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**Progress and Pitfalls: Attaining Best Practices
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Abstract

This paper traces school library policy formulation and implementation as factors for attaining best practices in Nigerian school libraries from the inception of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977 to the present. Nigeria's post-independence educational policy advocates an active, learner-centered and resource-based constructivist approach that demands a central role for school libraries as learning and resource centers. The Policy also makes favorable mention of provision for school libraries. However, putting policy into practice has proved difficult in the almost 40 years that have followed. Since 1977 implementation has been attempted through a number of initiatives aimed at developing school libraries as a way of realizing the NPE vision. At the same time, there have been policies that proved to be detrimental to development. This paper traces policy and its implementation through the past four decades, beginning with the efforts of the Nigerian School Library Association to work with government in implementing NPE provisions on school libraries and the successful advocacy of school libraries by the Anambra State School Libraries Association and Bendel State Library Board at state level during the 1970s and 1980s. It continues by reviewing federal government programmes to improve primary education and school libraries through the National Primary Education Commission in 1989-1991 and the Universal Basic Education Commission from 1999 onwards. Policies concerned include those on provision of material resources and funding; those related to human resources, their training and position; and policies enabling use of school libraries as "the heart" of any education system.

Key words: school libraries, Nigeria, school library professional associations, public/school library cooperation, educational policy

Introduction

What works? How can educational policy help us attain best practices in Nigerian school libraries? As indicated by the theme of this conference, policy has two crucial aspects: formulation and implementation. The first requirement is formulation of sound policy, but this achieves little unless such policy is implemented. And putting policy into practice has proved to be difficult in all areas of life, including education in Nigeria. Indeed, for this reason putting policy into practice, or (PPP) has become a major research focus in recent years. This paper will trace sound and faulty policies relating to Nigerian school library development from the promulgation of the National Policy on Education in 1977 to the present, and review the ways or extent to which these policies have been implemented in support of best practices. However, let us begin by placing Nigerian school libraries in an international context, focusing on factors that have aided or hindered best practices.

School libraries are the youngest of the major types of libraries, their widespread development dating only to the twentieth century. While there were significant bursts of activity in the 1920s, school libraries are largely a post-World War II phenomenon (Lowrie and Nagakura, 1991). There are a number of reasons this period was auspicious for school libraries. The decades of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and much of the 1980s were a period of relative economic prosperity throughout the world. Moreover, the school population was expanding rapidly, with increasing birth rates and emphasis on universal education as a prerequisite for national development. Newly independent countries like Nigeria in particular saw need to reformulate policy to suit their requirements as independent nations. It was also a period of ferment in educational philosophy, with reforms leading to what is usually called modern education—education that is learner-centered, resource-based and self-directed (Dike, 1993).

Such ideas brought the school library as the media or resource center to the very heart of the educational enterprise and turned it into the school's central learning laboratory.

As a result governments in many countries developed new statements of educational policy reflecting these reforms as well as the new understanding of the role of school libraries. To support the new vision of education, they also took steps to establish and develop libraries at both primary and secondary school level. These policies were often implemented through massive funding, collection building, or training of school library personnel. However, most enduring in effect was legislation mandating school library standards, as well as curricula reflecting the new philosophy and the establishment of institutional structures in support of school libraries at regional or national level (Lowrie and Nagakura, 1991). When hard times came toward the end of the century, school libraries fared better in countries where they had been firmly institutionalized and embedded in legislation.

Government has not worked alone. While government intervention is usually required for comprehensive and systematic school library development, other agencies have played important roles in implementing policy, independently or in partnership with government. In many countries these include professional associations, which often lobby government on behalf of school libraries, play a significant role in raising library awareness, and mobilize school libraries at the grassroots. Another important agency is the public library. With larger, more established libraries and a corps of professional staff, public libraries have typically provided advisory services to school libraries, training of their personnel, and assistance with collection building (Dike, 1997; Lowrie and Nagakura, 1991).

These factors of policy formulation and implementation, trends in progress and regression, and agencies partnering to implement policies have featured in Nigeria as well as other countries. Examples from the period from 1977 onward will now be considered.

