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Financial Management... Issues of Financial Allocation and their  
Consequences... How to Design and Develop Projects for Exhibition...

**ALSO** Principal's Administrative and Leadership Functions. The  
Importance of School Library. Sensitizing Students' Learning of  
Mathematics...

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# *Nigeria Educational Forum*

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## The Importance of the School Library in the Teaching and Learning Environment

H. M. Daudu

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*In order to emphasize the importance of the school library in a teaching and learning environment, the writer has taken pains to redefine the concept of a school library and stated factors which have necessitated such a redefinition. Then she outlines some objectives of school library. She has also pointed out the need for adequate provision of learning materials in the library. Emphasis has also been put on the indispensable role of the teacher in helping to shape healthy attitudes in the students on the use of the sources of information that may be available in the library.*

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### Introduction:

#### What is a school library?

When mention is made about school library what readily comes to mind is a library in a nursery school, or primary school or secondary library stocked mainly with books and that such a library is peripheral to the school curriculum. Mohammed (1998) points out that this concept of the school library has gradually changed over the years as a result of the changing roles of the library in schools as a by-product of increase in information needs of learners and teachers and the increase in the variety of information resources. Egbule (1931) and Mohammed (1998) submit that it is no longer fashionable to talk of school library. The modern terminologies include 'Instructional Material Centre (IMC), Educational Resource Centre (ERC) and Workshop for the Subjects of the school Curriculum.

Several development factors have been responsible for the new designations of the school library. A description of some of these factors will help to make the point clearer.

1. A number of documents in modern times are electronically produced instead of the traditional printed matter. Electronic production of materials seems to be better than the traditional printing in terms of portability, usability, space for storage or convenience.
2. As a result of present day advancement in educational technology, modern philosophy of education put great emphasis on the use of multi-media teaching and learning.
3. The ideal library collection is more than books, journals and newspapers; there are films, cassettes, slides and computer software. It may sound rather too ambitious to talk about computer software in school libraries but we must move with the times. Remember this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the new millennium.

4. The library is meant to render all-embracing services to the community it serves. The school library exists to serve the academic needs of the school as well as its social and cultural needs. This calls for the provision of multi-media resources that would enhance teaching, learning and personal research.

#### **Objectives of a School Library:**

It is necessary to identify some of the objectives of a library in a school setting. A clear knowledge of these objectives will help participants of this programme appreciate the important role of school libraries for effective teaching and learning. Find below an outline of some objectives of a school library. A school library is established in order to:

- support and enrich the curriculum which the school operates;
- provide basic collections that will help to broaden the learner's educational experiences beyond the limit of his classroom experience.
- motivate the learner to read for pleasure and not because he has an assignment to submit at a given time or a test and examination to write;
- cultivate the habit of independent reading in student whether or not the teacher asks him to do so;
- provide teachers with a variety of resource materials that will help them prepare their classroom lessons.
- cater for the diversities of interests of member of the school community by making revision for a variety of resources from which selection may be made;
- keep teachers and students informed of latest developments in their subject areas because knowledge grows particularly in this modern age; and
- teach library users how to respect public property, the rights of others and how to take care of books to keep them from tearing.

#### **The importance of the school library:**

In tracing the historical development of the Nigerian School Library Association, Elaturoti (1998) enumerated some programmes embarked upon by the association which have brought into realization the aims of the association. One of the important programmes is the provision of guidelines, which will enforce the provision of libraries in schools by governments. The Nigerian School Library Association, in realization of the importance of school libraries, aims at encouraging the establishment of school libraries. Without school libraries it is impossible for school to make meaningful impact in the learning ability of students.

There is no question in the minds of educators today about the growing need and importance of the library in the education of children and youth. It is evident that sources of information are needed today than were needed in previous years. The school library serves as the greatest of all aids to teaching because it forms the sparks of information that pass from teacher to pupil/student. This is the sole purpose of the school library.

The school library is to provide books and other learning materials for the pupils and staff of the school. Its resources must relate not only to the expressed and anticipated

requirements of all subject areas and special interests of the school, but also be able to satisfy the demand for books and materials for personal and individual use.

Secondary school pupils are expected not only to seek information, but to give consideration to it and to apply their new-found knowledge to the work at hand. They are encouraged to form their own opinions and to express them. Every effort should also be made to encourage the habit of reading which can give satisfaction for the rest of the student's life.

In Egypt, way back in 1963, according to Tewfik (1972:217), some inspectors of school libraries recommended that "the ratio of books to the number of pupils in..... Libraries must not be less than 5:1 and that in schools with more than 300 pupils, a full time librarian must be appointed". This goes a long way to show how that country recognised the importance of the library in education. The significance of libraries is not only applicable to pupils or students but also to staff. In fact teachers have to appreciate the significance of libraries before they can encourage students.

The role of the teacher:

It has been rightly observed that Nigerians are not a reading audience. Reading materials may be made available but may remain under-utilized because the users have not developed a good reading habit. There are practical ways through which the teacher can promote good reading habits among his pupils or students. Some examples are listed below:

1. Chapter summary - This is not in literature alone. The method can be adopted for other disciplines.
2. Reading reports - Mostly in the sciences.
3. Comparing and contrasting views of different writers on a given topic or subject matter. This will encourage reading of several related textbooks.
4. Answering questions that are based on particular points from several related textbooks.

