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THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Due to technological advancements, Nigerian school libraries need to adapt to meet students' information needs in the digital era. This paper examines the role of school libraries in Nigeria in the digital age. School libraries in Nigeria are expected to play various roles in enhancing academic activities in primary and secondary schools by serving as hubs for teaching digital skills, providing resources and spaces, curriculum development, and personalized learning support. Additionally, they must engage students through digital platforms and virtual learning environments to promote lifelong learning. To enhance their role in the digital age, school libraries should establish digital libraries, and automate resources and services, despite challenges like lack of infrastructure, funding, digital literacy skills, and staff shortages. Library management and policymakers must prioritize school libraries in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Changing, Digital Age, Schools, School Libraries, and Role

Introduction

Acquiring basic education by citizens in any nation is crucial for enhancing living standards, health, gender equality, and peace. According to Flexisap Foundation (2024) education system can significantly impact the Nigeria's economic growth and development. Access to education can equip citizens with necessary skills and knowledge to compete in the global economy, Nigeria can attract foreign investment, generate employment opportunities, and ultimately

alleviate poverty. Despite its significance, millions of children globally struggle with literacy. The World Bank (2020) reported that approximately 250 million children cannot read or write even after three years of schooling. To address this issue, strategic reforms and interventions at all education levels are essential. Additionally, well-equipped libraries in every school are necessary for improving learning outcomes.

The significance of school libraries in Nigerian primary and secondary schools is paramount. They play a crucial role in helping pupils, students, staff, and the local community acquire new knowledge and skills to enhance their learning and personal growth, fostering a culture of lifelong learning. By offering resources and services, school libraries guarantee that all pupils and students have equal access to materials regardless of their social status. As stated by Oyetola and Adio (2020), a school library is a vital resource that supports educational programs, aids in the teaching and learning process, and provides materials to cater to diverse needs while promoting reading and learning.

To support the educational programs of the schools they serve, school libraries in Nigeria are expected to provide various resources and services to pupils or students such as providing teaching and learning resources, provision of study space, mentoring students, teaching information literacy skills, and providing tutoring services. Ubegu (2006) stated that school libraries should provide access to information resources, expert professional support to facilitate thorough and accurate use of all school library resources, access to school library materials, and service to the community. In the past, these resources and services were provided using only traditional mediums such as the availability of printed information resources and a physical reading space.

There is no doubt that Information and Communication Technology has been integrated in the nature, scope, strategies and policies of school educational system all over the world. For libraries to adapt to these changes in education, there is a need to design their resources and services in accordance with current technological trends. . Kimani (2020) maintained that school libraries in the digital age can be small in size, exponentially scale up in content, and yet be made available to unlimited users at the click of a mouse at any time of the day. The relevance of school libraries in the digital age cannot be overemphasized. School libraries play a crucial role

they promoting information literacy, ensuring pupils and students are critical thinkers, and providing access to vast information without any boundaries. This paper therefore examines the role of school libraries in the digital age in Nigeria.,

The Role of School Libraries in the Digital Age

There has been a shift in the use of traditional methods in accessing education in primary and secondary schools to increase the use of technology in the classroom worldwide. Technology access has changed how schools operate and transformed student learning experiences. Haleem et al. (2022) highlighted that Information technology is a key driver of education reforms. The introduction of new technology-assisted learning tools like mobile devices, smartboards, MOOCs, tablets, laptops, simulations, and dynamic visualizations has reshaped education in schools. As the educational landscape in primary and secondary schools transforms, school libraries need to play new roles in enhancing academic activities. The following are the roles school libraries are expected to play in the digital age.

- School libraries can function as hubs for teaching digital literacy skills to students. It is crucial for students to learn how to assess information sources online, effectively use online resources, and navigate digital tools and platforms. According to Wordertsadik (2024), school libraries play a key role in guiding students through the vast online information landscape. Every Nigerian student should be adept at locating, evaluating, and utilizing online information. However, Diepriba (2024) found that digital literacy skills among physical and health education students in Bayelsa State secondary schools are lacking.
- Nigerian school libraries are expected to offer a variety of digital resources like e-textbooks, educational websites, multimedia materials, and database subscriptions to support learning. They should also provide tools like computers, tablets, screens, and projectors to enhance the educational experience. School librarians can access free educational websites such as Howstuffworks and oxfordcivil to provide information resources. Additionally, subscribing to databases like National Geographic Kids, Credo Source, Pabble Go, and Bigfuture can further enrich the resources available to students.