Creation of the National Policy on Education and Nigerian School Library Association

Nigeria was part of these international trends in education and school library development. The National Policy on Education, developed first in 1977 and still in use after several revisions, expressed the tenets of educational reform named earlier, a constructivist philosophy envisioning education as lifelong, individualized, learner-centered, functional, relevant, self-directed, and emphasizing modern educational techniques (Nigeria, 2004, p. 9). The Policy also recognized the role of school libraries, asserting that they are “at the heart of the education enterprise” (p. 52) and “one of the most important educational services” (p. 53). Consequent to this, the section on Educational Services went on to state that “proprietors of schools shall also provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions in accordance with the established standards. They shall also provide for training of librarians and library assistants for this service.” (p.53) “Shall”, not “must”: unfortunately, school library development, while acknowledged as important, was not backed up with any mandate for provision or implementation that would give “teeth” to these strong aspirations. While the NPE was an important step in affirming school libraries, implementation has lagged far behind. The Policy is still in effect and school libraries are still struggling.

The shortcoming did not go unnoticed. Coincidentally, the same year, 1977, saw the founding of the Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA), established as a national professional body capable of advocating for school libraries with the federal government, the level where educational policy is formulated. Among NSLA’s first actions were developing

guidelines for legislation on school libraries/media resource centres, submitted to government for consideration in 1978, and participation in national workshops on implementation of the National Policy on Education in 1979 (Ogunsheye, 1998; Elaturoti, 1998). Aside from implementation of school library provisions in the NPE, the NSLA placed emphasis on human resources. The Association's first conference, held in Benin in 1978, took as its theme: School Library and the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, with special attention to the problems of provision and training of school librarians. Resolutions passed at the end of the conference addressed the major challenges facing school libraries even today: legislation, personnel, funding and material resources (Ogunsheye, 1998). The NSLA has continued to press for effective policies on these issues even to the present day.

Leadership from the Anambra State School Libraries Association

Aside from the national efforts of the NSLA, the period from 1977-1991 saw encouraging strategies for developing school libraries implemented at state level. Eastern Nigeria had been a leader in school library development since the creation of the Eastern Nigeria School Libraries Association, a section of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), in 1963 (Obi, 1998). From 1977 to 1991, its successor, the Anambra State School Libraries Association (ASSLA), played a major role in raising library awareness, advocating for school libraries, and mobilizing teacher-librarians at the grassroots level (Ngwuchukwu, 2013). While this professional association took the lead, it worked in close cooperation, in partnership with state school boards/ministries of education and the public library board. It also enjoyed the support of agencies such as British Council and higher educational institutions like the University of Nigeria. Among its accomplishments in the major areas of school library development were the following proposals adopted by the state government:

1. **Legislation** – ASSLA proposed Minimum Standards which the state government adopted as guidelines (Anambra State School Libraries Bulletin, 1977). While implementation was left up to schools, these provided a useful guide, which was also used for assessment during the Best School Library Competition organized in 1986 and 1987 by the Anambra State Library Board in partnership with the ASSLA and state ministry (ASSLB, 1987).

2. **Appointment of a School library supervisor** – This advocate of school libraries within the Ministry of Education visited school libraries on supervision, raised library awareness with government and the public, and promoted government adoption of measures supporting school libraries (Okechi, 1977; Katchy, 1987).

3. **Training** – In 1982 the ASSLA successfully lobbied the state government to introduce library studies as a specialization in all colleges of education in Anambra State (Muogilim, 1983). These produced many qualified teacher-librarians who served capably in primary and secondary schools. However, the programme was abolished in 1991 on the grounds that library is not a subject taught in schools.

4. **School library personnel** – This was an area of limited success. The ASSLA never succeeded in getting the position of teacher-librarian declared a duty post with extra allowance (even though librarians are named among the specialist teachers in the NPE, p. 15) or in gaining a full-time position for school/teacher librarians. However, government did approve the appointment of teacher-librarians graduating from colleges of education, provided they would also teach a school subject; and at times sent library assistants to serve in schools (Ngwuchukwu, 2013).

5. **Funding** – The state government accepted the ASSLA proposal of imposition of a library fee for all students in primary and secondary schools. This was used at times with limited success for running school libraries and funding collection development (Obi, 1998).

6. **Collection development** – For a period, the state government sent library fees to the state library board's book depot for purchase of library books by schools. In addition, government periodically gave book grants or sent library materials directly to schools (Ekweozoh, 1985).

7. **Accommodation** – The government contribution here was limited to highly committed officers mobilizing school or PTA support to build or furnish school libraries. For instance, local government school officials in Onitsha, specifically C. Agunwa and Henry Nwokedi, spurred a number of primary schools to develop libraries between 1978 and 1981 (Nwokedi, 1981). Officers from the Library Board often played a similar role, as in Abakaliki in the early 1990s.

