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Advocacy for School Libraries in Nigeria

Boma T. David-Westⁱ

Department of Library and Information Science
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
boma.davidwest@uniport.edu.ng.

Mary Mfon Basseyⁱⁱ

Library Department
University of Uyo, Nigeria
princessmji@yahoo.com

Abstract

In a learning environment the ability of a child is anchored on reading which requires a school library to strengthen and develop the reading skills as he or she moves up the educational ladder. Most public primary and secondary schools in Nigeria does not have a school library. More so, the ones that have are not well equipped. Hence the purpose of this paper is advocating for government to cite school libraries and stock it with books. It was recommended that government should make library a top priority in their budget. We look forward for government to re-invest in this vital neglected asset, our school library.

Keywords: Advocacy, School, Importance, Need, Libraries, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Library services for schools are very important. This importance is realized by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the Fourth National Development Plan of 1981–1985. It sees library development as an important component of educational services designed to enhance the learning process in the society. According to (Krashen, 2007) there exist a tangible relationship between the quality of school library and the amount of books children read as well as a relationship with competence in reading. Onwubiko and Uzoigwe (2004) define school library as the learning laboratory of the school equipped with books, magazines, newspapers and audio visual materials, aimed at enhancing effective teaching and on the part of teachers and students. This creates an environment of literature and cultivates the habit of using information resources as teaching tools which will lead to academic achievement.

Access to school library books leads to more reading and this will result in academic excellence. The school library helps to satisfy the demands of young minds. Students and teachers need library resources and expertise of a librarian to man school libraries help teachers to teach students Keith (2004). The school library is integral part of the learning process it facilitates the work of the class room teacher and ensures each student have equitable access to resources irrespective of home opportunities or constraints. It helps students to discover independent study and learning.

According to IFLA and UNESCO manifesto 1995 in Tiwari (2013), the school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge based society. It is said to be the heart of school. Books play a vital role in the life of students. It is a most adaptable invention for conveying knowledge. The school libraries are agencies for the acquisition and preservation of other documents. School libraries also provide means to meet and stimulate the many interest appreciation and curiosities of youths. Before now the schools were run by the missionaries, library facilities provided in schools were not very adequate but considering the level of education provided at that time, it was fairly good. Now that the level of education is much higher than what it used to be, the need for schools to have updated and better stocked libraries need not to be overemphasized. It is possible that it is the reason for poor performance in schools because students have limited books to refer to in the libraries. Thus the school library has a major role to play in the lives of students according to Bonanno (2011) opined that utilization of school libraries make for significant impact on academic performance.

National Policy on Education stated that it will ensure that schools are properly equipped to promote sound effective teaching and in particular suitable textbooks and libraries will be provided for schools. In spite of this policy made by government being aware of the importance of libraries and other services for effective learning, government have not provided adequate libraries for schools. There is also the awareness of this modern concept of school library, many school libraries in Nigeria are yet to integrate both the print and non-print materials and other services to users. It is disheartening to know that government do not see libraries as a priority in secondary schools despite all efforts to see that all citizens are literate. Furthermore, if there are school libraries in Nigeria it will help give the students and even their teacher's moderate idea of the world around them. It will also practical for the students what they have being taught in the classroom. The libraries will also serve as instructional media centres where apart from books other materials such as maps, film slides, strips are also kept.

There is need for advocacy so as to let the government be aware of the deplorable state of libraries in schools and also some schools that do not have libraries to be adequately funded. Advocacy is defined as an attempt by libraries and library associations to keep libraries and what they do in the minds of the people, who make decisions that affect libraries. 'Advocacy is a planned, deliberate and sustained effort to raise awareness of issues. It's an on-going process in which support and understanding are built increasingly over an extended period of time using a wide variety of marketing and public tools' (American Association of Public Libraries , 2010). Advocacy is also to speak on behalf of another. It means communication as an individual or group with decision makers and others in support of specific issues. Myenzi (2008) sees it as an action oriented art persuasion to bring about change in policies, resource allocation service delivery or behaviour that affects the public of a particular society.

IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL LIBRARY

The school library is the gateway to knowledge and it plays an important role in building up love for reading. It is also an integral part of an educational process. Since it encourages reading at the right age the children are sure to develop love for books catch them young is therefore the motto of the school libraries. Forsyth (2005) reports that various researchers have shown that a strong library programme can make a student perform better. The library equips students with long life learning skills and also develops their imagination making them responsible citizens. The school library does this by selecting, acquiring and providing access to appropriate sources of information. The school Library offers books and other resources ranging from print to electronic media for completion of various school projects and assignments, for acquisition of knowledge about a topic taught in class, also for finding information about a hobby or current events and news etc. The school libraries act as laboratories for students and the librarians should function as guides to help the students in learning and using the books to improve their knowledge. The school library is essential for literacy, education and information provision as well as for economic, social and cultural development of a nation. Hence government must have adequate and sustained funding for school libraries.

NEED FOR ADVOCACY

As professionals advocacy is done for school libraries because it is a place where students will be able to pursue learning in their own way. Library development forms an important component of educational services designed to enhance the learning process in the society. It is also a place where they could reinforce skills and knowledge learnt in class. The role of school libraries is elaborated by UNESCO public library manifesto which states that library offers learning services, books and other resources that enable all members of the community to become critical thinkers, and effective users of information in all formats. According to the National Policy on Education (Federal Prpublic of Nigeria, 2013), the library is at the heart of the education enterprise and one of the most important educational services. The government policy on school library states that every school should have a functional library in accordance with the established standards and actively promote reading culture. This has not been achieved because government do not give priority to library.

