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ITEM COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY: A REFLECTION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the status of Item Community High School library in an attempt to showcase the state of school libraries in Nigeria. The research investigates the personnel, facility and material availability in the library as well as the extent of use of the library by teachers and students. The questionnaire and observation research methods were used to collect data for the study. Apart from observing that the library lacks materials and facilities, the results of the study further show that the school has no person at the moment to man the library. As a result, the library has been shut down for more than one year. Regrettably, a total of 166 potential library users, comprising of teachers and students of the school, are denied access to and use of Item Community High School library. This is a state that is alarming and needs both professional and government intervention.

Keywords: School Libraries, Item Community, Nigeria.

Introduction

Libraries are broadly categorised into different types based on the target audience. There are five major types of libraries, namely, national libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, special libraries and school libraries. The latter, school libraries, is the focus of this paper. Aina (2004) states that school libraries are libraries attached to schools such as pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. They supplement the teaching of school children. It caters for children who are eager to read and also for backward children who read with difficulty and who require visual aids and all kinds of incentives to study. The holdings of school libraries contain more of audio-visual and graphic materials such as pictures, photographs, realia, diagrams, etc. This does not mean that school libraries do not contain materials such as books, magazines, periodicals, and newspapers. Adetoro (2005) opines that school libraries are libraries devoted to the support of educational programmes of primary and secondary schools in countries throughout the world. Thus, school libraries are seen as centre of the school learning programme and the foundation stone of any modern educational structure. Hence, a school library should contain various books and non-book materials in all subjects of interest to the children and the teacher. In the instance of a primary school, a greater percentage of its collection should contain story books or fictions. In any case, school libraries are maintained by professionally trained librarian who are called School or Teacher Librarian.

Item Community is one of the communities in Bende Local Government Area (LGA) of Abia State, Nigeria. It is bordered by Akeze (a community in Ebonyi State) in the North, Nkporo in the East; Alayi in the West, and Ariba in the South. Item community consists of nine villages namely Apuanu, Akanu, Amaeke, Okigwe, Okai, Okoko, Umuakpa and Amaokwe. The last village, Amaokwe, is the village that harbours Item Community High School whose library is the focus of this study. Item Community High School was founded in 1966 as the first secondary school to be established in the ancient town of Item. The school's library is as old as the school itself, fragmented into junior and senior school libraries, all situated within the school premises. This study therefore is aimed at examining, collectively, the status of Item Community High School library.

The Statement of Problem

According to the principles in UNESCO public manifesto of 1999, school libraries has a mission to provide learning services, books and resource that enable all members of the school community to become thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media, with links to the wider library and information network. In line with this, Issa (2003) states that the distinctive purpose of the school library within the total complex of the school work centres on helping pupils to develop abilities and habits of purposefully using books and libraries in attaining their goals of living. Thus, the school library programme is to carry out the purpose of sharing knowledge in the whole school programme. It is also expected to encourage the effective use of books and libraries by providing individual services to individual pupils through reading guidance, ample reading materials and library experience. Besides, the main purposes of a school library as enunciated by Ralph (1962) are to encourage the reading habits of the learner, develop in pupils the ability to learn from books without teachers, breakdown the rigid divisions which the school timetable often creates between different subjects and thus enhance social training. But, nonetheless, school libraries seem not to be attaining these heights. There are claims that school libraries in Africa are still poorly developed. While research has shown that secondary schools in Africa and Nigeria in particular do not have what can really, in the actual sense of it, be regarded as school library, what are available in some of the existing ones are hardly useful to the pupils and teachers. In fact, it is on this premise that Tawete's (1995) suggests that the services of school and public libraries in Africa be combined so that public libraries should be stationed closely to school compounds and thus provide services to school students and teachers. While this is not the situation in Nigeria yet, it is ideal that more research is conducted to show the status of school libraries is in various parts of the country so as to inform the decision making in the future. Consequent to this therefore, this paper is set to investigate and showcase the state of Item Community High School Library.

