

## THE PLACE OF SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES IN PROMOTING READING CULTURE AT BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This paper examined the central role of school library in basic education programme in Nigeria. Basic education has been a universal concern aimed at providing access to education to every citizen globally. The paper discussed major objectives of Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria and provide insights on how School Library services can support resource-based learning as well as inculcation of good reading culture. Some hints on how to develop reading culture among children were highlighted. These hints include storytelling hour, readers club, and reading models. However, the paper noted inhibiting factors for the effective promotion of reading culture at basic education schools in Nigeria. These factors center on lack of comprehensive policy for implementation of the programme, scarcity of trained librarians and inadequate funding. Therefore, in order to reposition the school libraries for enhanced performance, the paper made recommendations that include sensitization campaign on community involvement in managing libraries of UBE schools and direct participation of the local community in developing and sustaining the school library programmes. Public and Colleges of Education libraries should also play key roles in training and retraining of the school librarians (teacher-librarian), especially on practical aspect of managing the libraries.*

**Keywords:** Basic Education, School Library, Reading Culture

### Introduction

Education has been recognized as the foundation of development in any country worldwide. It is against this background that Unagha (2008) reported that, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that everyone has the right to education, but for over 40 years since then, many people cannot have access to education in Nigeria. This is so despite the fact that; all successive Nigerian Constitutions have featured the rights of all Nigerians to basic education. In fact, the successive governments in Nigeria made various efforts towards providing opportunities for quality education for its citizenry. Some of the efforts are reflected in the development and subsequent reviews of the nations educational curricular, the publication of National Policy on Education in 1977 (revised 1981,1999 & 2004), the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme that was launched in 1976, and Universal Basic Education (UBE) that is presently implemented in the country.

Basic education has been a universal concern aimed at providing access to education to every citizen globally. Nigeria's conceptualization of Basic Education Programme is part of effort to show her commitment to world trends in the field of basic education (Tahir, 2003). This world trends as pointed by Tahir (2003) is the major international and inter-African conventions in which Nigeria is a signatory for the realization of basic education. These conventions include:

- i. The Jomtein Declaration and framework of Action (1990);
- ii. The New Delhi Declaration (1992) requiring the E-9 countries (i.e. the nine countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterate adults) to reduce the incidence of illiteracy drastically within the shortest possible time span;
- iii. The Amman Reaffirmation (1995) confirm everyone's commitment to the Jomtein Declaration;
- iv. The Durban Statement of Commitment (1998) by which African state reaffirmed their commitment to making the generalization of basic education a reality; and
- v. The OAU Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006) also reaffirming Africa's commitment to the generalization of basic education.

From the aforementioned conventions, it is very clear that the basic education was a global initiative. But, re-introduction of the basic education programme in September 1999, at Sokoto by then President Obasanjo Government was a step forward in providing the much needed educational opportunities to Nigerian citizenry. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 was mainly targeted at primary education level and so could not achieve much due to factors such as poor planning and implementation. However, the current UBE programme as highlighted by Unagha (2008), stresses the inclusion of girls and women, and a number of underserved groups such as the rural poor, street and hawking children, rural and remote populations, the nomads, migrant workers, indigents people, minorities, refuges, the internally displace people (IDPs) and the disabled. Thus, it is very much clear that UBE programme is much broader in its focus and scope of providing access to quality education in Nigeria. This programme focuses on core areas that include early child care (Pre-primary), and the 9-year programme for primary and junior secondary school while the non-core areas focus on apprenticeship, adult and mass literacy education and others.

According to Tahir (2003), The UBE programme has the following principal objectives:

- i. Provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- ii. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
- iii. Catering for the learning needs of young people who have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- iv. Ensure the provision of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning and a strong commitment to the vigorous promotion of education.

In pursuance of the above noble and forward looking objectives, the Federal Government of Nigeria, in its implementation guidelines for the UBE programme has recognized provision of School libraries as part of the infrastructural and instructional materials

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requirement for effective implementation of the UBE programme. Thus, while the UBE commission is charged with the responsibilities of co-ordinating all aspects of the Basic Education in order to ensure its success, the actual implementers are the State and the Local Governments. In addition, the National Library of Nigeria, which is the apex library has been listed as one of the collaborating agencies in the implementation of the UBE Programme. Other agencies include: National Teachers' Institute (NTI), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Educational Technology Centre (NETC), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), etc.

### **The Concept of School Library**

This is a library established to provide teaching and learning resources to be used by teachers, pupils and students of primary/secondary schools. This type of library is expected to make effective contributions towards achieving the objectives of school curriculum. The central roles of a school library include to:

- i. introduce information literacy skills to young learners,
- ii. inculcate good reading culture,
- iii. promote independent study even outside the school, and
- iv. develop critical learning skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating and collaborating).

