



# School Libraries and Development of Library Skills in Nigerian Secondary Education System

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Received 25<sup>th</sup> January 2015, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015, accepted 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015

## Abstract

*For qualitative learning and study, the indispensability of information cannot be over-emphasized. The development in information and communication technology brought about explosion in information resources. Information Literacy skills is the basic tools the students need in order to effectively harness and evaluate these resources. This paper deliberates on the role of information literacy skills in students' study and research; it looks at the concept of information literacy skills; rationale for information literacy skills, potentials of information literacy skills, methods of inculcating information literacy skills and the challenges of inculcating information literacy skills in students.*

**Keywords:** School libraries, library skills, secondary education.

## Introduction

The road to a nation's greatness is through education, which is acquired through reading and study<sup>1</sup>. Effective reading on the other hand is dependent on the acquisition and utilization of relevant skills and more importantly, on the ability of the students to explore the reading materials that abound in the school library. Library skills constitute a fundamental tool for study and learning from the very foundation of formal education. These skills, according to UNESCO<sup>2</sup>, are one of the basic learning skills required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to make informed decisions and to continue learning.

It has been observed that the most important learning is learning to learn and the most important knowledge is self-knowledge<sup>3</sup>. Teaching students how to learn has become a major theme of modern education and a vital tool for educational reform. In the library where different information resources abound, students need to develop the skills to access, acquire and use information from a variety of the resources<sup>4</sup>. Library skills are necessary skills that are utilitarian in every aspect of a person's life. For students, library skills will lead to independent and student-centred learning rather than dependence on the teacher to provide answers to questions or problems that they encounter. This in turn creates a greater responsibility towards their own learning which will help them become dynamic learners and thinkers who are creative, analytical and efficient instead of mere regulators of facts<sup>5</sup>. Acquiring library skills will help students to become proficient, lifelong learners and subsequently benefit them in both personal and professional endeavours.

## Conceptual Definition

**School Library:** school libraries are libraries that are found in pre-tertiary institutions such as nursery, primary and secondary schools with the mission of contributing to the intellectual development of pupils and students. It involves collection of books and other learning materials organized by trained professionals and placed in one or two big rooms in the school for the use of the pupils and teachers for learning, recreational activities, personal interest and interpersonal relationships of children in school. These enable the school library to fulfill functions which can be distilled as follows: i. to encourage the development of skill in reading, ii. to prompt reading habits to some literacy appreciation, iii. to sort for subject information centre and support the school curriculum and iv. to inculcate intellectual development.

It is expected that all who are connected to the school libraries should have a clear understanding of the role it is expected to perform in the school system. School libraries can serve as a resource centres, learning laboratories, teaching agencies, a service agencies, a guidance agencies and as centre for recreational reading, viewing and listening<sup>6</sup>. i. As a resource centre, the school library is expected to acquire and organize for use, print and non-print materials suitable for the needs of its users. ii. As a learning laboratory, it is expected to provide materials to support teaching and encourage or help students to find out for themselves. iii. As a teaching agency, it teaches students how to find information and it stimulates new interests in them. It should also aid the class teacher through the use of audio visual and library-directed assignments. iv. As a service agency, all libraries are service agencies and the school libraries should specifically offer services to students and teachers. Services will include reading facilities, lending services, reference services, etc. v. As a guidance agency, it should help

the students to learn to study effectively (learn how to learn) and provide assistance to students in exploring wide varieties of materials. vi. As a centre for recreational reading, viewing and listening; because the school library is expected to provide fiction materials, newspapers and magazines, it serves as a centre for recreational reading. Thus, it helps to develop the reading habit in pupils. With the provision of video tapes, films, records, cassettes, etc. the library could become a centre where pupil can relax, view and listen and at the same time learn.

In summary the school library reflects and supports the philosophy of the school, it shares and implements the school's aims and objectives; it is totally involved in teaching and learning.