The school libraries are not considered as essential as compared to other sectors of the society. Knowledge is power so says a popular axiom. Government should implement this policy by adequately funding the school libraries. Book has remained a fundamental source in all human endeavour, books can be described as a world of possibilities. Hence the strong need for advocacy to have excellent school library service, appropriate staffing and facilities in the content of advancing the educational opportunity. It will be difficult to achieve universal primary/secondary education without school libraries being involved. Therefore, the school libraries should be well stocked in order to address the systematic inequalities that are too evident across the province. These investments will improve our student's achievement and enhance literacy skills. The school library should also focus on providing information or service to meet identified needs.

Deplorable State of Libraries: the libraries are in a poor state due to lack of poor funding. Some of the government schools have libraries but are not well equipped. Since the government recognized the importance of libraries in schools, it should make move to remedy the situation by upgrading the libraries.

Lack of Qualified Personnel: More so, some of the government school libraries do not have qualified personnel to run them. According to (Apotiade, 2002) argues that many

libraries do not have librarians. It should be the role of librarians to make sure that the library is given full support and be promoted all over the nation. Government should employ teacher librarians to give a professional touch to the library.

Librarians Attitude to Advocacy: How can the professionals become better advocates? An important step ensures that school librarians themselves have clear understanding of the benefits of school library programs. Williams and Wavell (2001) have stated that such understanding is necessary to demonstrate the value of the school library. Government need to know about problems facing libraries. The librarians should be able to provide current, factual information on issues concerning the library. Government need to be reminded of the effectiveness of the library in the primary and secondary schools because it is the foundation for every solid education. Librarians need to be actively involved in issues such as lifelong learning education, cultural promotion, services to students etc. All these issues need to be discussed as matters of importance to a larger extent at the national level.

Need for Change in government policies: Advocating for change in government policies as it pertains to school library. During the annual budget school library should be given topmost priority in education because it will satisfy the demands of young readers and make efficient use of library influence in teaching and training. It's also important for government to know that libraries are the corner stone of democracy, equipping a library is helping the civilization to move forward. Library assists students in accessing diverse resources and in developing literacy skills necessary to make informed and responsible citizens who can participate in our democracy.

USEFUL APPROACHES TO ADVOCACY

The under listed are some of the useful approaches to advocacy:

- **Advocacy Efforts** should be directed towards power holders in the state. "Advocate" should understand the power structure before advocating. Librarians should identify and partner with stakeholders and friends of library like non-governmental agencies, the Nigerian library association, and partner with them.
- **Create Awareness:** Government are not aware of the importance of school libraries advocates should stress the role library plays in the society of information age for all.
- **Rural Support:** Advocate should maintain strong rural support base for rural efforts. Work with the public you serve throughout the year compelling a list of supporters that you can call on at crucial times.
- **Roles of School Library Association:** The school library association is a forum that allows the voice of librarians to be heard. This association creates a framework that enables libraries and librarians to increase their effectiveness in empowering the public to participate in a democratic society.
- **Invitation Letters:** Elected leaders like politicians and charitable groups should be invited to take a tour of the library. Begin with a letter of invitation, follow up with a phone call, and keep the tour brief and informative.
- **Non-Governmental Organization:** Library issues should be discussed with other groups in the state. E.g rotary club, lion club. Etc. The deplorable state of some libraries should always be brought to public notice. Advocate should be very active not passive.
- **Media:** The media should be used in advertising the importance of library. This will go a long way in creating awareness to the public, and government, why library should be given top priority in state budget.

- **The Use of Professional Lobbyist:** Interest groups that have interest in promoting the value of school libraries in learning, and the existence of libraries and library related legislation.
- **Book Fair:** Book fair orientation programme should be done annually. This book fair provide the cornerstone to reading culture in students. It emphasis on literacy skills in fostering a love for reading. This will also require acquisition of books for the library.

CHALLENGES OF ADVOCACY

The library professional seems not to apply the right advocacy tools so as to get government attention. Also if advocates are not active it will not yield result. The lack of know how is one of the challenges of advocacy. Advocacy requires strong communication skills. However, most librarians have limited knowledge or skills in social communication, although they may have the ability to put together strong evidence, they may not be able to select the best facts for advocacy and create a coherent message .Their evidence could therefore be of limited impact on government. Kachel (2017) asserted that the perception that books, libraries and librarians are no longer essential because the internet has all of the information students and educators need.

CONCLUSION

In a learning environment the ability of a child is anchored on reading which requires a school library to strengthen and develop the reading skills as he or she moves up the educational ladder. Hence the need for advocacy for government to cite school libraries and equip them with the vital information resources so as to improve academic performance in schools. If the advocacy efforts fail, don't give up. If the present legislators do not support the library, the next might have libraries as a major priority. Librarians should be visible online in this age of technology promoting library services. Librarians should be proactive and not reactive in everything that has to do with the publicity of library. It is recommended that government should make library its top priority in budget, so that adequate fund will be given to school libraries to make it well equipped and also build school libraries for the schools that do not have. Government should invest in this vital neglected asset the school library which is a tool for promoting national development.

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¹ **Boma T. David-West** (CLN) is of the Department of Library and Information Science, University Of Port Harcourt. She can be reached via email at boma.davidwest@uniport.edu.ng.

ⁱⁱ **Mary Mfon Bassey** (CLN) is of the Library Department, University of Uyo, Nigeria. She can be reached via email at princessmji@yahoo.com.