### **Meaning of Reading**

Reading is one of the four language skills. Other skills are listening, speaking and writing. It is an activity that involves recognition and comprehension of written text or symbols in a particular human language. According to Jibir-Daura (2014) reading is an individual activity that involves perception and thought for understanding written text. It is a fundamental life skill that should be acquired by children in order to meet the challenges of modern society. The ability to read fluently means somebody has acquired reading literacy which is fundamental lifelong learning. Therefore, reading helps to develop the intellectual capacity of an individual right from early childhood stage of learning. Hence, at basic education level, learners are guided to enjoy reading so that learning becomes more relevant and enhance their reading ability as they progress in their educational pursuit. According to Ogbonna and Eze (2015), a part from provision of reading materials, school libraries organize reading activities that motivate children to read for pleasure. These reading activities are purposely provided to create awareness about varieties in the School Library collection for teaching and learning, and thereby motivate the young children to read for pleasure. Such activities include display of children literature, exhibition of reading materials and other creative arts or works of imagination, guided tour of public and other type of libraries, lending of books, storytelling, book talks, and so on.

### **The Concept of Reading Culture**

Reading culture has been a recurring concept in the pages of newspapers, scholarly literature on school librarianship and many other channels of information dissemination and knowledge packaging. This was because researchers have for the past several years established that reading culture gave impetus to educational, social, economic, and political development of any nation. Reading culture is self-directed practice of reading

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that enables an individual to acquire knowledge, seek for information or to derive pleasure. This implies that, reading culture is an established habit for reading a chosen material voluntarily. According to Furfuri and Anka (2016), reading culture can be regarded as sustained reading habit for lifelong education. However, Benson, Okorafor, Nongo and Anyalebechi (2017) described reading culture as a situation where by the society attached much value on reading and appreciate reading at all levels of its educational system. Hence, school library is one of the institutions that is charged with responsibility of not only promoting reading culture but also laying a solid foundation to its development.

### **Basic Education Programme and School Library Services**

In the modern world, the education process of children is fundamentally based on three inter-related approaches. According to Dike (2017), these approaches refer to three modern methods of education; that is (i) resource-based learning, (ii) inquiry methods, and (iii) open classroom concept. In all these methods, the provision of school library services has very important role to play, especially in the promotion of reading culture. A well-equipped school library will serve as a resource-based learning center where the teacher will organize a learning situation that encourage independent thought, inquiry, and creative abilities. In other words, School Library services will add value to classroom teaching and learning situations by providing supplementary materials that can motivate and boost the reading abilities of children, and at the same time increase the intellectual capacities of teachers. However, to achieve this independency of learning at the basic education level, inculcation of reading culture is indispensable. According to Ogbonna and Eze (2015), the Minimum Standard for School Libraries pointed out nine contributions expected from such libraries in Nigeria. However, these contributions are on reading development, which can be stated succinctly as follows:

- Promotion of reading skills and encouraging lifelong learning through reading among other related activities,
- Provision of opportunities for voluntary reading in addition to classroom textbooks.
- Stimulation of inquiry and independent study using variety of learning materials
- Provision of materials for recreation and reading for pleasure.

Finding from a study by Ogbonna and Eze further confirmed the positive relationship between school library programmes and development of reading culture. In other words, reading programmes offered by libraries generally has great influence on level of reading. The indispensable role that school library can play towards the success of UBE programme cannot be over emphasized. Unlike during the UPE of 1976, it becomes necessary for all librarians to play active role for the attainment of UBE objectives in Nigeria. So the librarians should see themselves as not ordinary stakeholders, but major partners in achieving the success of UBE programme. In this direction, it is of paramount importance for the librarians; regardless of the type of library they are working, to focus attention on issues that affect provision of resources and services in School Libraries, for the success of UBE.

The IFLA school library manifesto (2021) recommended core School Library services for the promotion of reading culture as follows:

1. Supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school's mission and curriculum;
2. Developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
3. Offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment;
4. Supporting all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication within the community;
5. Providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions;
6. Organization activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity;
7. Working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the school;
8. Proclaiming the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in a democracy;
9. Promoting reading as well as resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond.

The policies to implement the above recommendations are already developed. According to Bello (2004), in the UBE programme, "Education support services Unit" under No. 7.4.3., it was pointed out that, the Commission is to ensure development of relevance books (fictions and non-fiction materials) in line with existing curricular; and to also ensure development and provision of functional libraries at all levels of UBE target.

Other similar policy statement has also been made Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in respect of the school libraries as contained in the National Policy on Education which states that:

*Since libraries constitute one of the most important educational services, 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.*

In the light of the above, the UBE Commission is expected to establish libraries and information resources centres for effective implementation of the Basic Education Curriculum. In its strategy to provide access to quality education, the UBE Commission set a target of ensuring that 50% of Basic Education schools have conducive teaching and learning environment, and that 100% are to graduate from Basic Education Institutions possessing literacy, numeracy and basic life skills so as to live meaningfully in the society and contribute to national development (UBEC, 2004). But observations have shown that so far this target has not been attained.

