingly diverse globalised and complex media saturated society. According to Kellner (2010) this technological revolution will have a greater impact on society than the transition from an oral to a print culture. Kellner (2010:6) asserts that in many countries, today's students are referred to as digital "natives" and today's educators as "digital immigrants". Teachers are working with students whose entire lives have been immersed in the 21st Century media culture. Today's students are "digital learners", they literally take in the world via the filter of computing devices, the cellular phones, hand held gaming devices, PDAs and laptops that they take everywhere plus the computers, television and game consoles at home.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) infiltrate classrooms around the world at an exceedingly rapid pace. In the wake of this influx, educators face growing challenges as they teach a very "wired" and more and more wired generation of students using technology that is evolving everyday (International Education Advisory Board, 2010). In order for our learners to be prepared to navigate this 21st century world, they must become literate in 21st century literacy, including multicultural, media, information, emotional, ecological, financial and cyber literacies. Collaboration with students from

around the world in meaningful, real-life projects is a necessary tool for developing these literacies (Keller, 2010). According to Indiana Library Federation (2010) the basic skills needed of a 21st century learner are the ability to (i) inquire, think critically and gain knowledge (ii) draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge (iii) share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society (iv) pursue personal and aesthetic growth.

Vance (2010) emphasizes that today's students need to enter the workforce being globally aware and literate in finances, economics, business, entrepreneurship, civics, health. No single core subject can teach these skills and an independent class could not fully support students development of these skills either. She states further that it is essential that today's learners are digitally fluent, meaning that they should feel comfortable navigating new technologies in every part of the learning process. As the partnership for 21st century skills states, learners need to be able to "use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate and communicate information". These skills also need to be part of every subject area. Future technology will present a special challenge and opportunity for education. Technology will be integrated seamlessly, processing tools, communication tools and information tools will be connected with common access mechanisms and interfaces. In other words, we will have more connectivity and technology that is customized to individual needs.

The school library media centre is the solution to meeting the challenges of the 21st century learner. A school library is one that is established in primary or secondary school (Edoka, 2000). In modern times, these libraries have evolved into school library media centres. Tabs (2004), defines school library media centre as an organized collection of printed and /or audio-visual and/or computer resources that is administered as a unit, is located in a designated place or places, makes resources and services available to students, teachers and administrators. According to Vance (2010) in the past, the library was a repository of books, a depot where you stop to pick up your information. As our world becomes increasingly globalised and information increasingly decentralized, the 21st century school library media centre has evolved into more of a learning centre. It is an area that fosters collaboration and creativity, a space focused on the learning process rather than the passive delivery and retrieval of information. She points out that the library should still have carefully selected print resources to support the curriculum but there should also be creative workstations that help students to interpret information, build understanding and create knowledge.

The media centre should be the access point to the school's technology. Today's school library media centre is manned by a school library media specialist whose career has grown into one of the most exciting in the information age. The school library media specialist must be knowledgeable about and maintain print, non-print and electronic resources both physical items the school owns and electronic ones to which it provides access. In most schools, this professional is also the key copyright specialist and the person who leads teachers in the use of new technologies in learning. He or she is a vital part of the school's instructional team.

Vance (2010) opines that it is the role of the school library media specialist to provide regular professional development so teachers can more fully understand the role of technology in their classroom. The school library media centre must support teachers in creating multimedia rich lessons and technology driven assessment. This article discusses preparing our learners for the challenges of the 21st century, the role of school library media centres in Nigerian secondary schools, the current situation of school library media centres in Nigerian secondary schools, and the role of school library media centres in Nigerian public schools. Recommendations for improvement are offered.

Current Situation in School Library Media Centres in Nigerian Secondary Schools

According to Okiy (2004) the state of school library development in Nigeria is deplorable. Even in this 21st century, the age of great advancements in all spheres of human endeavour, the role of school libraries in the attainment of educational excellence is yet to be felt by most citizens in Nigeria. The Nigerian government is guilty in this regard as it pays lip service to the establishment of libraries in schools. Okiy further states that the government even though acknowledges the importance of school libraries as far as 1981 when she stated in her National Policy on Education (Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, 1981) that:

“Libraries are one of the most important educational services. Every state ministry of education needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in all our educational institutions and to train librarians and library assistants for their services”.

