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Pathway to Inclusive Community Children Reading Program for Sustainable Development: Summer Reading Experience in Anambra State, Nigeria

Ngozi P. Osuchukwu Mrs

Madonna University, Nigeria, ngostary2k@yahoo.com

Ifeyinwa N. Okonkwo Mrs

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State Nigeria, zuco609@yahoo.com

Adaora C. Obuezie Mrs

Madonna University, Nigeria, adaoraobuezie@yahoo.com

Nkechi S. Udeze Ms

Anambra State Library Board, Awka, nkedez@yahoo.com

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**PATHWAY TO INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY CHILDREN READING PROGRAM FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: SUMMER READING EXPERIENCE IN ANAMBRA
STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

**OSUCHUKWU, NGOZI P. (CLN)
MADONNA UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA
ngostary2k@yahoo.com**

**OKONKWO, IFEYINWA N. (CLN)
NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA
ANAMBRA ATATE
zuc0609@yahoo.com**

**OBUEZIE, ADA, C. (CLN)
MADONNA UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA
adaoraobuezie@yahoo.com**

AND

**UDEZE, NKECHI S. (CLN)
ANAMBRA STATE LIBRARY BOARD, AWKA
ANAMBRA STATE
nkedez@yahoo.com**

Abstract

Reading is an important aspect of literacy that improves academic performance in children as well as widens horizon. Hence, extending reading activities to rural communities enhances social inclusion and bridges the gap of service delivery between the children in the urban areas and the underserved communities. The essence of the summer reading program is to integrate literacy skills in children and build a community of children with love for reading. It underpins the relevant theme of sustainable development goals (SDGs) where no one should be left behind. The study highlighted the activities, resources, targets, lessons learnt and challenges of extending reading programs to community children. The project was carried out in Nawgu rural community in Anambra state, South East, Nigeria. It was an evidence based study that adopted qualitative

and quantitative data collection. Interview was also used. There were joint planning meetings from the initial stage to the final stage of the project with 4 librarians, 8 officers of the non-governmental organization (NGO) and 7 volunteer teachers. There was advocacy visit to Nawgu Traditional Ruler for awareness, acceptance and supports of the project in his community. The project implemented story hour activities of read aloud, picture books, children movies, use of ICT, classroom subjects among others. 153 print resources were loaned from different libraries in the state. 5 computers, 1 projector and generator were used. 142 preschool, primary and secondary school children participated in the reading program. It lasted for five weeks. The lessons learnt were that the community children are really smart but lack activities and reading resources to enhance their literacy. They showed great intelligence and willingness to learn as the presence of varieties of reading resources nurtured and brought out the desire to read. Challenges encountered were geographical location, inadequacy of teachers and librarians, lack of energy to power the laptops and the projector. The study recommended collaboration, regular extension and engagement of library services to rural children for equitable quality education.

Keywords: children, library services, literacy, rural community, social inclusion, summer reading, SDGs

Introduction

Literacy has never been more critical than it is today. The shift to global trend of sustainable development goals (SDGs) with Goal 4 of equitable quality education makes it imperative that learning and reading are important activities for survival in the information society. This is the reason reading programs are organized in the communities so that no one misses out in the learning programs. One of such program is summer reading program. It is children educational development scheme that aims at improving reading habits as well as enhancing academic performance. It is truly better to inculcate reading habits, right from tender age, so that children can imbibe it and grow in them as they grow up (Simisaye & Quadri, 2010). Thus, summer reading programs are executed so that children can spend quality time with books, learn more and read freely with various resources.

Summer reading program is highly rated as improving reading skills. Simisaye & Quadri (2010) informed that it helps to inculcate reading culture and love of books in children, creating awareness on the activities of library in the community, encouraging useful utilization of long vacation and building literacy collaboration between the libraries and community stakeholders. Indeed, it provides confidence, mental, emotional health and well-being of young people. Arguably, students experience learning and reading loss during holiday, especially, when they are not taking part in active literacy activities. But enrolling them in reading programs as Kim & Quinn (2013) emphasized facilitates excellent way of forestalling such reading loss.