- **Provision of Spaces:** School libraries are expected to provide a conducive environment for students to engage in digital projects, create multimedia presentations, and foster collaboration. In a study by Shafie et al. (2012), environmentally friendly school libraries were identified as key resource centers for nurturing human capital among Malaysia's youth. The research highlighted significant differences in various dimensions, such as the presence of efficient staff, a comfortable study environment, access to online resources, and the necessity of well-trained, full-time librarians. Additionally, Ashley (2016) explored how school library spaces can cater to the evolving needs of learners in the 21st century in Iowa. Interviews revealed that features like a welcoming atmosphere, cozy seating, and diverse activities such as board games and makerspace materials are crucial for student engagement. The study emphasized the importance of adaptable furniture, natural light, noise control, and an overall expansion of physical space.
- **Curriculum Development:** Librarians in Nigerian school libraries should collaborate with teachers and policymakers to develop curriculum. This includes integrating digital and traditional resources into the curriculum and giving students access to current information resources to improve their learning.
- **Providing Personalized Learning Support:** School libraries are expected to offer personalized assistance to students by aiding them in finding resources aligned with their interests, learning styles, and abilities. School librarians also have the responsibility of teaching students how to independently utilize a variety of resources and digital tools. Webber et al. (2024) conducted a study on librarians' perspectives regarding the diverse ways they support enhancing pupils' reading and personal development in 18 High Schools in Scotland. However, there is limited research focusing on high schools. This study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 18 practitioners overseeing school library services in 18 geographically dispersed high schools in Scotland. The research findings revealed that school librarians in the study area ensure students develop a love for reading, support diverse reading activities, ensure the book selection reflects the school community, align reading materials with pupils' contemporary lives, support personal development, broaden pupils' worldview through books, assist in various aspects of pupils' lives, provide support for minority students, create a safe and social space, and promote pupil autonomy.

- Professional Development: Among the responsibilities of school librarians is to enhance the professional growth of teachers in schools. It is their duty to seek out conferences, seminars, and webinar opportunities relevant to teachers' interests for them to participate in. These opportunities can be communicated to teachers through emails, text messages, and various social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. Additionally, organizing online training for teachers is crucial.
- Supporting Learning: School librarians can enrich students' learning experiences by ensuring access to a range of print and electronic resources, teaching students how to search and evaluate information sources, providing quiet and convenient study spaces, offering group study areas to promote teamwork and enhance communication skills through collaborative assignments. In Nigeria, school libraries can establish book clubs to encourage student reading. Ebizie et al. (2022) explored the role of teacher-librarians in classroom instructional management in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study findings indicate that the role of teacher-librarians in classroom instructional management includes collaborating with staff to prioritize information literacy outcomes, engaging in curriculum planning and school curriculum committees, raising staff awareness about the importance of students acquiring information skills, promoting resource-based learning, and monitoring students' development as information users systematically.
- Engaging the Community: School librarians should also involve the community, including parents and the local community where their school is located. Workshops and training sessions can be organized on accessing, utilizing, and evaluating information resources, particularly those available online.
- Digital Education: School librarians play a crucial role in educating Nigerian students about responsible online behavior. Students need to understand privacy issues, cyberbullying, online safety, copyright concerns, and plagiarism.
- Bridging the Digital Divide: Nigerian school libraries can bridge the digital gap by providing computers, tablets, internet access, conducting workshops and training sessions to teach effective online tool usage, offering electronic resource access, and providing virtual learning services.
- Promoting Digital Entertainment: Digital entertainment involves using electronic devices such as computers and smartphones for amusement and enjoyment. School libraries can

subscribe to digital books, games, and streaming platforms offering educational and entertaining content like documentaries, movies, digital newspapers, magazines, online games, and platforms for digital art creation, music, video editing, podcasts, and web series on various topics like history and culture for students to download, listen to, and watch at their convenience.