Objectives of the Study

This research tends to investigate and achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the personnel status of Item Community High School library.
2. To examine the status of facilities at Item Community High School library.
3. To examine the material availability in Item Community High School library.

4. To examine the use of Item Community High School library by teachers and students.
5. To show the challenges of Item Community High School library and recommend ways to ameliorate the challenges.

Literature Review

Encyclopedia Britannica defines library as collection of information resources in print or in other forms that is organised and made accessible for reading or study. Shera (1987) states that a library is an organisation, a system designed to preserve and facilitate the use of graphic records. A school library is one that is established in primary or secondary school (Adetoro, 2005). According to Fayose (1995), a school library is that part of school where a collection of books, periodicals, magazines, and newspapers, films, and filmstrips, videotapes, recording of all types, slides, computers, study kits, and other information resources are housed for use by teachers and pupils for learning, recreational activities, personal interest and inter personal relationships of children in school. Ibeto (1998) opines that school libraries an essential ingredient in learning at any level of education, pointing out that it serves as the intellectual centre of the school that contain records, not only of the intellectual but also of cultural and social produces.

In the light of these, Elaturoti (1993) postulates that the usefulness of any school library media centre like the *Abadina Media Resource Center Ibadan* depends on its maximum utilisation by students otherwise it will be as good as nothing. Consequently, Aguolu (2002) posits that work in any school library requires staff of various categories and levels of education and training, indicating that the following may be needed depending on the enrolment, staff, collection and academic program; librarian employed as school librarian with or without any teacher qualification, library officers, library attendants and library prefects. Meanwhile, Abdullahi (1998) writes that most of the Nigerian students who enter higher institutions of learning never used the school library effectively during their primary and secondary schools. He suggests that teaching of basic instruction on skills, rules and regulations for using the library, proper use and handling of books, arrangement of books in the library, amongst other things as panaceas. Already, the Federal Ministry of Education's minimum standard for school libraries as given in Arua and Chinaka (2011) identifies the types of books which school libraries should acquire to include reference books, non-fiction books including textbooks, supplementary order

and fiction books such as story books, novels and cartoons. Indeed, the establishment of school libraries and stocking it with variety of reading materials is one thing but the exploitation of such resources to achieve educational goals is another thing.

The definitions of school library given by various library and information professionals reflect the heritage that library is rich in its tradition, meaning and usage. Throughout the world, the library of a school is considered as part and parcel of the academic set-up. It is created and maintained to serve and support the educational activities of the school. The school library provides information, inculcates ideas, and develops knowledge that is so essential to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge based society. Hence, it is fundamental to school libraries to equip students with lifelong learning skills and develop in them creative thinking and imagination, and enabling them to live as ideal and responsible citizens. The school library must be made the hub of all the activities planned and executed in school. It can be used by students to prepare for their next class period, home examination, general education, information, competitions, recreation and inspiration. To cater to the wide varieties of demands of students and teachers, it has to judiciously select and procure the prescribed or recommended textbooks and other reading materials from different sources, technically process them by making use of a standard scheme of classification and catalogue them to provide various access point, organise the collection and circulate the materials for dissemination, bearing in mind the manner most convenient for the users (students and teachers).

In conceptual planning and development of school library services, the librarian is guided by the stated objectives of the school. These objectives mostly pertain to the provision of reading materials, guidance in reading, reference services, instruction to students, etc. With little modification here and there, different school libraries decide about the priorities of services to be offered and frame a set of objectives to be achieved. According to the National Policy on Education (1982), the major objectives of a school library are to:

- effectively participate in the teaching and learning program of the school
- provide the students with appropriate library materials both printed as well as audio visual services for overall growth and development of the personality of the student as an individual
- develop reading ability and interest, and inculcate love, enjoyment and pleasure of reading amongst students

