



## **Changing Roles of the Teacher Librarian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria: Issues and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

The paper discusses the changing roles of the teacher librarian in Nigerian school librarianship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century characterized by the emergence of information and communication technology materials and tools otherwise known as e-library. These roles include being a teacher/educator, a resource manager, an information specialist and a programme administrator among others. The concepts of virtual libraries, digital libraries, paperless systems, electronic books (e-books), CD-ROMs, are all suggesting to teacher librarians that it is no longer the era of meek and apologetic school librarianship, but the new era of aggressive and active librarianship with new challenging roles in school library services. The paper highlights the challenging variables that confront the teacher-librarian in his new roles in school library administration including inadequate funding and personnel, lack of accommodation and the usurpation of functions of the teacher-librarian by Headmasters and Principals.

**Key words:** Teacher Librarian, Changing Roles, Environment of School Libraries.

### **Introduction**

Throughout the history of the school library profession, the essential goals of the school library have remained unchanged. A school library is a library established in primary or secondary school with the main purpose of serving the academic and information needs of teachers and pupils or students of the school. According to Nwokocha (2013), a school library aims at providing information materials relevant to the subjects offered by the school and those that can be read for personal development of teachers, non-teaching staff and students. School libraries strive to instill love for learning in all students and ensure equitable access to information. However, in the past two decades, technologies have revolutionized the roles and duties of a teacher librarian. A teacher librarian according to Ibezim (2008) is a certified teacher who has also received training in librarianship and appointed to organize and manage the resources of a school library. Abali (2013)



opines that the teacher librarian is the highest level of manpower that is available in the school library. Indeed, he is a person with bifurcated training in school librarianship as well as in education. For the teacher librarian to perform his duties effectively, he must be a professional who understands the rudiments of school library duties.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the society had shifted from the industrial Age, which centred on jobs in manufacturing, to the information Age, in which jobs of a teacher librarian requires innovative thinking and problem-solving skills, effective communication skills, teamwork, and the ability to manage information effectively, particularly in this Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, the aptitudes required by learners to be successful in work and in life, have evolved to include high-level thinking skills, innovation skills, and collaborative teamwork (Brenda; 2013).

Michael (2012) opines that because of the nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment, the teacher librarian, classroom teachers and students now share the roles of teacher and learner. Therefore all of them become partners in meeting instructional goals and curriculum development. Information specialist or the school librarian must therefore work to create an environment where everyone is a teacher, learner and contributor in school library environment. Patrons of the school library are now collaborators who interact with resources and with each other. Kontz (2012) opines that digital technologies have created endless opportunities for innovative teaching and learning. Though he said, face-to-face collaboration remains an essential component of learning; virtual tools are now used to connect learning to the world outside the classroom. Teachers and students can bring topics to life through web-based assignments that incorporate a multitude of online resources, including subject-related photographs, video and audio. Using emerging technologies, the teacher librarian and classroom teacher can create online discussion group for students to debate a classroom topic. The teacher librarian and classroom teachers can also use such technologies to connect with other educators and experts to seek advice or ideas for class assignment, or to partner with local business, educational institutions, and organizations to blend leaning with real-world experiences.

Kens (2012) remarks that within the past decade, educational scholars have worked to define the elements that should comprise today's learning environment which has drastically changed the traditional role of a teacher librarian in a school library environment.



The goal of any educational system according to Johns (2008), is to enable students to emerge as responsible and productive members of the society. For that to happen, students must be taught responsibility as an art during their school years. Probably the most effective method of teaching responsibility is to follow a process of gradual release of responsibility, in which the teacher assumes a strong, guiding role at first and then gradually transfers that responsibility to the student as he or she develops the capacity to assume it. For example, students who are expected to respect copyright and intellectual property rights must learn through a series of experiences how to avoid plagiarism and to rely on their own thinking.

### **The Teacher-Librarian's Role Prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Traditional school library according to Sutton (1998) is a “specific place with a finite collections of tangible information and it is geographically constrained”. This type of library before the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Nigeria operates within the four walls of a building either located in one room apartment or in the principal or Headmaster's office. In this regard, users are compelled to visit the library before they can have access to the collection. Therefore, the teacher librarian under this situation performs the traditional roles which include the following;