Interestingly, summer reading programs have actually taken places in communities and local libraries. In New York Libraries (2011) the annual summer reading program has brought children and families into local public libraries for reading and activities. This was geared

towards the needs of children in their communities where over 1.6 million of New York's children and teens participated in the state Library-sponsored program in 2011. In a study by Thebridge (2016) in Warwickshire public library, the supports and engagement increased confidence and well-being of students. The six to eight workshops in groups were testified by students:

This project completely opens my mind, and I did not know what to expect. It brought me back to life.

It opened my eyes to a different type of poetry. Different to what I did at school. One afternoon, I spent all afternoon looking up poems that I liked in the library.

However, the activities that support reading programs and the resources needed have not been developed to reach out to too many schools, communities and children across the nation (Scholastic Library, 2016). The focus on enriching the community children with literacy skills is critical in imbibing the reading culture and getting them ready for new academic session. Suffice it to say that reading is a very important activity that sharpens the mind and widens horizon. The importance of learning and inclusive participation of all children: girls and boys, wherever they may be are particularly beneficial for sustainable development, especially, where books and libraries might not be readily available. It calls for strategic extension of literacy activities to community children in support to social inclusion. Hence, the activity of rural community reading in Anambra state is to discourage marginalization and support the mantra of "leave no one behind".

Background of the community for the program

Nawgu community is in Dunukofia local government area in Anambra state, South East, Nigeria. It is a small rural community with a population that is predominantly agrarian. The dwellers are mostly women and children as the men are largely in the cities hustling for the welfare of the families. It has a Traditional Ruler and cabinet members, who are the custodians of cultural heritage of the community. There are also the President General, the Woman Leader and the Youth Leader who perform the administrative roles for the development of the community. Based on the previous funded educational activities in the community in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, the librarians decided to carry out personal project during the long vacation to inculcate and encourage reading culture among the community children. Because of the size of the project, partnership with NGOs and the community stakeholders were sought through advocacy and community sensitization which was supported by the Traditional Ruler. It was a very successful activity as the impact created more opportunities and spaces for more learning in the coming vacations. The success story and the theory of change of engagement to underserved community provided the strategy for more innovative literacy programs in other communities.

Statement of the problem

Libraries are meant to be at the center of learning and reading, serving everyone and every community. The engagement of every group of people in meaningful learning is what Scholastic Library (2016) stated as promoting and facilitating the learning of core and evolving 21st century skills. The fact remains that with libraries, reading becomes a critical activity because it will cut across every strata, reaching out to rural communities with the stakeholders being parts of the planning and taking ownership of the program. However, observation showed that people in the

city are more served with reading programs while rural dwellers are conveniently forgotten. This widens the gap and marginalizes the students from these poor backgrounds. In South East Nigeria, no summer reading experience has been recorded for social inclusion of students in the rural communities. This evidence based study aimed to unravel the good practices of inclusive reading program for children in rural community for sustainable development in Anambra state, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to review the inclusive reading program for rural children for sustainable development through summer reading experience. Specifically, the study:

1. highlights the activities of summer reading program for rural children in Nawgu community
2. examines the resources used in the summer reading program
3. looks at the targets of the summer reading in the rural community understudy
4. evaluates and assesses the rewards offered to participants in the summer program
5. reviews the lessons learnt from the project
6. identifies the challenges of the rural summer reading program in the rural community

Literature review

Basically, reading is an aspect of literacy that plays a crucial role in creating independent learners, literacy promotion and educational attainment of individuals in every society in the world. Just as Nigam (2015) and Didham & Ofei-Manu (2015) posited, education is central to achieving this goal. It goes to prove that changes in the way of living have affected every facet of life, especially in basis of education which requires innovation and strategies to collaborate,

teach, and learn even among the community dwellers. This is what summer reading program fulfills with the aim to contribute to nation building because providing access to literacy adds value and power for assertive thoughts. (Edem, Mbaba, Udosen & Isioma, 2011).

