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1-23-2020

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Mba, Blessing B. CLN, "Designing Child-Friendly School Libraries and Media Centres for Sustainable Reading Development amongst Nigerian children" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 3913.

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**Designing Child-Friendly School Libraries and Media Centres for Sustainable
Reading Development amongst Nigerian children**

By

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Introduction:

Aesthetic considerations are pivotal in designing a child-friendly or ‘developmental library’. Among other considerations, the location of the library, the collection of materials, the programme of activities and the general ambience of the library are all critical for the aesthetic needs of a developmental library. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, many school libraries are not child-friendly as they fail to meet the aesthetic imperatives of a developmental library. As a matter of fact, most school libraries are ill-equipped to instill and sustain a reading culture in the impressionable child. Inadequate educational funding at all levels of government, and the failure of many school managements to prioritise the library has conspired with an apathetic reading public to alienate young minds from the library and thus reading.

According to Greenwood, Creaser, and Maynard (2008) successful school libraries are defined as those which are being well-used and demonstrating innovative approaches to engaging children in reading. It is important to place importance on reading for pleasure, on the basis that school libraries could provide an excellent means of giving all children the opportunity to enjoy books and developing and sustaining reading development. By relying on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for learning and designing a school library in the 21st century as discussed by Sullivan (2011), this research attempts to investigate the extent to which an aesthetically supportive environment as well as enriching and captivating programme of activities in school libraries/media resource centres are capable of augmenting children’s spontaneous concentration and optimising their reading development, interest and culture.

According to Adetoro (2005) school libraries/media resource centres 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 teachers. Beyond the availability of ample library spaces and building, it is imperative for a school library/media resource specialist to put into consideration the aesthetic quality of materials that should make up the collections of the library/ media resource centre holdings, formulation of inviting programmes, beautifying and decorating of the interior reading spaces as well as

formulating attractive rules guiding use and access to the school library/media resource centre. Nelson (2014) posits that school libraries/media resource centres are going from book warehouses to multi-functional learning spaces designed to support multiple learning activities, goals and interests at once. Akintunde (2010) succinctly argues that books availability and use in school libraries, especially literature books enhances use of libraries and therefore children.. Books, especially literature books, develop children's imagination and sensibilities and help them to consider nature, peoples, ideas or experiences in new light (Ilogho, 2013).

However, this paper argues that asides the obvious benefits of having rich collections of books especially literature books for children, there are more educationally enriching and captivating ways Sullivan (2011) describes the library/ school media centre can develop and sustain readership in children especially in the 21st century. Similarly, Holland (2015) asserts that younger children no longer need a library simply for access instead they require a place that encourages participatory learning and allows for co-construction of understanding from a variety of sources. In Nigeria children in this 21st century have ample ways of engaging themselves in unprofitable and uneducative activities through the use of technology and other related media.

School managers, media specialists and teacher librarians have it as a greater challenge in combating children's lukewarm attitude towards reading and learning as a result of unexciting and boring school libraries/ media resource centres towards adopting the dynamics of our society into library programmes. Sullivan (2011) agrees that finding books stacked on shelves in the library, with a busy circulation desk have turned out to be one of the boring part of visiting and use of libraries in this era of technological dynamics, she further stated that the extrinsic part of socialisation has turned out to be a meeting point where school librarians/media specialists could perhaps explore and develop even better desire and interest towards reading in children.