- i) **Book Selection:** The teacher-librarian is the co-ordinator of library acquisition. After the subject teachers have submitted their recommendations for new library books, the teacher librarian prunes down the list according to the fund available, adding more books in subjects not adequately covered in the library.
- ii) **Processing and Organization of Information Materials:** The teacher librarian processes and organizes information materials in school library. The aim of which is to promote quick retrieval and dissemination of information. A lot of processes are involved in processing and organization of information materials. They include:
  - unpacking of materials
  - stamping
  - accessing
  - preparing the book pockets, cards and
  - shelf arrangement.
- iii) **Classification and Cataloguing:** In managing school libraries, cataloguing and classification functions are important traditional role which the teacher librarian performs in school librarianship. Cataloguing according to Chester (2012) is the process of describing information materials by listing their different parts in terms of the author, title, edition, place of publication, publishers, date of publication, etc. In classifying school



library materials, the teacher librarian uses the school edition of DDC to assign subject headings to catalogue entries. Whenever he is in doubt over the specific subject of a particular book, he consults the subject teacher for assistance.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought a dramatic change in the role and services of school librarianship, thereby introducing new roles for the teacher-librarian.

### **The Changing Roles of the Teacher Librarian For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School libraries**

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment in Nigerian primary and post-primary schools has witnessed tremendous changes and these changes have affected the roles of teacher librarians in Nigeria. This changing role was predicated on the emergence of information communication technology (ICT) in service delivery in school libraries. These include several trends in the school library programme in the areas of services that involves global networking; to integrate technology directly with curriculum; to connect the school library programme outcomes to broader learning outcomes and measurements and to substantially increase collaboration with classroom teachers, anticipating their needs and delivering information to them.

These variables automatically have shifted responsibilities of the teacher librarian from the traditional functions of information specialist, student helper, instructional partner, programme administrator, acquisition, cataloguing, classification, weeding etc. In order to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century service delivery in school library, the teacher librarian is expected to perform four main leadership roles, which include the following:

- i. A Teacher and Educator: The teacher librarian is involved in programming, teaching and assessment and is also responsible for literacy and information literacy skills development and the promotion of literature. Teacher-librarians, as collaborative teaching partners, support teaching and learning in information literacy.
- ii. A Resource Manager: The teacher-librarian engages in the development of the school collection to suit the needs of teachers and students and manages both the physical and virtual environment. Gibbons (2013) states that “a good school library supplements the prescribed curriculum with that other curriculum, the world of favourite books, comics, DVDS and websites”.



- iii. An Information Specialist: As an information specialist, the school librarian develops a resource base for the school by using the curriculum and student interests to identify and obtain library materials in a data base that is organized and maintained in order to promote independent reading and life long learning. Materials in the library collection can be located using an Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). This role also encompasses many activities relating to technology including the integration of resources in a variety of formats: periodical; Blog and Wiki content, digital images, virtual classroom etc.
- iv. A Collaborator: The teacher librarian is a partner in curriculum planning who also designs a resource centre and reshapes tasks to suit the learner.
- v. A Programme Administrator: The school librarian defines, leads and manages school library media programmes by establishing library policies, overseeing the library budget; planning the physical and virtual library space and maintaining a welcoming, positive and innovative learning atmosphere.
- vi. A Teacher: As a teacher, the school librarian empowers students to become critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. According to Happell (2013), the school librarian supports the student' success by guiding them to:
  - ❖ Read for understanding, breadth and pleasure,
  - ❖ Work with each other in successful collaborations for learning,
  - ❖ Build on prior knowledge and construct new knowledge among others.

Irrespective of all these, the teacher librarian advocates for reading for pleasure and supports reading comprehension skills across all formats. A leading teacher librarian stays abreast of both national trends of popular reading material and student interests within the individual school community. The teacher librarian in the 21<sup>st</sup> –century Nigerian school environment is faced with the problem of reading in all formats such as graphic novels, periodicals and online sources.

### **Contending Issues in the Environment of School Library in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigerian Society**

Environment here implies the geographical location of school library and its physical space. The physical space serves as an intellectual gymnasium with multiple flexible spaces that accommodate a variety of learning tasks. Among such tasks are information seeking, collaborating, and communicating, as well as reading and browsing and use of multi-media formats. The physical environment also includes areas for group and independent work, an area for presentations, a



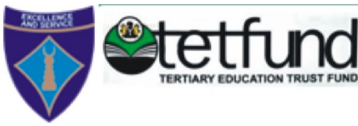
multi-media production areas access to adequate number of workstations, wireless Internet access for students and teachers who bring their own laptops, space for curricular planning and small meetings, and comfortable space for reading.

The school library building must occupy a central location in the school, where all can converge to make use of the school library collection. A library building does not need permanent partitions, so as to allow for easy adjustment without breaking down walls which might disturb readers. It should be a functional building that can be re-arranged to suit ones needs and tasks at any time. The school library building must provide for work store, auditorium and audio-visuals. The rooms must be attractive, spacious, ventilated, sound proof and used exclusively for library purpose. Nevertheless, researches such as the one carried out by Ebubeike (2012) has shown that most school libraries are in a make-shift classroom or headmaster's office with outdated materials squeezed in cupboards.