Research on summer reading has shown that lots of benefits are accrued from the interventions. The study of Kim & Quinn (2013) conducted in the United States and Canada from 1998 to 2011 revealed that children who participated in classroom interventions, involving teacher-directed literacy lessons or home interventions, involving child-initiated book reading activities, enjoyed significant improvement on multiple reading outcomes. Another important factor is that summer reading interventions had significantly larger benefits for children from low-income backgrounds than for children from a mix of income backgrounds. It is part of this reason that community children are sought to participate and enjoy reading from wide arrays of free books, which ordinarily, their parents cannot afford.

With tons and tons of activities like sing songs, story time, crafts, read aloud, games, among others, children are encouraged to discuss and report on the books they read. Other activities are party full of games, movies, crafts, food, storytelling, music, creative arts and many more (Normal Public Library, 2017 and New York Library, 2011). They aim to stimulate and enhance children's development of languages and senses. Edwards, Rauseo & Unger (2013) confirmed this and stated that annual summer reading programs have positive impact on student performance. The libraries and librarians organize programs with resources that support learning.

These resources are selected to help children choose the reading materials they like in order to provide that literacy-enhancing programs. They include different classroom subjects like science, maths, English, local languages among others. The provision of resources of the GlobalGiving (2015) offered children in rural Mongolia with better access to quality learning materials, age-appropriate literature and children's books. This made the children to engage in fun and meaningful ways, promoting a quality education. The project provided poor, rural areas, reaching 2,000 - 5,000 children, providing access to quality learning materials, promoting interest in reading and learning. In addition, the importance of reading resources was stressed in the work of The Library Project (2015) which supported children who grow up in China's rural communities, who may never be able to see the rest of the world, but with the Library Projects, exposure to books can make a world of difference to them.

The beauty of summer reading programs are signified in different age groups (early literacy, children, teens and adults) which speaks of social inclusion to promote literacy and community in a fun way. The targets are the three- to five-year-olds, children in elementary and secondary schools and their families, babies from 0- to 2-years-old, young adults, etc (Normal Public Library, 2017).

Importantly, previous researches have shown that a strong relationship can be built among the community stakeholders, libraries, librarians, teachers and the non-governmental organizations in promoting reading experiences. Studies by CSLP (2106) and Osuchukwu & Edewor (2015) have proved that low cost and willing teachers with careful planning and innovative strategies can be achieved in library services to children. Collaborating with school and local organizations

help promote and create the program for enriching knowledge. According to Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) (2016) partnering with nonprofit corporation and other groups for successful summer reading has been acclaimed as good practices in organizing solely for charitable, scientific and education purposes to promote and support summer reading programs as well as to:

- Provide library programming materials and technical expertise
- Encourage literacy in all age groups
- Raise the quality of library programming
- Support other efforts to promote summer learning
- Support libraries and library programming

One of the most exciting moments of every summer reading program is party, gifts and general good time. In the words of Normal Public Library (2017) bonus party is a special treat for older kids who finish all of their reading logs. The good food, entertainment and prizes given at the end of the day seethes deep acceptance with expectation of more learning programs.

Conversely, it is disturbing when there is marginalization in literacy activities. More worrisome is it when there is no real examination of information needs and best practice in the promotion and development of reading program by community (McGrath, et al 2010). The issues of funding, inadequate reading materials, logistics and personnel have also been identified as factors that hinder summer reading. Mahwasane & Mudzielwana (2016) succinctly put it that considering the background to the provision of library services in the rural areas, it seems that these are poorly developed while children in rural areas do not enjoy the same privileges as children from urban areas. This must be because of the inadequate infrastructure, geographical

locations among others which make it very difficult to provide adequate library and information services to children in the rural communities