The UBE Commission has also been organizing series of training at different levels on how to make the school libraries to function effectively. For instance, in a monitoring of schools' achievements conducted in December 2001, it was discovered that many pupils cannot read and some teachers too cannot read effectively. This situation had made

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UBEC to adopt the practice of creating classroom collections from supplementary reading materials, as the practice has been attested to in several countries to be a good one. This project of creating classroom collections was boosted by the World Bank/ Federal Government of Nigeria credit facilities under primary Education project II. Under this project about 200 teachers and library officials from State Primary Education Boards and local Government Education Authorities in each of Nigeria's 12 geo-political Zones were trained on classroom books selection techniques and management. Thus, over 8,000 titles were received from foreign and local publishers, which were classified as fiction, non-fiction, reference, picture series, Nigerian languages, and so on. The titles were evaluated by using language comprehension level, cultural relevance, scope, design, content and illustrations (Tahir, 2003).

### **Hints on Promotion of Reading Culture in Basic Education Schools**

Promotion of reading culture among children requires different approaches and activities. The most important starting point is the provision of varieties of teaching-learning resources. These resources include books, periodicals, charts, maps, pictures, drawings, films, audio tape, multimedia such as CD-ROMs, DVDs, social media tools, materials for festivals or events, cultural objects, and so on. According to Dike (2017), one of the good ways of promoting reading culture is using storytelling and story hour. Storytelling involve careful selection of reading materials that can be read aloud to introduce the children to different aspects of literature such as poetry, fiction, proverbs and songs, riddles and tongue twisters, folklores, and so on. A library hour can be dedicated by teacher librarian or any other competent teacher to tell the story to the children, and later evaluate himself. Through this periodic activities, the children will be motivated to become independent reader.

Readers Club, quiz and debating society can be organized for the children to be meeting under the guidance of the teacher or teacher-librarian. The children will be introduced to various activities that will lead them to become good readers as well as to acquire skills for creative writing and self-expression. Through that club, reading competitions can be organized and the best readers can be given a prize as motivation. For example, children can be encouraged to read selected books at home, and later tell the stories they read in the class.

Another hint is that authors within the local community can be invited to talk to the children about their experiences in reading and writing books. Similarly, holiday reading is also a very important way of encouraging reading. For example, a nearby public library can be requested to engage the children with different reading activities during holidays. The teacher/teacher-librarian can equally serve as role model to the children when they noticed him to be a reader all the time. The children should also be encouraged to become habitual readers time over. They can also be encouraged to be borrowing books for home reading.

### **Factors Inhibiting Promotion of Reading Culture at Basic Education Level**

It is noticeable that in most of the public UBE schools in Nigeria, there is hardly what can be regarded as functional school library. And where the libraries or classroom collections exist, it is not put into proper use. A review article by Bello (2004) stresses the need for school libraries throughout Nigeria to take their rightful position in the UBE programme

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for primary school pupils. Bello pointed out the need for training of librarians, creation of library hours in the school time-table, provision of relevant resources and discontinuance of teachers/librarians policy. The assessment of the UBE implementation in a Local Government Area in Borno State by Thliza (2005) reported the non-provision of books in more than 50% of the primary schools. This situation concords with that of Aduwa and Sam (2006) who conducted an evaluative assessment of the provision of educational services under UBE schools in Southern Nigeria and their findings suggests that educational services (library services inclusive) were not adequately provided in the schools as parents still buy books.

Though the UBE guidelines did not provide a comprehensive manual or minimum standard for developing and offering the school library services, it is the responsibility of all stakeholders especially Federal, State, Local Government, NGO's, local communities and the professionals to see that school library services are practically integrated into UBE school curricular.

Despite the strategic position of school libraries as integral part of UBE programme, the reading culture in Nigeria is still declining drastically. Benson, Okorafor, Nongo and Anyalebechi (2017) has cited other researchers (Akindele, 2012; Ilogho & Micheal-onuoha,2015;) who confirmed the poor state of reading culture not only in UBE schools, but among students and youths in Nigeria. Similarly, Akinfenwa (2015) had also asserted that, Nigeria is one of the country with lowest reading culture in the world, because 38% of its citizens cannot read, while 4 out of 10 primary school pupils lacks effective reading skills. This poor state of reading culture in Nigeria was linked to increasing cases of examination misconducts/malpractices committed by candidates in both institutional and public examinations (Anunobi, 2022). Anunobi therefore, asserted that parents and the society has a key role to play by placing value on knowledge hidden in print and electronic documents. This situation cannot be divorced from the numerous inhibiting factors for promoting reading culture in the basic education schools in Nigeria.