Studies have been carried out by different scholars in Nigeria revealing the deplorable state of school libraries in Nigeria. Ayeni and Oyebanji (1977) cited in Okiy (2004) in a nationwide study revealed that school libraries in Nigeria were still mostly non-functional due to neglect and inadequate funding. In most states of the country, school library services were very inadequate because there were no financial allocations made to school libraries even though financial allocations were being made to schools. The revolution in information generation storage and dissemination has transformed the school library or media resource centre tremendously (Udoh, 1998).

The school library of the 21st century can readily facilitate the teaching/learning process advocated by the use of computer Assisted Instruction. The school library media centre is better suited to providing the requisite multimedia resources because it is usually under the expert supervision of a teacher-librarian who serves in the triple capacity of team teacher, media programming engineer and curriculum energizer (Okiy, 2004). Today's school library media centre is a source of educational excellence and fundamental to any educational programme. This is why the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National policy on Education (2004) recognises the prominent role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the modern world and has integrated ICTs into education in Nigeria.

According to Okebukola (1997) cited by Aduwa Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005) the computer is not part of classroom technology in more than 90 percent of Nigerian public schools. This implies that the chalkboard and textbook continue to dominate classroom activities in most Nigerian secondary schools. In addition, studies conducted on availability and use of relevant learning resources in support of the school curricula have revealed that there is a dearth of relevance and suitable learning resources for implementing the curricula in Nigerian schools. There is also shortage of qualified, teacher-librarians, school library media specialists and reading teachers to develop virile media programmes for effective implementation of the curricula in the school system. (Abadina Media Resource Centre Brochure, 2011)

Role of School Library Media Centres in Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the 21st Century

According to Xu (2007) the school library media centre plays an important role in the school learning community. In the 21st century learning environment, the school library media centre is becoming a learning hub that empowers and engages learners to all kinds of and formats of information. In the 21st century, school library media centre, learners access technology and resources effectively and efficiently and train themselves to become information literate, independent learners and socially responsible persons. Indiana Library Federation (2010) outlines the roles of the school library media centres to conclude: acting as instructional partner with teachers and others to identify links across students information needs, curricular contents learning outcomes, and a wide variety of print, non-print and electronic information resource,. The centre works closely with individual teachers in the critical area of designing tasks and assessments and integrating the information and communication abilities required to meet subject matter standards.

The library media specialist collaborates with students and other members of the learning community to analyse learning and information needs, to locate and use resources that will meet those needs, and to understand and communicate the information the resource provides. The library media specialist is knowledgeable about current research on teaching and learning and skilled in applying its findings to a variety of situations. Particularly those that call upon students to access, evaluate and use information from multiple resources in order to learn, to think, and to create and to apply knowledge. The library media specialist teaches students to use information for critical thinking and problem solving.

The school library media centre provides expertise in acquiring and evaluating information resources in all formats, bringing an awareness of information issues to teachers, administrators, students, and others, and modeling for students and other strategies for locating, accessing and evaluating information within and beyond the school library media centre. School library media centres assists students to search out their information needs and use technological means to synthesize their findings into new knowledge. The library media centre directs all the activities related to the library media program. The library media specialist confident of the importance of the effective use information to students' personal and economic success in their future lives, he/or she is

an advocate for the school library media program and provides the knowledge, vision, an leadership to steer it creatively and energetically in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The 21st century will require knowledge generation not just information delivery, and schools will need to create a “culture of inquiry” schools will go from buildings to nerve centres with walls that are porous and transparent, connecting teachers, students and the community to the wealth of knowledge that exists in the world. A successful school library media centre affects the entire school. The Federal Government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency address the pitiable state of our school libraries for it to metamorphose into an efficient school library media centre. In order to increase students’ achievement and create an environment that foster life-long learning, it is essential to have a certified library media specialist to coordinate the many aspects of the 21st century school library programme.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that students brace up with the challenges of the 21st Century, it is recommended that government should ensure that ICT policy statements are translated into reality in Nigerian schools while an ICT policy implementation commission should be created. Also, the various commissions and agencies on implementation of ICTs should be adequately funded and given the power to provide ICT facilities in the school library media centres and monitor their use. School library media centres should be made beneficiaries of ICT project and computer/ICT education should be made compulsory for all secondary school students. Efforts should be made by Ministry of Education (at federal and state levels) to post qualified teachers in ICTs/school library media specialist to each school library media centre to impart ICT skills to the students. The Federal Ministry of Mines and Power should work towards ensuring constant supply of electricity in Nigeria.

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