**Library Skills:** Library skills, according to UNESCO school libraries manifesto, are skills provided by libraries to enable students and other users to become effective users of library resources regardless of format or medium. Herring, quoted in Mole, posits that library skills are skills students need in locating, retrieving, organizing and evaluating information<sup>7</sup>. Report on undergraduate education identifies the need for more active learning whereby students become self-directed and independent learners who are prepared for lifelong learning. Library skills, according to Dike<sup>8</sup>, is expected to empower the students to achieve various goals in the pursuit of academic excellence in the following ways: i. It exposes the student to varieties of materials to extend their knowledge and meet their needs for recreation inspiring, reading, viewing and listening skills. ii. It develops in the students the positive attitude towards learning, habit of enquiry and skills of self-directed study, which afford them the opportunity to study independently. iii. It encourages the use of learning resource materials by every student at school and borrowing them to use at home. iv. It assists the students to develop required reading skills. v. It helps in developing the habit of reading for pleasure to gather experience especially through imaginative literature.

In summary, the aim of library skills is to use the techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information materials and tools to solve problems. Library skills can be viewed as a situation whereby a person has the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively and efficiently the needed information in the library.

**Secondary Education:** In today's world, secondary education has a vital mission - one which combines the policy peculiarities of being at the same time terminal and preparatory, compulsory and post-compulsory, uniform and diverse, general and vocational. Secondary education is a gateway to the opportunities and benefits of economic and social development. The broad goal of secondary education shall prepare the individual for useful living within the society and higher education. He wrote in specific terms that secondary education shall: i. Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status,

religious or ethnic background. ii. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles. iii. Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades. iv. Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage. v. Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence. vi. Foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity. vii. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the view and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens and viii. Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial commercial and economic development.

### Rationale for Library Skills

Research has shown that most of the new entrants in high institutions of learning in Africa, particularly Nigeria do not have good reading habits. They lack knowledge of the library organizational pattern and find it difficult visiting the library thereby necessitating the need for the teacher-librarians to teach the library skills in order to make the library user-friendly. In a nutshell, the rationale for library skills is to make library users more receptive to library usage and thus increase their competence in independent library usage for academic excellence. This is supported by the findings of Elaturoti that there is a positive and significant relationship between knowledge of library use and academic standing<sup>9</sup>.

Secondly, the unprecedented explosion in admission figures of secondary education, made individual assistance to library users difficult if not impossible. Therefore there is need to inculcate library skills to the students to enable them make effective use of the library independently.

Thirdly, the geometric growth of knowledge and the resultant proliferation of all types of published and unpublished materials which a school library collects in order to support teaching and learning have enormously aggravated the problem of bibliographic access to library-based information resources. Therefore it is important that library users are educated in searching and mastery of every information sources that suit their needs

### Qualities of one who possesses library skills

The following are qualities of one who possesses library skills: i. Has the knowledge of the library as a place and its organizational structure, i.e the way books are classified and arranged on the shelves. ii. Has a positive attitude to information searching with stimulus to make use of the resources at different libraries to pursue studies on their own where ever they find themselves. iii. Ability to locate needed information effectively and efficiently. iv. Accessing or retrieving the needed material

from the library resources. v. Ability to evaluate information and its sources critically i.e. knowledge of formal and visual presentation, how to make notes, summaries, outlines. vi. Ability to undertake individualized learning leading to lifelong learning. vii. Understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information access and use information ethically and legally.

Invariably someone who possesses library skill is said to be one who has learnt how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use it in a way that others can learn from them<sup>10</sup>. No doubt, students that have acquired library skills are those who have been prepared for study.

### Benefits of Library Skills to students

The need for library skills in the students' reading and study can be summarized as follows:

**Key to the use of the library resources:** Teaching the library skills to students makes them competent in using a well organized library for finding needed information and information resources. Such skills enhance the use of the library resources. There is no doubt that without skills in the use of the library, location of books in the shelves, use of indexes and abstract etc, students will only wallow aimlessly in the library when it comes to location of library resources and leave the library with the impression that there is nothing of use to them there.

**Ensuring Adequate Coverage of the Curriculum:** Library skills no doubt enable students to integrate the library and its resources with the curriculum. By acquiring skills in the use of library and having knowledge of the content of their curriculum, students are equipped to consult relevant library materials in line with curriculum content and requirement.

