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CONTENTS

Computer-Assisted Instruction, Simulation/Games and Lecture Methods as Determinants of Secondary School Students' Attitude Towards Biology <i>Dr. (Mrs.) J. B. Bilesanmi-Awoderu</i>	1
Staff Training and Development for Effective Teaching <i>Grace Edet Uya (Mrs)</i>	12
Towards a Rights Perspective Early Childhood Care and Development Programme for Nigeria. Strategies and Approaches. <i>Dr Chinyere Nwagbara</i>	21
Nativization of English Language in Africa: Implications for Nigeria's Education System <i>Dr. A. A. Otaoye</i>	29
The Importance of Nigerian Languages in Education and National Development <i>Salami Omitade Saliman</i>	44
Wetland and Natural Waterway Conservation and Management in Lagos State: Curricular Perspective <i>Ogunbiyi M. A.</i>	53
Developing the Library to Meet the Current Spate of Development in Nigerian Educational System <i>Makinde O. O. [Mrs.]</i>	63
Effects of Three Classroom Interaction Patterns on Achievement in Accounting: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Kaduna State <i>Samuel W. Ahrwong, Ph.d</i>	70
Science Teachers' Computer Utilisation in Lagos State Secondary Schools <i>Akindoju Olugbenga Gabriel & Lawal Nurudeen Adesina</i>	85
Book Review <i>Apegba Ker</i>	94

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**DEVELOPING THE LIBRARY TO MEET THE
CURRENT SPATE OF DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the importance of the library to education by enumerating its role and services which include educational, economic and socio-political functions. It goes on to discuss the spate of educational development in the contemporary Nigerian society showing that there is a high level of enrolment figures. The writer observes that the growth in enrolment has not been matched by growth in the necessary infrastructures including libraries. The paper then goes on to conclude on possible ways by which the library can be improved to meet the challenges of the developing educational system, like expanding the library structurally, extending the library hours, establishing cybercafes on campuses and encouraging private individuals and corporate bodies to participate in building and maintaining libraries.

Introduction

The fact is that library is an important tool for any form of development and this cannot be overemphasised going by what various scholars have written. Nwalo [2000] explains that concept of library involves four key factors which are information sources, conducive accommodation, library users and professional personnel who will acquire, organise and preserve the information materials to cater for the information needs of various users. Similarly, Aguolu [1998] in Nwalo [2000] observes that library is a collection of records of human culture in diverse formats and languages, which are being preserved, organised and interpreted to meet various needs of the human race.

Quadri [1993] describes the library as the resource centre of any institution, organisation or establishment, a depository of information consulted in order to expand upon and enrich the work of individuals and bodies. Ekweozoh [1989] states the various types of resources that can be found in the library, he defines the library as a collection of books, audio visual aids and other printed materials properly organised and used.

In talking about the usefulness of the library, Mabawonku [1976] says it is useful for independent study as it is a place where one learns how to find out and use

the resources. Kalu [1986] is also of the opinion that time spent reading in the library is well spent and such transforms the reader into an informed and disciplined citizen. Apart from playing educational and socio-political roles in the society, libraries are also necessary for economic development as mentioned by Ikem [1986].

The importance and relevance of library can be better appreciated in the present dispensation that has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the enrolment figures at all levels of education in Nigeria as well as in other developing nations. As most part time courses for which many of these students enrol in the tertiary institutions operate in the evenings during the week and on weekends, most of these students do not have access to the library and its services. Since quality textbooks are hard to come by, and many of the students do not attend lectures regularly, they depend on notes and handouts given by lecturers. Therefore assignments are haphazardly done and the quality of examination answers are poor. If our colleges and universities will not continue to produce half-baked graduates, the reading culture must be revived in our schools and the library must be seen as a repertoire and reservoir of resources for educational development. The need for the library to live up to expectation has even become more compelling with the establishment of the Distance Learning Programme in the Open University of Nigeria.

Although the importance of the library to educational development cannot be overemphasized, the extent of the importance of the library cannot be visible without mentioning the role and various services offered by the library.

