CONFERENCE PAPER

NO.6

Teacher-Librarian Collaboration in Developing Favourable Reading Culture in Nigerian Primary Schools

A Paper Presented at the 27th Annual Conference of the Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA) At University of lbadan, lbadan on 29 October - 2nd November 2012

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Abstract

This paper is an off-shoot from class discussion on the issue of poor reading ability and habit of primary school pupils. This discussion was in a course titled "School Information Systems and Services" taken by undergraduate students of Library and Information Science, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Two sets of students were used for this study. Fifty (50) students from the regular programme and seventy (70) from the part-time programme who are mostly teachers in their various schools were used for the study. These students were from different localities in the country; hence, they were a representation of all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The research was guided by three (3) questions which assisted in eliciting information that can be used to encourage the use of school media centres to develop a reading culture in Nigerian schools. Before a reading culture can be inculcated in children, books have to be made available. Suggestions were made on how teachers and librarians can collaborate in developing reading culture in school children. Prominent among them is that teachers should send children to the library for specific assignments and librarians should make resources available for the specific assignments. Prominent among them is that teachers should send children to the library for specific assignments and librarians should make resources available for the specific assignments. Parents were also found out to be vehicles through which reading in school children can be accelerated. At the end of this paper, a suggested list of supplementary readers was made for use in primary and secondary schools to develop reading culture in children.

INTRODUCTION

Most educationists and serious minded Nigerians have acknowledged the drastic decline in the Nigerian learners' performance at all levels. There is serious diminishing standard of attainment among learners right from primary to tertiary level of education. It is worrisome to have students even at tertiary level that can hardly construct good sentences let alone display the ability of independent learning and reasoning. Yet our schools have continued to ignore this by not paying attention to the major means of salvaging the situation-developing reading culture through the use of libraries. Reading culture is synonymous to reading interest. When children have interest in reading, they will be able to understand what teachers are teaching them, since they will always struggle to read it at all times.

Based on the assertion of Oyetunde and Umolu (1991), the role of the school in the reading development of children is a critical one. The school must regard its primary responsibility as that of ensuring that children acquire necessary reading skills. Since it is at primary school that the reading foundation is expected to be laid, this paper identifies the collaborative role of the teachers and librarians arousing and maintaining reading interest. Collaboration in the context of this study refers to teachers and librarians working hand in hand to the benefit of the school children. Teachers are expected to contact the school librarians, get to know the resources in the library and give children assignment to go and use those resources in the library.

The little effort that triggers academic excellence is the provision of school libraries. But according to the discussion with students who are also teachers in their

various schools; many schools do not know the value of libraries in schools hence libraries in the real sense of it are not found. The issue of provision of libraries in schools has lingered so long that teachers and librarians ought to team up to bring it to an end. Programmes such as story-hour or book-talk suggested by Elaturoti. (1990) or reviewing titles, section headings and photo captions in books as suggested by Igwe (2011) are library programmes and strategies that should be used in school libraries so as to build reading culture.

Several other strategies advanced by Edeghere (2001) which will assist to implement the policy of establishing school libraries include suggesting to library schools to train students to specialize on school librarianship, providing physical school libraries in schools and to providing library resources. These are laudable suggestions but there is implementation problem. The efforts of providing resources through UBE programme is being frustrated as we see books specially provided for schools and "not for sale" finding their way to the market. Students who took school information services course in the library school do not use it in the long run. Resources and professionals are key requirements for school library service in schools. These are not negotiable if the current low levels of proficiency in reading would be curbed.

While lamenting the general poor state of provision of library facilities and resources in most primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, Fadero (2007) in Igwe (2011) stressed that inadequate provision of libraries in schools is a general disease that is plaguing education in Nigeria. Education cannot be fully effective without the ability to read. Reading is an activity that occurs primarily in an effort to gain access to what has

been committed to a written form. The reader comes in contact with some written materials which could be short or long, simple or challenging, permanent or fleeting. Whatever the manner of the material, the reader's first concern is to gain an awareness of what has been committed to written form. The school librarian by virtue of his/her position and responsibility should be charged with this duty in collaboration with the teacher in the school.

Some schools refer to the library as a "resource room". According to Oyetunde and Umolu (1991), a resource room is a room where children with special needs can go to get some extra help in developing the skills in which they are weak. These children leave their classrooms sometimes during the day to work in the resource room under the supervision of a special education teacher to remedy that areas of weakness, reading inclusive. This special education teacher can be the teacher-librarian who will take over from where the class teacher stops and establish reading ability for the children.

The resources that can be acquired in the library (resource room) could be done by the librarian in collaboration with the teachers. The librarian will process and arrange the resources in such a way that it will attract users and therefore ignite the zeal of reading in them. Every reading materials cut across different strata of human existence which according to Aliyu and Daudu (2004) include:

- Religious materials
- Educational texts
- Correspondence papers
- Medial materials

- Legal documents
- Publication on diverse themes
- Notices and advertisements

A variety of these materials could be acquired for the different levels of pupils in the school and stored in the school library.