State of School Libraries/Media Resource Centres in Nigeria

Authors such as Adetoro (2005); Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2011), Arua and Chinaka (2011); and Uzuegbu and Ibiyemi (2013) in their research x-rayed the state of school libraries/ media resource centres in Nigeria. Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2011) school expressed apathy over the state of Nigerian school libraries. They attribute decline in financial support from government at

all levels for most school libraries/media resource centres especially in public schools as one reason for the obvious limitations libraries/media resource centres are experiencing in extending the scope of reinvented child-friendly libraries and media resource centres which is capable of transforming children's lukewarm attitude towards reading. Preliminary investigations reveals that the state of some supposed school libraries and media resource centres in Ibadan Oyo state such as The Smart School, Agbowo, Hillcrest Private School Bodija, Glory Academy Orogun, 'B' Alpha Montessori School Orogun all in Ibadan North Local government and around the vicinity of the University of Ibadan. One would have thought that the proximity of a Higher institution of learning could challenge the managers and proprietors of these schools to establishing an ideal child- friendly library but the situation of libraries in these schools can best be described as afterthought arrangements.

Similarly, a visit to the libraries of The International School Ibadan (ISI) and Staff School both located in the University of Ibadan reveals that an aesthetically sensitive and child-friendly library is missing. Also a visit to the library of the two time best school in WAEC performance in Oyo State the Orita-Mefa Baptist Model School library at Total Garden, Ibadan shows that they have an experienced librarian but however, the collections, space, location of the library as well as the aesthetics of the school environment does not speak about their intellectual commitment and performance of the students. Proprietors of some of these schools perhaps perceive the establishment and funding of a child- friendly school library as an unprofitable venture that adds no financial benefits to the income of the management, but feels less burden in hurriedly converting room to a makeshift book room where some of the collections are neither renewed nor restocked without the professional service of a certified Librarian.

The public schools in the state are worse off, as functional libraries do not even exist in the schools not to talk of a child-friendly one. Adetoro (2004) reveals that school libraries/ media resource centres in public schools in Ogun State use improvised accommodation and lacks qualified personnel while the libraries are occasionally used. Similarly, Arua and Chinaka (2011) survey on the state of school libraries in Umuahia North Abia state, Nigeria, discovered that out of all the seven surveyed school libraries, none of them was worth regarding as a library/media resource centre. Uzuegbu and Ibiyemi, (2013) expressed appellation at the pathetic sight of

libraries in Item community in Bende Local government of Abia state Nigeria. These xrayed libraries and media resource centre conditions in Nigerian schools contravenes Sullivan (2011) theory of intrinsic motivation in libraries/media resource centres. In recent times, it has been observed that younger children enjoy reading through other media such as mobile gadgets and learn both rightly and wrongly through these media. Young Children of impressionable minds gets attracted by things that easily catch their fancy, and so it is imperative that for development and sustenance of reading interests and culture reading should be made fun and pleasurable to children through developing schemes for inculcating a lifelong virtue of reading and library use.

Children born in this era are termed “the digital natives” which suggests that they can manoeuvre any form of device and have abilities to learn and understand more complex activities if well prepared and guided. The school librarian/media specialist has the responsibility to develop and design a compatible and enriching library programme, collections as well as fascinating reading spaces as an avenue to develop and sustain readership in children. Akintunde (2010) in his research findings submits that the school media resource centre plays a major role in facilitating the teaching of reading. The school library/media resource centre is a dynamic store house of knowledge where media specialists and pupils come in contact with the 'the world' where they acquire the general knowledge which forms the basis for all further learning (Correa 1997) Reading is an activity perceived as one of the predictors of civilisation, academic achievement and as motivators for a life-long learning.

Anyanwu, Obichere, and Ossai-Onah (2008) define reading as a worldwide phenomenon that has the capacity to promote development as well as instill discipline on the individual. Reading can be achieved through effective access to vicarious medium of information materials which could be presented in different forms of both electronic and print formats. Exposing children to books and other forms of reading very early in life could promote discipline, improve knowledge and enhance efficiency towards achieving goals and purposeful life at an early age. For one to play a significant role in contemporary society, the ability to read and write must be there. The survival of any society therefore is a function of the extent to which that society is involved in reading. Reading transcends the use of printed books but also the use of other objects and literary materials which could be in an electronic, printed, or material formats. Based on the merits of