Library and its services

According to Ugwuanyi [1998], the general roles of libraries in the educational process include information dissemination, expanding the horizon of learning, aiding independent learning, serving recreational purpose, helping to develop values, attitudes and appreciation and performing economic role. Esdaile [1989] enumerates the various roles libraries play in the society as follows: preserving the record of the nations literature; giving society a sense of oneness and serving as the power house for the leadership of the society. He concludes that for a man to be worthy of his freedom he must make a right use of libraries.

Other services include current awareness service, reprographic service, mobile library service and inter-library loans and exchanges. In order to perform its roles and provide the services conveniently, the library provides conducive reading environment in the form of a building or part of a building in a noise-free area that comes with all necessary equipment like furniture, electronic gadgets like computer among others. Professional library staff in the persons of qualified librarians are also provided to acquire information by procuring relevant materials in various formats like print and non-print formats. These professionals are also responsible for organising these materials into various subject areas through the process of classification which helps a library user to get needed information without wasting time. They also make sure that the library materials are properly preserved. Thus through their various duties, they help the right reader to get the right book at the right time.

Considering the importance or usefulness of these services mentioned above, it may not be out of place to say that the library is a learning resources centre, a service institution whose aim is to enable the users make the most effective use of its resources and services [Oshundeyi, 1999] especially for educational development.

Spate of educational development in contemporary Nigerian society

As mentioned earlier on, there has been an unprecedented increase in the enrolment figures at all levels of education in Nigeria [Imogie 2000]. In the list of tertiary institutions published by NERDC in 2003 Diary, Nigeria is blessed with the following:

S/N	Types of Institution	Number	Total
1.	Federal Universities	24	
2.	University centres e.g. Nigerian French Village	04	
3.	State Universities	12	
4.	Private Universities	07	
5.	Military University	01	48
6.	Federal Polytechnics	18	
7.	State Polytechnics	27	45
8.	Federal Colleges of Education	21	
9.	State Colleges of Education	39	
10.	Private Colleges of Education	05	65

Source: NERDC 2003 Diary

This aspect of growth in the educational sector has led to many universities admitting more students for the various part-time programmes than for the regular mode of study. Although this growth rate is high, the reason for it is not far fetched from Imogie [2000] observation, which shows that Nigeria's educational purpose aims at creating a good society and good life for the citizens of the country. Therefore since individual Nigerian knows that he can be empowered through education, he strives to get education at all cost even if it means combining it with other things, he wants to be in an environment that will allow him grow physically, mentally and spiritually so as to have harmonious development within himself and with fellow human beings [Dosunmu and Pemedede, 2001].

It has been observed that education and development go hand in hand; Rodeny in Dosunmu and Pemedede, [2001] observes that development at the level of individual implies increased skill and capacity; greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. He further says that the achievement of these aspects of personal development is connected with the state of the society as a whole. This is also in line with Nigeria's educational purpose of good society and good life for all citizens.

Since education brings about individual and consequently societal development no wonder then that there is a great rush by individuals to be educated. However, despite this noble attempt on the part of Nigerian citizens to get formal education, and the higher institutions willingness to get this ambitious candidates admitted even if it is on part-time basis, it can be observed that structurally various governments [both Federal and State] are not doing much to encourage educational development. This could be seen in the fact that most higher institutions in Nigeria still have the same structural facilities [lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, offices, car parks etc] today when they are admitting about three to four times the number of students they used to admit about twenty, thirty or more years ago when such higher institutions were established.

This unpleasant situation is taking negative toll on the products of these institutions and this is the reason for thinking about what can be done with the library, which is the backbone of any meaningful academic development in order to redeem this ugly situation. The British and American standards suggest a library with seating space for at least 20% of the school's total population at any given time [Fayose 1995] but hardly will one get an academic library which can sit 10% of the total population of the parent institution. This situation calls for urgent attention in order to empower the library for the challenges of the developing Nigerian educational system.

