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The Role of Library Services in Adult Literacy Education

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Introduction

The importance of the library in the service of adult education cannot be overestimated. Akinpelu (1994) describes books as, "the shrines where the saint is believed to be, and having built an ark to save learning from the deluge, deserve in propriety any new instrument or engine whereby learning should be advanced." Libraries are regarded as one of the institutions that have a role in advancing literacy and education in the society.

While the library is essential to any formal educational system, the facilities offered by the library are also required by the adult who is a wage-earner but who is engaged in improving his or her education, whether at the remedial, functional or higher educational level. (Ogunsheye 1981). This paper examines the role of the library as one of the essential ancillary services to the functions, activities, and operations of literacy education with specific reference to Nigerian adult learner.

The Role of the Library in Adult Literacy Education

Education has been defined as a complex of social processes for acquiring knowledge and experience, formally or otherwise. Ogunsheye (1981) states that it involves the total apparatus used for the development of the individual. In this paper an adult is someone of fifteen years plus who is responsible for himself and others, and who probably missed the opportunity of attending formal school due to financial problems or other factors, or had gone to school but dropped out after spending one, two, or three years. In Nigeria, the majority of illiterates belong to this group. The purpose of adult education is to continue the education of the adult so that:

- A State of literacy may be attained and maintained;
- The adult may continuously improve his knowledge and skills;
- The individual is enabled to adjust to existing social, political, and economic systems;

- The adult may be made aware of the common citizenship, cultural heritage, and social values, and thus adapt to changing roles in adult life;
- The individual may develop his personality and full potential, widening the range of his perception, interest and skills. (Ogunseye 1981, pp. 232)

The library enables the individual to obtain spiritual, inspirational, and recreational activity through reading, and therefore the opportunity of interacting with the society's wealth and accumulated knowledge (Omojuwa 1993). The library can be seen as an extension of adult education. One part of the mission of the library is the same as the mission of adult education (Omolewa 1981).

The Need for Library Services

The recognition of the need for library in Nigeria is as old as the Nigerian history. The first library, which was called "town library," according to Oyegade, Nassarawa, and Mokogwe (2003), was founded in 1879. Among its objectives were the maintenance and the establishment of books and materials to lend to the public for self improvement. The investment in libraries by early Christian missionaries in Nigeria showed the importance attached to library services, including public lectures. Libraries play a major role in adult education, including:

- Helping literacy to become permanent
- The improvement of knowledge and skills for positive, productivity
- Assisting to adjust to existing social, political spiritual and economic activities of the community.
- Giving personal awareness to adult learners of their rights in the society and to appreciate the social values and be able to change for easy adaptation into the expected roles within the society.
- Enabling the individual to develop its full potentials and widening the range of its perception, interests and skills (Metzger 1991).

Owino (1995) further discusses the need for library services that will help to develop a habit of continuous reading even after literacy classes are completed. Library services are needed to keep the skills that have been required through literacy classes alive by the provision of good literature. If adult education is to have a greater share in the molding and building of a happier individual and a better society, the providers of adult education must go beyond their roles as literacy facilitators to a more practical role of providing libraries for sustaining the newly acquired skills of adult learners.

Organization of Library Services for Adult Education

In Nigerian society where there is still a low literacy rate, where written records are still very few, and oral tradition predominates, in the absence of books in the native languages, particularly in science and technology, libraries should not only serve the literate minority but should encourage the illiterate to become literate by providing easy-to-read material, audiobooks, and adult education facilities (Batubo 1986). Literate people, especially Nigerian public library boards, have trying to do this (Ojo-Igbinoba 1985).

Organizing a library to aid adult education calls for an atmosphere of friendliness and a useful collection. The first thing to consider when organizing a library to aid adult education programme is the need of the clientele. The characteristics of the clientele (age, population, occupation, marital status, economic and cultural levels) are considerations. Facilities and furniture are other important aspects of organizing a library for this purpose. Book selection is crucial, especially when budgets are small. It is good encourage to choose books that will use the newly-acquired skills of adult learners. Adult education facilitators should involve librarians in planning adult education programs. Adult learners should be given library instruction.

Conclusion

Organizing a library for an adult education programme is not difficult. Library services are of paramount importance to the success of the goals of adult literacy education. Adult educators should incorporate library services into adult education programmes to complete the process of helping adults become literate and sustain that literacy.

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