From this it can be seen that partnership between the ASSLA as a professional association and two arms of state government—the educational authorities and public library—between 1977 and 1991 resulted in policies supportive of school libraries, as well as limited implementation of such policies for a time. The successful partnership for school library development ended with the creation of states in 1991, which led to the demise of the Association and disruption in its government partners, the state educational agencies and public library (Ngwuchukwu, 2013). Another factor was the unfavorable economic situation of the late 1980s and 1990s, which brought decline to all social services, including schools and libraries.

Leadership from a Public Library – Bendel State Library Board

The Bendel State Library Board was another outstanding example of leadership in developing school libraries in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Its most notable contribution was

the Bendel Book Depot (Onyeonwu, 1977), which grew out of dissatisfaction with the state of school library development in spite of the collection of library fees. Advantage was seen in a centralized purchasing agency utilizing the bibliographic tools, professional expertise, and economies of scale available through the public library. Selection remained in the hands of the schools, since teacher-librarians were able to visit the Depot's large showroom in Benin and local branches to inspect books and select the relevant titles. The economic downturn of the late 1980s adversely affected both the Bendel Book Depot and its less successful imitators in other states, such as Anambra and Imo. However, besides positively impacting school library collection development in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it has left a useful model for developing school libraries through networking and partnership with public libraries.

The Library Board also initiated establishment of model libraries in selected school throughout the state (Ene, 1979). These both served as spurs to development and provided resources to neighbouring schools. This was supplemented by visits to schools to increase library awareness and advise them on the requirements of a good school library. These initiatives were so successful that management of school libraries was handed over to the Bendel State Library Board (Ene, 1979). This progress was disrupted by a change in policy, the decision of a new state government administration to abolish library fees (because education was to be free) as well as breakup of the system following states creation in 1991. The economic hard times and consequent government policy that public libraries should be self-supporting also had devastating effects both on public libraries and the school libraries they had been assisting.

Leadership from the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC)

The first major federal government initiative was the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC), established in 1989 to take charge of primary education nationwide and

improve the deplorable state of education at that foundation level. The Commission showed interest in primary school library development, improving the physical infrastructure in the schools, adding more qualified teachers and providing training workshops for library services in schools on a zonal basis throughout the federation. Elaturoti (2002) reported among many others that the commission accepted and sponsored the Abadina Media Resource Centre's proposal for a national teacher librarian workshop for primary school teachers that would run the libraries set in the schools. The disbanding of the commission in 1991 led to discontinuation of federal government efforts and general disruption in primary school education and the end of school library development until 1999 when the government launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. UBE took over the functions of NPEC (Okezie, 2006) and renewed many of the services of NPEC relating to school libraries.

Government Efforts since 2000 – Universal Primary Education Commission (UBEC)

The Universal Primary Education Commission (UBEC) and its arms at state level, the State Universal Basic Education Boards, have been at the forefront of primary school library development since 2000. Universal Basic Education was set up in 1999 as part of Nigeria's ratification of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). UNO article 46 on the Universal Declaration calls for resource-based learning, thereby focusing attention to the need for school libraries as resource centers. In a bid to fast track school library development, the Universal Basic Education Commission works in different aspects, which include: awareness and advocacy, attraction of funds through collaborations with other agencies, collection development, personnel development, and services. They have collaborated with international agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, and national agencies such as the former Education Trust Fund (ETF) in developing primary school libraries.

1. Awareness - The Universal Basic Education Commission embarked on different activities so as to raise awareness on the need for library development. However, according to F. Edegere (personal communication, June, 2011), this had not gone a long way in improving the situations of school libraries in the country, though it did facilitate getting ETF library intervention fund to SUBEBs. It has fought for the inclusion of SUBEB librarians in instructional materials committees. Also, through the efforts of librarians in UBEC, 7th of August has been declared National Library Day.

2. Partnerships - UBEC has attracted World Bank and other agencies to library development over the years. An example is the World Bank loan in the year 2000. Through this project, books were selected with the assistance of librarians as consultants and resource persons for purchase by 1110 focus primary schools. In addition to this, a zonal school library resource center was developed in the 774 local governments existing at that time. This was done to give primary schools better access to effective school library services.

3. Training and collection development - Training of teacher librarians to man libraries has also been a major priority for the Commission. It was noted that twenty SUBEBs that met the pre-qualification standards set by UBEC were supported with 2 million naira each to develop their libraries (S. Gamba, personal communications, 2012). The Federal Ministry of Education Library Project complemented this intervention in 2003 by providing them with library books. Subsequently, UBE in 2002 and 2003 also organized workshops for teachers

4. Self-help project - Embarked on from 2000 – 2004, this was geared towards empowering communities to develop schools. One million naira was given for such project, with 10 percent was to be provided by the community while 90 percent was given by the government. The communities had to identify the areas of need, which could be building of school library

blocks, among others. The vision was to be world class education intervention and regulatory agency for the promotion of uniform qualitative and functional basic education in Nigeria.