developing and sustaining good reading culture in the society, one of the most crucial point of contact in realizing this goal is through the library and school media centre. The library /school media resource centre is supposed to be a place where children can achieve pleasure, succor, entertainment, skills acquisition as well as dedicated study time in order to broaden their horizon. Preliminary investigations and observation has shown that most Nigerian schools have less regard towards establishing and equipping standard library with facilities and activities that could be capable of improving readership amongst school children. lack of functional libraries in most of the schools surveyed and a similar lack of trained librarians or teacher librarians; the failure to provide library periods in schools; language teachers and shortage of equipment and resources for teaching reading skills; and a heavy reliance on school texts, although students show willingness to read more broadly, e.g. newspapers and novels (Ogunrobi and Adio, 1995).

Similarly, Ilomechine (2008) in her survey on the state of school libraries in Delta state shows that most of her respondents are not satisfied with the services and collections of their school libraries and therefore outlined the following recommendations:

- The school library should have a professional librarian to render effective services to staff and students
- The teacher/librarian should organize orientation, films, exhibitions, and displays to create awareness of the library service to users.
- The library should take steps to enhance its collections and resources with material for both staff and students that meets their educational needs and developments and augments classroom teachings.
- Students need audiovisual materials as well as print and other formats.
- The library should provide adequate recreational and information materials to arouse student interest
- The library should provide adequate reading and study space.

Methods of Designing a Child Focused and Friendly Library/Media Resource Centre

Apart from creating or establishing a child focused library, the libraries should also be child friendly. Most established libraries in primary and secondary schools are usually established with a focus for children, but most of them are not child friendly. Based on the intrinsic and extrinsic theory of designing a school library / media resource centre by Sullivan (2011), there are various projects, programmes, and activities that could be introduced in Nigerian school libraries/media resource centres in order to reinvent a child-focused library for reading development in children. According to Kerst (2016) active learning environments can keep kids engaged, improve test scores and result in greater creativity and positive behavior. Gretes (2013) opines that establishing high quality school libraries not only help children read more, but also likely to help them learn how to use and process information better and to perform better on achievement tests. Similarly, Ugwuanyi, Okwor, and Ezeji (2011) enumerated three elements that should depict a good reading space/place include:

1. A space for variety of library materials and expansion or addition of collections.
2. It has to be comfortable or behaviourally usable for both users and staff. The users should find the library, inviting and staff having enough and inviting space too, rather than be relegated to subterranean spaces and treated as second-class citizens.
3. The library should also be attractive to the users in terms of the aesthetic (beauty) through art work decoration and other beautifying features. A library housed in a structure that is ugly and ill is likely to bring about of disorganisation of library materials which could translate to poor morale. Differing space arrangements such as floor loading requirements, book stack spacing, furniture and equipment section, as well as power and energy requirements should be taken into consideration in the allocation of study and research areas in school libraries. This is to accommodate the functionality, aesthetic and behavioural principles of library building.

Swain, (2015) reiterates that technology shouldn't spell doom for books and reading, but rather, libraries should be redesigned to meet up with the technological innovations and inculcate advanced practices in through installations of computers, laptops with moveable and convertible

seats and tables equally to allow the space to be used for exhibitions of pupils' work or curriculum-linked displays, debates, presentations and even a jazz band for creativity and entertainment. And also school libraries/ media resource centres should have a contained space to give pupils a fully immersive sensory experience, with a big screen, smoke and wind machines and spotlights, in order to enhance reading interest development and teaching

Staffing:

Funding, staffing, collection quality size and the instructional role of the Librarian are all likely to have a direct impact on children's achievement toward reading development. However, staffing school libraries with the qualified professionals perhaps could be one of the ways to begin reinventing school libraries/media resource centres. Gretes (2013) opines that schools with well-staffed by a full-time- certified librarian and appropriate support staff contribute significantly to gains in children's learning. Librarians develop in their students a life-long love of reading; build critical thinking skills and digital literacy that prepare students for the 21st century workplace, and help children meet the Common Core State Standards.