Methodology

This was an evidence based research that adopted a case study survey. It was a personal project management that employed both qualitative and quantitative data of all inclusive participatory activities from the planning stage to the evaluation. It involved 8 NGO officials from Justice Development and Peace Commission Onitsha (JDPC) and Women Action Committee (WAC), 7 volunteer teachers and 4 Librarians. It took place in Nawgu community in Dunukofia local government area in Anambra state. Nawgu was chosen because it is one of the project sites of JDPC which the baseline survey indicated as low literacy community in the local government. Another reason is that the Traditional Ruler is a lover of literacy who mandated all the executive members of Town Union and community based leaders to enroll into adult education for improvement of literacy in the community. Town crier was used to invite all the children. Announcements were made in churches and the annual August meeting of the women.

Spaces were created for the librarians in Anambra State to be part of the program. There were 142 participants. A total of 153 print resources were provided by Anambra State Library Board (ASLIB), Anambra State College of Health Technology (ASCOHT), Obosi, Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbaku and personal collections from the Coordinator of the project. Also provided were 5 laptops, 1 projector, 1 generator, building blocks and 4 mats. The program lasted for 4 weeks from August to September, 2017 and it was free for all school children in the rural community. There was no remuneration to the NGO officials, volunteer teachers and the

librarians. It was solely social service for improvement of the rural children and the community.

The methods we used were:

1. Joint planning meeting
2. Advocacy to Traditional Ruler of the pilot community
3. Inclusive participation of Librarians and Libraries in Anambra State and teachers
4. Teaching of classroom subjects
5. Adoption of story hour activities of read aloud, picture books, story time, singing, craft and general reading
6. Teaching of ICT
7. Educational/children movies using projector
8. Prize giving, entertainment and party
9. Interview

Findings

Table 1: Data of participants

S/N	Participants	Sex		Number	Qualifications	Locations of the facilitators
		M	F			
1.	Students/children: Toddlers Primary Secondary	24 18 12	36 27 25	142	School children	
2.	NGOs	3	5	8	1 Professor, 4 M.Sc 3 B.Sc	City
3.	Volunteer teachers		7	7	2 NCE 5 B.Ed	3 - Nawgu community 4 - City
4.	Librarians		F	4	MLIS	City
	Total			161		

The Table on the data of the participants of the summer reading program shows that the rural communities have large population of school children who go to school like other children in the cities and big towns. The characteristics of the NGO officials shows highly educated personnel who are professionals in their own field with majority of them having more than one degrees. The volunteer teachers are qualified with good certificates while all the librarians involved have Masters degrees in Library and Information Science. All the partners in the summer reading program were coming from the city except three volunteer teachers that reside in the community with the children. Thus, the partners in the summer reading program were professionals who exhibited responsiveness and ownership for community sustainable development.

Table 2: Activities of the summer reading program

S/N	Activities	Participants	Facilitators	Venue
1.	Story time	Toddlers, primary school children	Librarians	Classroom
2.	Picture books	Toddlers, primary school children	Librarians	Classroom
3.	Story books	Toddlers, primary school children	Librarians	Classroom
4.	Read aloud	Toddlers, primary school children	Librarians	Classroom
5.	Games eg: building blocks, toys	Toddlers	Librarians, volunteer teachers and NGO officials	Classroom
6.	Songs	Toddlers, primary and secondary school students	Librarians and volunteer teachers	Classroom, school hall and open space
7.	Writing	Primary and secondary school students	Volunteer teachers	Classroom
8.	Classroom subjects such as: English language, mathematics, Igbo, social education, civic education, basic science	Primary and secondary school students	Volunteer teachers	Classroom
9.	Use of computer	Toddlers, primary and secondary school students	Librarians and NGO officials	Classroom
	Media resources of audio	Toddlers, primary and secondary school students	Librarians and NGO officials	School hall and

	visual eg: children's movies, music	secondary school students	officials	classroom
10.	Art and craft	Toddlers, primary and secondary school students	Librarians, volunteer teachers and NGO officials	Classroom
11.	Dancing	Toddlers, primary and secondary school students	Volunteer teachers	Hall and open space
12.	Essays and compositions	Primary and secondary school students	Librarians, volunteer teachers and NGO officials	Class room and open space
13.	Borrowing of books	Primary and secondary school students	Librarians	Classroom
14	Vocabularies and word formation	Primary and secondary school students	Librarians, volunteer teachers	Classroom and open space