Generally, lack of comprehensive policy that is in line with digital era, inadequate funding, and scarcity of trained school librarians have been the major inhibiting factors for provision of the desired school library services that are prerequisite for inculcation of reading culture in UBE schools in Nigeria. These factors have resulted into having school library building and furniture that are far from being conducive for providing library services. Some of these factors can be highlighted from the work of Monica and Chinwendu (2017) are as follows:

**Collection:** Though the library materials are in printed format, the quality of the collections is geared towards meeting the information needs of the pupils and their teachers. The collection comprised mainly fiction and non-fiction books and materials for children. The size of the collection is scanty and so is far from being proportionate to the number of expected users. The way and manner these primary school libraries are developed and managed; only time shall tell when other relevant materials such as audio-visuals, periodicals and digital/computerized resources will be found as part of their collections.

**Acquisition:** Another, observation is that selection and acquisition of the materials is done centrally at State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) headquarters. The practice of non-involvement of teachers in developing the collection makes them inactive

in collection building and maintenance. Hence, only very few staff in charge of the libraries are willing to be innovative and adding materials to the collections.

**Organization of Materials:** The materials are supposed to be organized by using appropriate tools to make simple cataloguing and classification. The organization of the materials supposed to be based on teaching learning needs of each school. The shelves for books storage and display should be well arranged and labeled. But, in all the 16 libraries, the organization of the collection is totally lacking. The materials lack any form of processing except the ownership stamp.

**Staffing:** The IFLA/UNESCO (2006) states that, “richness and quality of the library provision depend upon staffing resources available within and beyond the school library”. For this reason, the school librarian supposed to be a well-trained person that is experienced in both primary education and school librarianship. But, the staffing situation in the libraries visited is still a reflection of the traditional teacher-librarian, whereby teachers of English language are assigned the responsibility of managing the school libraries. Since the staff in these libraries lack the necessary skills, experiences and competency of marking the school libraries, it is not possible to develop the library services required for the implementation of Basic Education programme in Nigeria.

**Service Level:** The service level in the existing UBE school libraries was very low. The reasons for this are many; poor staffing, lack of organization of the collection, inadequate space and facilities for readers, etc. In fact, there is limited access to resources for pupils as no definite arrangement is made for the pupils to use the library. However, some teachers visit the library from time to time to prepare lesson or take some books to the class to be used as instructional materials. Therefore, the utilization of the available materials is nothing to write home about.

**Funding:** The fund for UBE libraries is control centrally at SUBEB. Thus, most UBE schools have no budget for its library. This situation could jeopardize the future development of the few existing libraries. This is because additions of new library materials, processing of the materials, collection maintenance, etc., are all dependent on the central budget that is expected to cover the whole state. In this regard, time and other bureaucratic procedures will hinder the efficiency of implementing a centralized budget for the primary school libraries.

Through some UBE schools made effort to generate fund through community involvement but nothing was achieved. This problem could be tackle through sensitization, advocacy and lobbying at grassroots by involving traditional rulers, community leaders, the elite, and community based NGOs.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion in this paper, the following recommendations are made as way forward:

1. Universal Basic Education Commission should make adequate provision for school libraries in Nigeria to develop systematic collections of teaching /learning resources, and ensure proper staffing and good organization of the resources.
2. teacher-librarians in UBE schools should develop collaborative activities and innovative strategies that will helps ensure effective utilization of the school library services.



3. National Library of Nigeria which is a collaborative partner should ensure regular production and distribution of Manual/Minimum Standard for developing and running UBE school libraries.
4. The Nigerian Library Association through its Association for School Librarians should be among the Consultants that UBE Commission and States Universal Basic Education Boards can engage in monitoring and evaluation exercises of Basic Education programmes in Nigeria.
5. it is also recommended that sensitization campaign on community involvement in managing libraries of UBE schools should be pursued vigorously at the grassroots. This will create awareness for direct participation of the local community in developing and sustaining the school programme including library services. The School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) can be key stakeholders in developing and managing school library services.
6. Public and Colleges of Education (COE) libraries should play key roles in handling training and retraining of the school librarians (teacher-librarian), especially on practical aspect of managing the libraries. This is because of the experience of public librarians in children library services while the COE libraries on the other hand are familiar with training of the UBE teachers.

## Conclusion

This paper discusses the central role of the school library in the pursuit of formal education components of UBE programme in Nigeria. The literatures cited have shown that, the implementation of the UBE programme will certainly succeed if school library services among other things are effectively integrated into the system. The school library has been recognized as indispensable in providing services that are very critical for inculcating good reading culture among the children. However, many factors inhibit having functional school libraries, and consequently, the reading culture continues to decline. The major inhibiting factors include funding, staffing and outdated school library policy.

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