Reading culture could be developed at home if parents appreciate the value of reading. Parents are probably the most powerful agents of influence on every child because children spend a significant proportion of their working hours with their parents or guardians at early age. Aliyu and Daudu (2010) conducted a study on parents influence on cultivation of reading culture. The study reported among many things that physical facilities in a home can influence children's reading ability. By implication, children who live in houses that have special provision for study areas which double as a library excel more in reading and love for books than those who are from opposite houses. It is not the fault of such parents that don't have conducive physical environments for developing reading culture, but it will be their fault if they allow that condition to affect their children's reading ability. They can remedy this condition by supporting the school to establish libraries that can assist develop reading culture in their wards.

There is no doubt that reading culture is diminishing in the formal school system, that is why children can pass through primary school level without knowing how to read. This problem is further compounded by the absence of libraries in schools. With the efforts of government by providing books to schools through some parastatals such as

Universal Basic Education (UBE), the introduction of library fees and introduction of book policy by some state governments, libraries are still absent in most schools especially public schools. This study is aimed at finding out what happens to books provided to schools and why children still cannot read in spite of the provision of books by government.

Research Questions

The following questions were used in carrying out this research:-

1. What are the factors that are responsible for increasing reading culture among school children?
2. What specific steps can teachers and librarians take to encourage reading culture?
3. How can parents team up with schools to influence children's reading development?

By this study, it is hoped that teacher-librarians would identify:

- The factors responsible for low reading culture in Nigerian schools.
- Practical steps that teachers and librarians can take to encourage reading culture.
- The areas parents can team up with schools to influence the development of reading culture.

Methodology

A survey design was used to conduct this study. The population of the study was all students in the Department of Library and Information Science that offered the course titled "School Information Systems and Services" both at regular and part-time basis in 2011/2012 session and 2012 contacts sessions respectively. One hundred and twenty (120) students registered for the course – 50 regular and 70 part-time students.

A purposeful sampling technique was used to sample 30 students from regular and 50 from part-time making a total of 80 students who formed the sample of the study. To justify the use of part-time and regular students together, a verification exercise was carried out to see whether both sets of students had similar ability levels that a research of this nature can be carried out using them without being biased. It was found out that they could be used equally because the students were all 300 level students. They were all teachers in either primary or secondary schools, they were holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and all of them offered the course "School Information Systems and Services. Given that the students were from all the parts of Nigeria, they were a true reflection of the country.

A twenty-five (25) item questionnaire was drawn and used an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by senior colleagues in the Department of Library and Information Science and 18 items were left. These 18 items were finally used to collect data that was used for this study. The data collected was analyzed using percentage and presented in form of table.

Research Findings and Discussion

Eighty (80) copies of the questionnaire were administered and all were returned. That is, there was 100% response rate. This was due to the fact that the copies of the questionnaire were administered personally by the researcher to the students immediately after their examination.

Research Question: What are the factors that are responsible for increasing reading culture among school children?

The responses to this question were presented in Table 1

Table 1: Factors that can increase reading culture

Factors	Yes	%	No	%
Availability of libraries	28	30%	52	65%
Library hour	15	18.25%	65	81.25%
Adequacy of library hour	8	10%	72	90%
Sending children to the library	18	22.5%	62	77.5%

Four items were identified for the purpose of this study as factors that can increase reading culture if available in schools. If these items were adequately available in primary schools, there could be positive turnaround of reading culture in Nigeria. The result of the study shows that only 28 respondents representing 35% and there were libraries in their schools while 52 (65%) revealed that libraries were not available in their schools. Responses on whether library hour was part of the practice in the school, 65 respondents representing 81.25% stated that there was no library hour while 15 respondents (18.75%) said there was library hour. Of this number, 9 of them were private schools. On the adequacy of library hour, 8 respondents (10%) were satisfied with the period used as library hour and 72 (90%) were not satisfied. Another factor that when absence can contribute to poor reading culture is sending children to the library by teachers. The study revealed that only 18 respondents (22.5%) said teachers send children to the library while 62 (77.5%) did not.

The library is the only place where there are various resources that can encourage the development of reading culture. It is in this light that Oyetunde and Umolu (1991) recommended the establishment of resource rooms in schools. These resource rooms can be used as the school library.

Question 2: What specific steps can teachers and librarians take to encourage the development of favourable reading culture?

The responses to this question were splitted into two – steps taken by teachers and steps taken by the librarian. Since only 28 respondents indicated that there were libraries in their schools, only data from those respondents were analyzed.

Table 2: What Teachers asked children to do in the library.