- assist the students to become skillful and discriminating users of library
- offer opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, information and enjoyment
- support all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communicating within the community
- stimulate and guide each student in the selection and use of books and other reading materials for the building of taste at appropriate level of maturity
- workout a program in consultation with teachers for effective use of all types of library materials

The above mentioned objectives focus upon the most important functions of the library in a school situation. In order to achieve these objectives, Fayose (1995) and Aliyu (2013) argue that school librarians need to:

- Provide students equal access to all library resources
- Arrange for high quality customer service to students organized on modern lines
- Be familiar with and aware of popular books and magazines the students enjoy most
- Arrange for reading sessions of popular books and magazines and talk by the celebrity authors
- Make the library inviting and pleasing with comfortable furniture.
- Involve teachers and students in making the collection up-to-date
- Draft student friendly library rules.
- Sign MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with sister libraries for mutual help and cooperation.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the success of any school library programme, no matter how well designed, depends ultimately on: 1). the quality and number of personnel responsible for the programme. A well-educated and highly motivated professional staff is critical to the endeavor. A School Librarians is professionally qualified staff member responsible for planning and managing the school library. He is supported with a support staff usually comprising of Library Officers and Library Prefects (UNESCO, 1999). 2). Facility provision

which aids effective delivery of library services. As a definition, facility here refers to the basic amenities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a system (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/facility>). Thus, a good school library should have a reliable a good space that allows ventilation, a conducive environment for learning, good reading tables with chairs, etc. 3). Material availability; a good library should have an extensive and intensive collection of materials which include print (visual) materials such as books, journals, newspapers, pictures, diagrams, maps, atlases; audio (non-print) materials such as radio, tapes and other forms of recorders; audio-visual (non-print) materials such as toys, kits, television sets and multi-media materials. This is yet a crucial responsibility of both the School Librarian and school administration. The former has the technical know-how required for building up the library collection in the first place and then to provide various services to the wide range of the library users such as pupils, teachers and other desiring members of the school set-up. The school management is expected to fund the provision of materials covering all areas included in the curriculum and in the school programme as well as for recreation. These materials need to be provided in sufficient quantity to enable teachers find the materials required in the teaching-learning process. Such sufficient number of materials will also serve to assignments, for independent research and inquiry, for reading, listening, or viewing and for personal enjoyment. School Librarians should include books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, films, filmstrips, pictures, slides, transparencies, maps, globes, disc and tape recordings, displays, models, exhibits, microforms and the likes as materials for the school library. 4). Compliance of the school management. The school teachers should collaborate with their School Librarian in planning their lesson or academic calendar for a session so as to allow the teaching and learning to be effectively carried out. 5). Students and staff use of school library. This is the mission of every school library; to ensure that students and staffs are able to access and use information effectively.

On challenges facing school libraries, Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2011) outline the common problems facing school libraries in Nigeria to include declining financial support, inadequate infrastructure and equipment, unqualified personnel, emptiness of the book shelves, low level of information technology development. Meanwhile, Orji (1996) and Okeason and Okpeota (1993) find that school library users in Nigeria use the library for many varied reasons namely; to prepare for examination, for leisure and recreation, for serious academic work, to see

friends and people and so on. He concluded that school libraries are as good as wasted if they are not properly used by students and teachers. In observing the realities of these within the local environment, Arua and Chinaka (2011) surveyed the use of school library resources by staff and students of secondary schools in Umuahia North of Abia State, Nigeria. Of all the seven secondary schools they surveyed, none of the school libraries was worth being regarded as a school library. Their challenges spanned from accommodation, with majority of the blocks dilapidated in form or the other; lack of reading facilities such as carrels to outdated collections, where materials are available. This is the situation report in one part of Abia State, Nigeria. This research is therefore not only going to add to the literature but also provide the situation report in another part of Abia State – Bende Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This research work is empirical. The researcher adopted the questionnaire and observation research methods to collect data for each of the outlined objective of the study. A questionnaire was used to collate data on the use of Item Community High School library by its user community. The questionnaires were fielded to the teachers only. Other data were collated by means of observation. The success of the later was largely based on the fact that one of the researchers was on ground in the study institution as a Youth Corp Member undergoing her compulsory one year national service. All data are presented and analysed descriptively on statistical tables and charts.