The activities of summer reading program in the Table above shows great varieties of learning experiences that appeal to different levels of children and students. It also shows the areas of contribution, facilitation and different locations where the summer reading took place. The librarians took ownership of the reading aloud, picture books among others which are their specialty in children's library services. It also shows the areas where the NGOs and volunteer teachers took the lead, respectively. This shows easy collaboration and respect of duties for achievement of common goals.

The interview revealed the students' feelings on the reading program. The toddlers simply enjoyed the picture books and stayed glued to all the pictures and colors.

I have never seen so many books. Please let me go home with two?

I will tell my friend in school about this summer school, they will love it

I can now build more words from vocabularies.

Table 3: Reading resources used in the summer reading

S/N	Types of resources	Number	Providers
1.	Picture books	15	Librarians
2.	Story books	10	Librarians
3.	Novels	32	Librarians and volunteer teachers
4.	Science text books	40	Librarians
5.	Social science books	43	Librarians
6.	Religious books	8	Librarians
7.	Visual posters	5	Librarians
8.	Computers	5	Librarians and NGO officials
9.	Projector	1	NGO officials
10.	Children/educational movies	5	NGO officials

The list of reading resources in the Table above indicates rich materials that can stimulate all types of literacy activities. The print resources are so many that every student could go home with a book every day. The wide varieties of resources provided simultaneous learning. The data also indicates that the librarians brought most of the print materials while the NGO brought projector and children's movies.

The interview on the benefits of the resources was so touching and soul lifting. One of the students Emmanuel stated:

I am so happy to have touched computer today and typed my name. I want to type more

The Traditional rulers also stated that happily:

The children ran to my palace to tell me they clicked on the computer and wrote their names. I felt their joy and was so happy you people came to my community to carry out this summer reading.

Even the headmistress of the host school where the summer reading took place requested that the librarians come to her school during resumption to teach computer to students and teachers. She pleaded that they choose the days they want while the time table would be created to accommodate them.

TARGETS and participants of the summer reading:

- Toddlers – Pre-school
- Primary school children
- Secondary school students

Table 4: Assessment, evaluation and reward to participants

S/N	Items	Recipients	Number
1.	Customized Exercise books	All participants and invited guests at the closing party	200 pieces
2.	Writing materials: pen, pencil, eraser, sharpener	All school children	142 sets
3.	Math sets	Students that participated in oral composition and essay	10 pieces
4	Extra exercise books and writing materials	Pre and primary school children who answered questions correctly	10 sets
5.	Novels	Primary and secondary school students who summarized the books read	10 pieces
6.	Food and party	All participants and invited guests	200

The Table above shows the various methods of evaluation, the gifts awarded and the quantity given out to students who did exceedingly well in showcasing what they learnt. It also shows that every participant went home with gifts. There were food and party for the official closure of the reading program.

LEARNS LEARNT:

1. The community children are really smart but lack reading resources to enhance their literacy activities. They showed great intelligence and willingness to learn.
2. The community stakeholders and the parents really want their children to acquire good literacy skills. The presence of library will help to nurture and bring out the best in these children
3. Rural community needs community engagement and social inclusion

CHALLENGES

1. The teachers were not enough to share the classes and subjects accordingly
2. The Librarians were not enough to handle the story hour and reading activities to all the classes at once. Hence, some classes did not enjoy story hour activities in all days as planned
3. There was no light which affected our computers at some point. It also affected the use of projectors which we did not use as often as we wanted
4. Transportation for the teachers and the librarians to the community was a big issue. There was no remuneration which made some teachers and librarians not to come regularly.