The virtual space of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century school library environment, especially the Internet has dissolved the physical borders of the school library facility. School library users can now enjoy online services, instruction and references from anywhere and at anytime. Thoughtful design of the school library's website can turn this virtual space into a vital instructional tool and resource centre, helping the teacher librarian reach learners who are largely online.

The website connects learners to existing school library services and provides additional services tailored to learners' needs. It should house such materials as graphic organizers, downloadable interventions, links to citation sites and reading list to support projects. By creating part finders for specific units of study and posting them on the school library website, the teacher librarian can reach the entire school community. The teacher librarian may also consider the use of interactive tools, such as Wikis and online document-creation sites, which invite collaboration among learners for using resources and production tools.

Therefore, careful attention is needed when designing or redesigning facilities, including the physical and virtual spaces. Consideration of feedback gathered from students and teachers can help ensure that the physical spaces meet the needs of the school community.



## **Challenges Facing Teacher Librarian's in the Administration of School Libraries in Nigeria**

The problems of school libraries in Nigeria, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Nigerian society, are negatively affecting the essence of school libraries as an important facility for successful educational planning. These problems include inadequate finance, inadequate staff, lack of accommodation, and personal interference of principals and headmasters among others.

The major reason for poor performance of teacher librarians, especially those owned by government, is inadequate funding by the government. Government is the only reliable source of revenue generation to school libraries in Nigeria. The school library programme requires solid funding to support teaching and learning

In most school libraries in Nigeria, accommodation and good furniture are lacking. The libraries are adopted in one or two small classrooms. The accommodation is rather small to serve adequately the number of students in schools. Lack of qualified staff creates a problem to school libraries. Libraries have gone professional. It is almost impossible to send a librarian to manage some of the numerous primary and post-primary institutions at present funding level in Nigeria. Furthermore, there has been no strong body that will champion the course of school librarianship in Nigeria. The Nigeria Library Association (NLA) who should play this role has its hands full with other issues. For a school library to function effectively, it must boast of adequate manpower in terms of their quality and quantity. A survey of staff situation in Nigerian school libraries according to Isdore (2012) show that almost all the public school libraries in Nigeria are poorly staffed. The libraries are staffed with inadequate number of trained personnel who are not the professional teacher-librarians. Even where the libraries have qualified personnel, the number is not adequate. Personnel are the bedrock of any school library and where there is inadequacy of school library personnel, the library is bound to suffer immeasurably.

There is need for school libraries to educate their users, particularly, in this 21<sup>st</sup>-century school librarianship in Nigeria that is equipped with Internet and ICT tools and facilities. Most users of school libraries lack basic library user education and computer skills/literacy to use these ICT and internet facilities. This in turn affects their patronage of the school library collection and facilities and their overall development.

There is the issue of usurpation of powers and functions of the teacher librarian by their Headmasters and principals. Headmasters and principals are in the habit of taking over the functions and duties of teacher librarians even when the principals



lack any knowledge of school librarianship. This usurpation of power often creates conflicts between the Headmasters/Principals and teacher librarians. This problem is more pronounced when it has to do with the management of school library finances and budgeting.

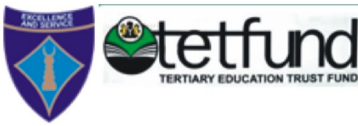
There is general apathy on the part of the government and school library proprietors towards the development of school library. As at today, there is no governmental policy on the establishment and management of school libraries as is the case with science laboratories, or academic libraries. Again, school libraries lack adequate security for their resources. Very often, school library resources are lost to thefts, mutilation and destruction. Like other libraries, school libraries should be adequately protected, secured and safeguarded.

### **Conclusion**

In all profession, including librarianship, strong leaders embody certain qualities that draw people to them and make them work toward achieving a common goal. Leaders are passionate about their work and look for new ideas in all their experiences, both personal and professional. Teacher librarians in school libraries are leaders, excellent communicators who should instill enthusiasm on the school library users and other staff of the school library by making them feel like important members of the school library community.

Leading teacher librarians should create an environment where collaboration and creative problem solving thrive in this 21<sup>st</sup>-century school library services and administration. The teacher librarian in school library should continuously strive to advance their skills by reading professional journals and books, attending conferences, and networking with other librarians so as to up-date their professional skills that will meet the current roles that are expected of them. District teacher librarians should meet regularly to share ideas, issues and new strategies and tools, and plan future services. Such meetings are critical to ensure that they meet challenges that confront their leadership roles in school libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian society.





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