Activities	**Frequency**			
	Regularly	**Occasionally**	**Not at all**	**Tota**
To read Newspapers	2	6	20	28
To find meaning of words	4	10	14	28
To find answers to questions from story books	3	8	17	28
To use library books for homework	8	10	10	28
To prepare themselves for debate programme	4	5	19	28
To carry out reading assignment	2	3	23	28

The highest activity in the library which teachers asked the children to perform was using books for home work as seen in Table 2, while the lowest was sending them to

the library to carry out reading assignment. The area of reading to prepare for debate was 4 regularly, 5 occasionally and 19 not at all. The regular and occasional preparation for debate was mostly done by teachers in private schools. The teachers in public schools did not prepare children for any debating programme hence they did not encourage them to read in the library for that purpose, Newspaper reading is one of the activities that can promote reading culture but most respondents stated that such materials were not available in the library hence only 2 respondents said teachers send children to read newspapers regularly while 6 send them occasionally and 20 respondents said teachers did not send children to read newspapers at all. Teachers should identify some columns in the daily newspapers and encourage children to read them even if it would be old newspapers. The method of identifying columns in old newspaper was used in a research by Aliyu and Daudu (2010)and it was discovered that it prompted children to develop interests in reading newspapers:

Table 3: What librarians do to promote reading activities.

Activities by Librarians	Frequency		
	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all
Acquire story books	2	15	11
Acquire newspapers	1	3	24
Conduct children round the library	5	6	17
Provide story telling hour	6	10	12
Provide read aloud programme	3	5	20
Give assistance to children for their reading assignment	6	8	14
Give loan of books to complete home work	3	6	19
Provide Reading Reward Schemes to select for reading	2	5	21
Guide children on which books to select for reading	3	5	20

Based on Table 3 only 1 respondent stated that the school library acquired newspaper regularly, 3 occasionally and 11 did not acquire newspapers at all. Of the 28 schools that have libraries, only 2 acquired story books regularly, 15 acquired them occasionally while 11 did not acquire story at all. The highest activities that librarians performed in this study which could promote the development of reading culture were storytelling and giving assistance to children for their reading assignment. These activities were carried out regularly and occasionally.

Guiding children on which materials to select for reading is very important but only 3 respondents said that it was done regularly, 5 said they did it occasionally while 20

respondents said children were not guided at all. The level of performing all the activities that could bring about development of reading culture was generally low. The school library according to Tiemensa (2006) is uniquely designed to support classroom acivity, teach library skills, provide supplemental reading materials, reinforce teachers' programmes and offer casual reading material for learners. But the libraries in this study have seriously fallen below this position.

Research Question 3: How can parents team up with schools to influence children's development of reading culture?

Several opinions were brought to answer this question by respondents. The PTA of a school should be at the fore-front of making this collaboration work. The PTA can encourage parents to sponsor "rewards for reading scheme". Parents can donate books, old newspapers and magazines to schools for use in the school libraries. Above all, parents need to create a conducive atmosphere in their homes for children to develop love for books and reading culture. The librarian can be given opportunity to give a talk to parents during PTA meetings to that effect. Respondents suggested that parents could get involved in developing reading culture in children by facilitating the engagement of home tutors who would visit their wards on regular basis, such tutors could organize lessons structured to complement the efforts of the regular school teachers. During such sessions, attention could be concentrated on reading aloud which can assist learners with correct pronunciation. Infact in many ways, parents have been described as legitimate vehicles through which reading in the young ones could be accelerated.

Conclusion

This research attempted finding out how teachers and librarians can collaborate to develop reading culture in primary school children. Authorities in the field of school librarianship agreed that the school library is capable of increasing academic excellence through the provision of library resources and services. However, the findings of the research revealed that libraries are not available in most of the schools use in the study. Where libraries are available; teachers did not recognize the role librarians can play to ensure that reading culture is developed in children. The research showed areas of collaboration of teachers, librarians and parents and stressed the need for teachers and librarians to work hand in hand to ensure that children make use of the library to read newspapers, find meaning of words, find answers to questions from story books, do home work, prepare for debate and carryout reading assignment. These are factors that can really encourage development of reading culture.

Recommendations

The following recommendations if followed will improve the teacher-librarian collaboration in developing reading culture in schools.

i. Qualified librarians should be employed to manage school libraries. By the nature of their training, they will device means of collaboration with teachers.

ii. Resource rooms in schools should be converted to school libraries.

iii. Back-set of newspapers could be brought to the library for the sake of introducing children to newspaper reading.

iv. Teachers should be encouraged by the school librarian to send children to read the newspapers in the library.

v. Parents should be encouraged to donate their old newspapers to the school library.

vi. The school librarian should work in collaboration with PTA to promote reading culture by celebrating world book day, children's book week and national poetry day.

vii. Teachers and librarians should involve parents in trying to develop reading culture in children by requesting for feedback on the reading progress of their wards.

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