Discussion

Summer reading in the communities is a worthwhile program that can attract every class of people that want to touch lives. The data in Table 1 indicated the great level of ownership and commitment which librarians, NGOs and teachers exhibited in supporting sustainable development. This shows hope, strategies, responsiveness and service deliveries which can be attained with careful planning and good project management. The indication is that libraries and librarians can reach out to any group if they really set out to do that with enriching partnership that can close the reading gap among children (Roman & Fiore, 2010).

The fact that the activities carried out in the summer reading program were mostly championed by librarians showed that libraries and librarians can really generate a project and execute it with resounding outputs in the communities. For instance, the activities of story time, read aloud, picture books (Table 2) which are the trade mark of library services to children were easy to execute in the rural communities. The contributions and collaborations of NGOs and the volunteer teachers showed understanding of joint programs and respect to expertise of duties. It

offered different reading skills that help young children build reading and language skills by fostering a love of reading and building confidence in children (CSLP, 2016).

The use of media resource in the summer reading (Table 1, 2 & 3) buttressed the essence of access to computer that yield the required impact for academic performance. It is one of the ways of improving students' literacy skills as they clicked away with glee, seeing their names and short biographical information appearing on the screen of the computer. It was a wonder to behold. Besides, that the majority of the resources were sourced from the libraries and by the librarians showed that provision of materials are still in the domain of libraries. They can influence reading and learning resources and make things happen in any location. Although, they could not provide the projector and the children's movies, probably because, they were out of their basic collection. The interview showed the joy of reading, what presence of reading resources can do in stimulating learning and igniting interest in books.

The prize giving and gifts of books to all participants was the highlight of the program. The Public Library Albuquerque Bernalillo County (2017) stated, give books: give a book for birthdays, holidays, or any special occasion. It doesn't have to be new — you can share one of your favorite books or look for a special old book from a used bookstore! If relatives are looking for birthday gift ideas for your child, ask them to give a book this year. The gifts were pluses (Table 4) which added excitement and values to improved learning. The provision of food and entertainment added to the excitement of the program and the children loved it as the social gathering sustained the budding relationship among the participants.

Undoubtedly, summer reading comes with challenges, especially in the rural communities where development is a far cry compared to city life. It affected some aspects of the program but the spirit of team work and commitment to serve made the facilitators to persevere to the end. It was the impact that drove the completion of the project. Hence, it was a great lesson learnt that people in rural communities have goals, inspiration and dreams to attain the heights just like every normal child in the urban center. When the same opportunities are presented to them, they can compete with their counterparts, elsewhere.

Conclusion

Our world can only be transformed with serious consideration of out reaches to communities on flourishing strong early foundations on the children, both girls and boys, especially during long vacations. Hence, the pre-school can be guided and made to love the world of books even before they start going to school. The primary and secondary school students can be supported to have long lasting relationship with books. This will definitely improve their academic performances. This calls for doing the needful and channeling the children to designated information centers where learning development play an important role in inculcating the attitude to reading and learning to avoid the accident of truancy in determining academic achievement and outcomes later in life. Collaboration is key to sustainable development and must be viewed seriously by librarians in attaining literacy goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are made, based on the reading project:

1. Libraries and information centers should be established in all communities to support reading and learning for lifelong opportunities.
2. Public libraries especially should connect with the communities, stakeholders in identifying their needs and serving them accordingly.

3. Libraries should collaborate with NGOs, corporate organizations and other agencies in order to reach out and engage everyone irrespective of location, age and gender.
4. Libraries and librarians should write proposals, seek for funds in carrying out reading projects in the communities and with marginalized groups for social inclusion.
5. Mobile libraries should be provided with relevant resources to reach the underserved communities and dwellers for inculcation of reading culture for sustainable development.

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