The sad thing is that when one looks at the reality on the ground, many students do not know how to read and write well. It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to help such students promote the desired reading habits. There is no short cut to it. One cannot learn well without knowing how to read well.

The teacher is a source of inspiration and guidance for meaningful learning. He is, therefore, indispensable in the promotion of learning. In the consideration of a good educational environment, the teacher ranks first in the order of importance. The second consideration in the order of importance is the learner. Even though he is not an empty vessel that needs to be refilled, the learner needs to be properly guided to enable him to learn effectively. No other person is more qualified than the teacher to meet this need. The third consideration in the order of importance is the world of knowledge or sources of information. Sources of information abound everywhere in the learner's environment but he may not perceive them. He needs the assistance of the teacher to introduce these sources to him and teach him how to utilize them as learning tools.

It may sound strange but it is strongly felt that the time has come for teachers to organize remedial programmes in the secondary schools to help students improve their

reading skills. Otherwise, we shall continue to teach and graduate half or non-literate school leavers. Dike (1998:137) opined that reading is acknowledged as a basic skill for information seeking and life long education. Therefore, it is only when students can read well that they can acquire this basic skill.

Another step to take in improving the reading ability of students and encouraging them to make proper use of the library is that teachers should discourage teaching and learning through handouts and copying of notes alone. Self learning through the above named methods must be encouraged at all cost because of the obvious advantages. Oladele (1987) cites several sources to show that students who have been guided to develop healthy skills through the selection and use of learning resources often demonstrate superior academic abilities than students who have not had similar privileges.

The quality and the frequency of the use of learning resources by the learner depend on the competence of the teachers to guide him appropriately in the wise use of the available resources. Observation has shown that a teacher's reading habit and use of library resources affect his ability to motivate his students to engage in similar activities. The teacher who regularly uses the learning resources in the school library will certainly acquire knowledge of the subject content. He will also discover a variety of learning materials from which he may select to enrich his classroom teaching preparations.

#### The Need for Information Literacy

For purposeful teaching and learning to take place, it is felt that both the teacher and the learner must develop the ability to recognize a need for information, to retrieve the required information, and to evaluate and utilize it effectively. The American Library Association as cited by Amucheazi (1998), submits that information literate people know how to find, evaluate and use information effectively to solve a particular problem or take a decision irrespective of the sources(s) of the information. In fact, it is often expressed that education is knowing where to get information when one needs it. This is true of both teachers and learners. But, it must begin with the teacher who is trained to guide the learning process.

It is felt that the teacher ought to transfer his acquired information literacy to his students immediately they come in contact with learning skills at every level of learning. The complaint is often, "We do not have these learning resources in the school libraries" (where one exists). The situation in some schools is very pathetic. There is nothing one can refer to as a library or library learning resources. How may the situation be improved? - Teachers should continue to request for these facilities from their principals who will in turn present the need to the state governments.

Teachers could influence the improvement of the situation by helping to establish a functional Parents Teacher Association which can make contribution towards provision of these needs. It is believed that in this new millennium, learners will be ushered into an information age that will require them to analyse and interpret information to present it to others in various forms. They will also be required to form opinions, make judgment and decisions from divergent sources of information. In order to actualize this dream, the teacher has an important role to play.

#### The contribution of resources materials to qualitative education:

The library is a gold mine for teachers and pupils because it is a store house of organised instructional materials, the use of which accelerates and broadens teaching and learning experiences. As a reading, listening and viewing centre, the library remains a basic and an indispensable requirement for quality education. The continuous use of its materials by teachers and students, keep them abreast with modern developments in science and technology and other fields of learning.

Studies have shown that learning resources contribute immensely to the quality of teaching and learning. Making reference to such studies Fagbeja (1987) submits that findings of evaluative studies have confirmed superior reading skills and note-taking among secondary school students who are exposed to well equipped libraries. Similarly, students in schools with good library facilities are reported to be significantly better in the area of general knowledge and use of reference materials.

Fagbeja (1987) also cites a study which has proved that there is significant difference in academic performance between children exposed to library education programmes and their counterparts who have been denied such facilities. It has also been reported that library education bridges the gap between academically and socially advantaged and disadvantaged children. The report of the studies referred to above have far reaching implications for Gombe State in particular and Nigeria in general. They imply that provision of appropriate learning resources will improve the quality of school products that are turned out year after year. The learner should acquire the skill of exploiting learning resources for effective and productive learning. He should also acquire the skill of inquiry that is concerned with how to find information, where to find information and how to use such information. Information for effective teaching and learning is stored in library resources in their various forms.

#### Conclusion:

Perhaps it is not new to state that the library is an indispensable factor for effective teaching and learning in the school setting. It is evident that there is an increasing need for variety of sources of information to be made available to teachers and students. It is felt that participant at this programme will not relent efforts to encourage the establishment and equipping of libraries in their schools since the library is the most important aid to teaching and learning. Learning can effectively take place where there is information and the library is the source of information. It is hoped that teachers will continue to teach by their own example how students should make the best use of library resources to enhance their learning experiences.

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