Data Presentation and Discussion

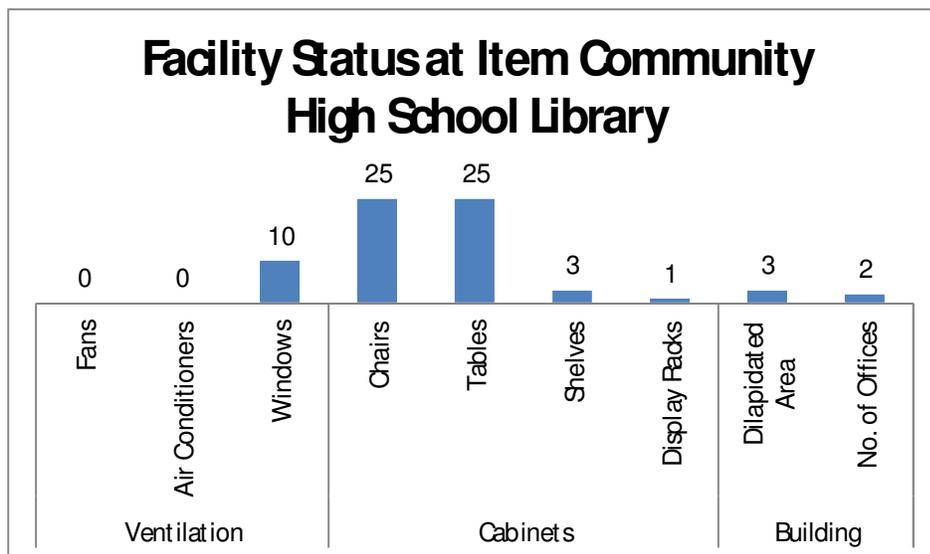
Personnel status at Item Community High School Library

Presently, Item Community High School Library is shut down for more than one year. This is because there is no one to man the library. Undesirably, one of the youth Corp Members posted to the school, who eventually was a graduate of Library and Information Science, who also should have overseen the library, was encumbered with teaching load. She was appreciated by the School Head for relieving their teaching load than to have reopened their library. This means that the school was even in short of teaching staff let alone providing personnel for the library.

Facility Status at Item Community High School Library

At Item Community High School Library, the facility provision is poor. Figure 1 below describes the situation as it concerns ventilation, cabinet and building facilities.

Fig.1.



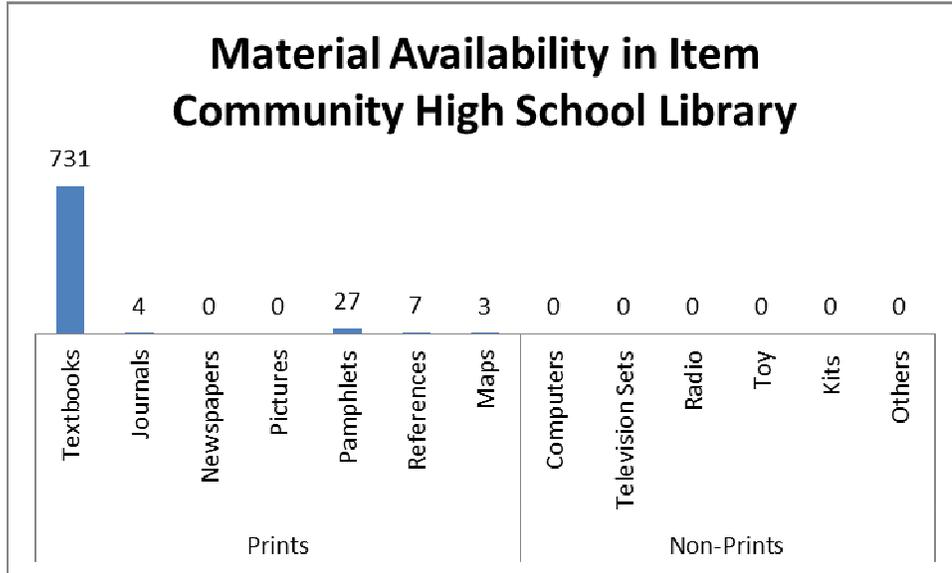
Based on the chart above, it is observed that the building housing Item Community High School library depends on natural air through the windows for ventilation. The library has some chairs and tables for reading but contains dilapidated spots and corners. By observation, two entrance doors to the library and one office's door in the library have fallen off from their post while one corner of the library's roof is leaking water profusely.