Greates (2013) further reveals that children in schools with certified librarians consistently score better on standardized achievement tests in reading, compared with students in schools without certified librarians. Despite the many findings that underscore the importance of having certified librarians especially in public schools and most privately established schools in Nigeria, most of Nigeria's school libraries do not have one certified professional staff, or even a functional library based on the requirements and recommendations of UNESCO, Librarian's registration council of Nigeria (LRCN) and Nigerian Library Association(NLA).this contravenes the Intrinsic theory of establishing and designing a child-focused library by Sullivan (2013).

Stocking the Library with Appropriate Collections

Greates (2013) stocking the school library with relevant and appropriate books that could meet the information needs of the pupils and at same time serve their leisure and entertainment needs is one step that could transform children's desire to use the library and as well develop interest towards reading. Aside purchasing recommended academic books and materials, beefing the school library with literature books of diverse story genre mixed with well pictorised illustrations

with good picture quality could attract and draw children's attention to reading. Gretes (2013) believes that providing access to books, they play a key role in teaching. Research confirms that the fundamental purpose of school libraries is to provide access to books and that access is the primary factor that leads to raising student test scores in all aspects of literacy. Access to books not only fosters an early love of learning and has a positive effect on reading achievement, but appears also to offset the impact of poverty. Results of studies show that children of poverty perform poorly on reading tests because they have very little access to books at home and in their communities. Unfortunately, at least one study indicates that students in most need – those attending schools with the highest concentration of students living in poverty – have access to the fewest school library resources. All aspects of literacy improve when children have access to books. If they have access to books, they read them, and they read them for longer periods of time. Around-the-clock access to a library's digital resources is critical to 21st century learners

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research on designing and establishing a child-focused school library/media resource centre this paper makes the following recommendations Building and designing a state of the art school library/ media resource centre that can accommodate contemporary innovations technological innovations through ample space.

1. Employing certified professional librarian / media specialist
2. Establishing aesthetically rich reading spaces with flowery decorations, brightly coloured paints for the walls which would help in enhancing illumination.
3. It is important for the school and media specialist to organize programmes and events such as organizing quiz, reading, spelling competitions and precise information on date of notable events which could challenge the children's IQ and increase fun and participatory reading and learning.
4. Hanging pictures/ rewarding of exceptional pupils who have exceptionally done well in reading and other competitions / programmes organized by the library could influence other children to develop reading interest.

5. A school library/media resource centre should display pictures of notable personalities and heroes who have excelled in their areas of endeavors with dates and description of activities such as Mahatma Gandhi of India, Mary Slessor, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Mungo Park etc.
6. pictures and description of historic places of historic places such as mount Everest, River Nile, London Bridge, etc
7. Acquiring literature books of diverse story genres, with captivating picture quality and colour formats.
8. Introducing routine period for story hours where children can listen and tell their own stories
9. Introducing technological activities using skype, voice records, whatsapp, facebook, etc. through mobile phone, computers and laptops for children to make their own videos of reading and other activities which could be subjected by viewing using slides and projectors in the library/media resource centres for others to view and critique
10. Allowing the children make crafts of library materials such as book pockets, pencils, writing pads, date due slips, book stacks, sign posts using objects and materials like cardboard papers, paints, inks, gum, sole tape, straws, toothpick, sticks, broomsticks, matchbox etc. Designing of foot and hand prints of the children using paints and colours with their names and ages inscribed on them.
11. Making reading spaces spacious and available for crafts symposiums, programmes, through the use of moveable and convertible furniture such as chairs, tables, desk, shelves etc.
12. Building and arranging library furniture like tables chairs, shelves, into shapes, animals or objects or alphabets of sitting positions and library materials, establishing rules of use and access such as neatness, dressing in the complete school uniform, and exhibition of identity cards before entry and use of materials

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