**Enhancing Independent Learning:** Library skills encourage the habit of personal and individual reading and study. With such skills, information needs are satisfied independently as the learner seeks the information he needs and organizes it in a way that is useful to him.

**Time Saving in Information Search:** With library skills, students find needed information with relative ease and less period of time and have enough time for their other curricular works. The result is greater academic performance by the students.

**Enhancing Lifelong Learning:** Library skills place students in a better stead in future when they come in contact with other types of libraries as they would be able to use with little or no problem, any document or materials found in them. This is especially important because if students are to engage in lifetime of learning, they will need the skills for learning

independently when the teacher and the school are no longer there to teach them. Similarly, developing the skills for finding and using information is more relevant than trying to impart all the information students might need for a lifetime because even within an individual's lifetime, information learnt in school may be discarded or outdated and new knowledge acquired. Knowledge changes and increases but skills for finding and using information are of lifelong value.

**Enhancing and Encouraging Information Literacy Skills:** Library skills encourage and enhance the development of information literacy skills. For instance, making searches in a computer system requires knowledge of search terms, keywords, subject terms, call numbers, shelf references etc. Library skills are *sine qua non* with information literacy skills. This is crucial especially in this information age.

### Methods of Inculcating Library Skills

Library skills could be inculcated through the following ways by a teacher librarian or school librarian:

**Library Instruction:** This is instruction given to students to help them make effective use of the library in handling their information needs. Aguolu and Aguolu posit that it relates to teaching how to make effective use of library resources whether through formal teaching, individualized instruction or tutorials or even seminars<sup>11</sup>.

**Library Orientation:** Library orientation is one of the ways by which the student acquires library skills. It consists of introduction of the librarian to the new students, explaining the collection, presentation of slides on the organization and layout of the library, guided tour of the library and distribution of well written pamphlets that give details of existing library rules and regulations.

**Bibliographic Aids and Guides:** These are user support materials which includes handbooks, printed guides and signs, leaflet and information sheets. They are specially prepared and produced to give guidelines to users on library arrangement and use and to influence users perceptions and behaviour about libraries thereby improving their skills and efficiency in information search in libraries.

Library skills should be directed towards lifelong learning. It should enable users to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, assume greater control over their learning and develop a cognitive approach to learning, making them conscious of the explicit actions required for gathering, analyzing and using information.

### Challenges of Inculcating Library Skills

Inculcating library skills in the students is faced with the following challenges: i. Most teacher-librarians are not

professionally trained in library management and consequently knowledge of library skills. They could neither process nor organize the library materials nor impart the basic library skills to the students. Some secondary schools in Nigeria do not even have teacher-librarian at all. ii. Many children lack access to effectively organized school and public libraries where they can use and borrow reading materials. Lack of physical access to library materials no doubt hinders effective teaching of the skills and their use. iii. Student's lukewarm attitude and disinclination to use the library may appear to be the greatest problem hindering effective teaching of library skills. iv. The government and schools are yet to see the need to introduce and entrench the teaching of library skills in secondary schools.

### Recommendation

i. Library services should be made physically accessible to all members of the school community. ii. A policy on the school library programme and programme of library services has to be formulated in which the teaching of library skills must be entrenched<sup>12</sup>. iii. Schools should introduce a curriculum for library studies and teach it as a core subject to the students in classrooms until graduation. iv. Teacher-librarians should make library use pleasurable and voluntary. Consideration must be given to all types of readers. v. Students should also be taught the application of computers and similar technologies in the use of the library as they are some of the resources that make library use pleasurable and interesting.

### Conclusion

The children of today are supposed to develop library skills and appreciate the values of books and libraries. Students are to develop the spirit of inquiry, acquire a sense of judgment' and discerning character. The promotion of library skills in students to develop a range of experiences in learning about library resources and their ability to access, retrieve, organize has some challenges. The paper solicits for creation of well-equipped libraries, provision of information resources and provision of professional staff in Nigerian school system.

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