Material availability in Item Community High School Library

The total number of textbooks in Item Community High School Library is seven hundred and thirty-one, four journals, no newspaper and picture. There are twenty-seven pamphlets, seven reference materials comprising of two Encyclopedias, three maps and two atlases. There no computers, television set, radio, toys, kits and the likes. It is important to note that most of the materials available in Item Community High School library are not in the school's curriculum while some are primary school materials. Yet, they are in multiple copies, being of no relevance to the immediate user community. For example, The Nigerian Integrated Science Projects Pupils

Textbook I is one hundred and eight copies, Nigerian Integrated Science Project Pupils Textbook II is eleven copies, Intensive English Junior Secondary School I is ninety-one copies. These are part of what constitute the seven hundred and thirty-one (731) textbook resources in Item Community High School Library. See Figure 2 below.

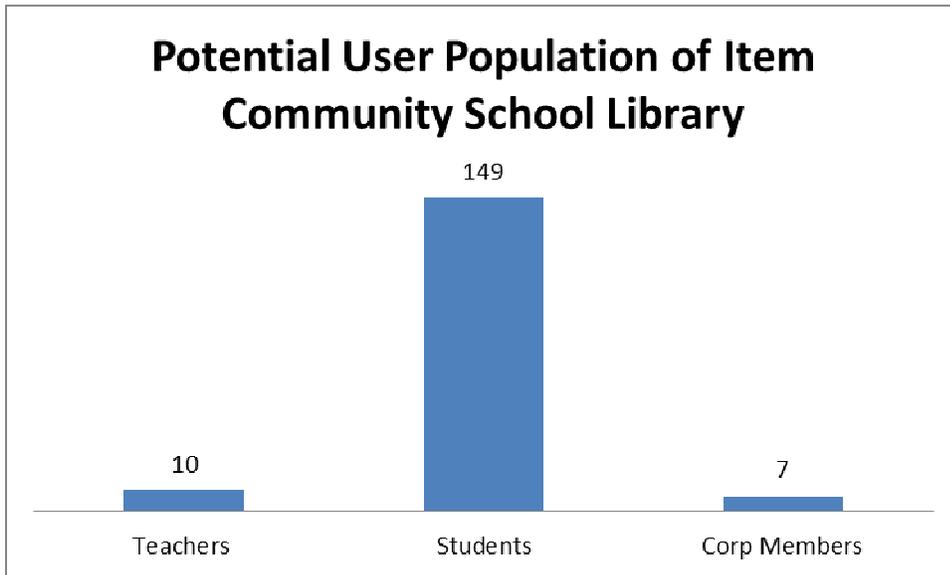
Fig.2



The use of Item Community High School Library by Teachers and Students

A total of one hundred and sixty-six (166) people are potential users of Item Community High School Library as at the period of the research. See Figure 3 below.

Fig. 3:



Regrettably, the researchers observed that Item Community High School library is not in use by both students and teachers. This is supported in Table 1 below which contains teachers' responses to the use of Item Community High School Library.