The ways by which the library can meet challenges of the present and the future. Going by the observation of Dosunmu and Pemedede, [2001] that no nation can develop beyond her educational provisions just as no river rises above its level then if there is going to be concrete intellectual development in the present day and future Nigerian educational system, there must be a meaningful development of the library to meet the information needs of the teeming population of students in Nigeria. The challenges of developing the library to meet the current spate of development in Nigerian educational system will be met by commitment from government, corporate bodies and individuals.

First, the government must ensure that more library extensions are put up in those academic institutions which already have libraries to cater for the initial projected intake of students. These extensions will help to meet the demands brought about by the increase in admission level. Every school should be compelled to have library complexes and extensions may be in form of departmental libraries where such do not exist presently. These complexes and extensions should be able to cater for at least twenty percent of the total population of the staff and students at any given time.

Then the government in conjunction with the school management must ensure that at least 10% of the total of the school budget is spent in procuring the necessary equipment and materials for the library as it will not make any sense having library structure that is almost empty or where needed information could not be got.

In order to cater for the part-time students, library hours should be extended especially on Saturdays when these students are more likely to have time to patronise it. Library administrators should also ensure that they create public awareness about the benefits that could accrue to library users in order to encourage students and

others to use library facilities.

Also, school authority should find a way of establishing cyber cafes on campuses in order to reduce the pressure on library and to ensure that more current information get to various information users within the shortest possible time. These cyber cafes could form part of the library extension.

Where possible, efforts should be made to provide lecturers with personal computers where they can source information directly from the Internet, this too will help to reduce the pressure on library facilities.

Also, public libraries in Nigeria should be given more attention by stocking them with relevant materials, equipment and qualified library personnel so that they can meet the information needs of the various categories of people in the society including the needs of those part-time students who might be able to go into nearby ones around their work places maybe during break time and at some other time. These will also help those students who are preparing for one examination or the other but who are not currently in school like those preparing for General Certificate of Education and Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination. They will also help to meet the needs of the students involved in the Distance Learning Programmes of the Open University who may not have access to academic libraries of the regular university system.

Nigeria can also pay attention to one of the services of the public library, which is not developed here in Nigeria. This service is mobile library service. It involves making use of library vans to cater for the information needs of those areas where there are no libraries especially the rural areas.

Apart from what government at various levels can do to help develop the library, the private sector could also be encouraged to contribute to the development of library in Nigeria. Corporate bodies and well-to-do individuals could be encouraged to build and maintain libraries even if it means charging token fees. This will help to reduce financial pressure on the government and make it easier for the reading populace to get needed information for academic purposes.

Other individuals too can help contribute to the development of the library even if they are not well-to-do if they can make a modest donation of at least a book to the library or help maintain those books they find in the library by imbibing good library habits.

Another area through which library development can be achieved to meet the present and future challenges of the reading population is to ensure that every library has qualified competent staff that can operate various modern information technology equipment and materials which should be provided in every library in Nigeria of today, this will ensure that information found in various formats can be stored and accessed in various Nigerian libraries instead of the current practice of manually accessing information and depending mainly on those information stored in print form.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the library to the education sector has been mentioned. It has also been observed that the library in Nigeria like some other structures in academic sector are not meeting the challenges being posed by the present day and future educational system. Some ways of meeting the challenges have been mentioned. Therefore, the final question to be asked is 'what kind of library should we build or have in order to meet the challenges of the educational system in Nigeria now and in future?' There may not be a simple answer to this question but some characteristics of such a library can be listed. These include a library that:

- a. can cater structurally for at least 20% of its targeted patrons;
- b. is able to provide needed utilities, equipment and materials for its patrons;
- c. has modern information technology that will facilitate quick and easy access to current information stored in various formats and available in various places;
- d. gives library education to the patrons thus ensuring that every library user gets the needed information within the shortest possible time;
- e. ensures that every patron has equal access to every library material;
- f. has competent staff that can collect and manage library equipment and materials;
- g. can help patrons develop intellectually and consequently help the nation to develop.

Surely, if the libraries in the Nigerian educational system can have all these characteristics listed above, the educational sector in Nigeria will witness not only population growth but also intellectual development which will be for the good of individuals and the nation at large.

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