Steps for School Libraries to Enhance Their Role in the Digital Era

To effectively fulfill their role in the digital age, school libraries must undertake several essential steps. Firstly, they need to address the issue of space. It is crucial to provide sufficient and accessible space to accommodate both physical and virtual resources and facilities. This not only encourages student visits but also facilitates resource utilization. Additionally, a well-designed space can promote learning and collaboration. According to Merga (2021), school libraries can serve as safe and comfortable spaces for students.

Secondly, school library resources and facilities must be overseen by qualified librarians. As highlighted by Pattansheti (2013), school librarians must possess a range of skills, including proficiency in information technology, familiarity with communication and networking technology, understanding of various database types, expertise in library automation, knowledge of e-resources and web-based resources, engagement with library networks consortiums, adeptness in using information retrieval tools and web-based services, ability to create digital content, awareness of open educational resources, familiarity with content management systems, proficiency in e-learning tools and technology, capability in designing library websites, knowledge of multimedia and social media tools, and staying updated on recent trends in information technology, digital resources, and digital libraries.

Thirdly, there should be availability of a digital library. A digital school library can be defined as a library utilizing digital technology to offer access to information resources and services. School libraries must have digital libraries to provide students and teachers access to a vast array of information resources not found in print. Kirmani (2021) suggests that school libraries should

procure digital libraries equipped with multimedia technology, a hands-on computer lab, interactive whiteboard technology, educational software, and laptops.

Fourthly, for school libraries to effectively fulfill their role in the digital age, automation is essential. Aghikuzzaman (2023) defines library automation as the use of advanced technology and software solutions to streamline and enhance library operations and services. An automated school library can efficiently acquire, catalog, search, retrieve, and download school information resources for students.

Fifthly, Engagement and Communitation; School libraries can engage with users, policy makers and school management by showcasing new information resources and services, maintaining an active social media presence (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) , develop a user friendly website, establish book clubs and students advisory groups. These steps are important for fostering a supportive learning environment and to showcase the activities of the library to government and school management

Lastly, prioritization of the school library by the school management, policy makers staff, and users is crucial. Prioritizing the school library ensures it receives adequate attention in terms of resource provision. Staff and users must recognize the importance of the school library to fully utilize its resources. Without this priority, the library may struggle to keep pace with evolving roles in supporting academic activities. Kimani (2021) explains that the prioritization of school libraries by management and users depends on factors such as existing infrastructure, teaching staff quality, student social background, and financial constraints.

Challenges faced by Nigerian School Libraries in Adapting to the Digital Era

Nigerian school libraries encounter various challenges in adapting to the digital era, affecting information and resource provision. One challenge is insufficient funds in government and private schools to invest in advanced technology like computers, tablets, and Internet access. Diyaolu and Ologundu (2019) assessed library services in selected government primary schools, highlighting the lack of funds as a significant challenge hindering effective service delivery.

Moreover, limited access to technology facilities and poor internet connectivity pose challenges in the digital era. Inadequate access to technology and internet can hamper service delivery in school libraries, limiting students' access to digital resources for academic enhancement and impacting library operations such as resource acquisition, organization, circulation, and management.

Additionally, the lack of digital skills among librarians can impede service delivery. Insufficient digital skills may hinder librarians in utilizing digital tools for information search, resource management, and guiding students and staff on digital literacy. Furthermore, inadequate qualified staff is another challenge faced by Nigerian school libraries. Effective library operations require sufficient staffing. Ahmed and Abdulkadir (2017) examined library staffing and information resources in Bauchi State, Nigeria, revealing that most schools in the state lacked library staff.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the digital age has brought significant changes in the way information resources and services are accessed. School libraries are no longer just repositories of print resources but have transformed into dynamic teaching and learning spaces that provide access to various resources and technology. As technology continues to advance, school library management and policy makers must prioritize the activities of school libraries in Nigeria, and school librarians should continuously develop their digital skills to enhance the quality of service delivery in school libraries.

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