Table 1: Teachers Use of Item Community High School Library

S/N	Use Posers	Yes	No
1	Do you have a library in your school?	5	12
2	Do you use your school library?	2	15
3	Are you satisfied with staff strength of your library?	0	17
4	Have you used your school library this year?	0	17
5	Is your school library conducive for your reading and research?	3	14

NB: The respondents are made up of seventeen (17) staff members; teachers and Corp Members

For more than one year, up till the time this research, the library has been locked up. The implication of this is that the school library programme which is meant to carry out the purpose of sharing knowledge and improve teaching and learning in school has failed. This is contrary to the fact that school libraries help prepare students to live and learn in a world of information. The mission of the school library is to ensure that students and staff are able to use ideas and

information. Thus, it should be noted that no matter how well furnished, spacious and stocked any school library is, it is nothing and not complete without library users (Orji, 1996).

The Challenges of Item Community High School Library and the Way Forward

The researchers' perceived challenges of Item Community High School library are as follows:

1. Poor orientation about the library. The students, teachers, management does not see reasons why the library should exist. This is one of the reasons why the library has been shut down for some time and has been totally out of use within the period. To resolve this challenge, there should be proper re-orientation about the use of libraries, its purpose in the teaching-learning process.
2. The absence of adequate and relevant materials. The few available materials are outdated and irrelevant materials to teachers and students. New media resources such as non-print materials are not imagined yet for the library. These are contemporary resources of school libraries and should be purchased for the Item Community High School library. Aside from that, the School Librarian should source for and acquire library materials for the library. This could be through purchases, gifts, bequest or exchange. The materials should be useful to teachers and students.
3. Shortage of staff. There is need for a Teacher Librarian to man the library. Alternatively, if hiring a Teacher Librarian is not feasible, any of the school teachers who have a passion for library work can be delegated to oversee the library.
4. Inadequate facility is affecting the growth of Item Community High School Library such good accommodation, seating provision, ventilation, amongst others.
5. Finance is, no doubt, needed to revive the library. Thus, there should a provision of fund and other kind of assistance such as aids from government and non-governmental organisations to support Item Community High School Library.
6. Lack of support from Library Associations. Relevant library associations should cry out against the deteriorating state of the school library system in Nigeria. Such professional voice can get the commitment of the Government to its public institutions.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Item Community High School library, there are no personnel to oversee the library. This is contrary to the view of Issa (2003) that the essential component a good and functional library is manpower. Obviously, the school's library negates the ideal collections of school libraries as submitted by Fayose (1995). A school library is supposed to be a resource centre that will provide information services that respond to the information needs of teachers towards fostering their professional development, and students, towards enhancing their learning process. In addition, the attitude of the school management to use of item community high school library is poor and is not encouraging. This is against the view of Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2011) who say that teachers should encourage and motivate the students in the habit of reading and use of library. Meanwhile, Orji (1996) has lamented that school libraries are as good as wasted if they are not properly used by its user community. This is no credit to Item Community High School Library which is not in use by both the students and teachers, having been locked up and abandoned for a couple of months.

So far, this research has supported the notion that school libraries are libraries attached to schools such as pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. The researchers investigated Item Community High School Library with the aim of examining its personnel status, its facilities, the material availability, the level of its use by teachers and students, and thus, have successfully shown the challenges of the school's library. It is observed that Item Community High School library has been shut down for a long time without any person to man it. It is not because the library building is badly dilapidated that no meaningful activity can be carried out in it but because of ignorance of the school management and students about its usefulness. This informs on what is the likely state of other school libraries in Nigeria. Hence, this research recommends that user education should be introduced in Nigerian primary and secondary education system so as to build the interest of students and staffs in library use. More so, dedicated funds should be mapped out by Government for schools to acquire current library materials such as books and audio-visual materials and also make it a priority that qualified and trained Teacher Librarian should be employed in schools to oversee the school libraries in Nigeria.

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