5. Reading promotion -The poor reading ability observed in pupils and some teachers was attributed to scarcity of books and libraries in schools. UBEC believed that the provision and development of functional school libraries would reduce this historical shortage of reading materials, as libraries will provide variety of reading materials that would support learning. In the South East states, libraries have introduced programs like reading competitions in developing the art of reading among the pupils (E. Anamaleze, former Anambra SUBEB librarian and C. Okeke, Enugu SUBEB librarian, personal communication, Aug.-Sept. 2011).

Discussion and Conclusion

What then can we conclude from this brief historical survey of school library policy formulation and implementation as it affects best practices in Nigerian education? What works in developing school libraries? This will be considered from three angles: basic policy, policy and politics, and personnel policy.

Basic policy issues

Nigerian educational policy as articulated in the NPE, with its constructivist philosophy and learner-centered approach, provides a sound basis for school library development. The NPE also specifically recognizes the central role of libraries by placing them at the heart of the education enterprise. However, these lofty sentiments remain aspirational. There is no provision for implementation, no mandating of school libraries, and as a result implementation has faltered in the years since the Policy was formulated. While shortcomings in policy implementation are not unique to school libraries, their neglect removes a basic condition for the learner-centered

approaches required for lifelong education. School library advocates recommend legislation as a better way of promoting implementation, as has been accomplished in a number of countries.

Moreover, there have been subtle and not always advantageous alterations in various editions of the Policy. For instance, the 2004 edition replaced the all-embracing 1981 concept of learning resources in all their variety with a narrow and exclusive focus on ICT, thus undercutting the recognition that quality education requires varied media resources, as found in a well-equipped school library, to provide fuller knowledge and meet varied educational needs and learning situations.

Policy trumped by politics

Political considerations have led sudden reversals in policy that were detrimental to school library development and often to education in general. A case in point is the disbanding of the National Primary Education Commission to satisfy the demands of local governments, just at the point it was instituting successful programs for library development. While it was revived at UBEC a few years later, hopes had been dashed and primary school education and libraries were several steps behind where they left off. Generally, history has shown national leadership to be more beneficial to school libraries than devolving most authority to the local level.

States creation, whatever its political advantages may be, has been carried out in a way that was detrimental to school and public library development. This was particularly the case with the 1991 exercise, which broke up the very successful Bendel State Library network of support for school libraries and led to the demise of the dynamic Anambra State School Libraries Association, as well as state chapters of the Nigerian School Library Association. In most cases nothing comparable has replaced the lost institutional structures.

Funding of school libraries has also suffered from policy changes resulting from political considerations. While not ideal, the only regular source of school library funding yet devised has been library fees and other levies. Yet at the height of success, library fees were abolished in Bendel State because the new administration had campaigned that education was free. More recently, all levies were banned in Enugu State for similar reasons, bringing community and PTA efforts to develop school libraries, or even repair broken roofs, to a halt. The only alternative seen is government grants, usually occasional, one-time gifts to a few favored schools; nothing that could allow for planned and widespread development.

For libraries to develop their collections, there has to be a regular budget as well as facilities to allow for high quality and cost effective selection, such as might be offered by book depots or other centralized networks. In terms of accommodation, libraries were included and later removed from the primary school blueprint. Any approved school plan needs to have a sizable and convenient space for the library. School libraries also offer opportunities for public-private partnerships with the community; such initiatives should be encouraged since “education for all is the responsibility of all.”

Policy on school library personnel

There are two aspects to the issue of school library personnel—training and position. Both have been problematic, possibly because of the dual professional demands placed on school librarians. To manage library resources and services effectively, school librarians require full library professional competence acquired through a degree, certificate or diploma program, not merely a single course or quickie in-service orientation. However, to fully realize the teaching role of the school librarian and work as an accepted member of the teaching team, they also need thorough grounding in education.

There have been programs in Nigeria that combine these two elements, for instance the NCE programs of the 1980s, B.Ed programs such as are offered at NnamdiAzikiwe University, and more recently, the higher degree and diploma programs developed at the University of Ibadan's Abadina Media Resource Centre. Unfortunately, certain policy decisions, like the abolition of NCE programmes for training teacher-librarians and denial of study leave for teachers to study library and information science, have been detrimental to the development of school libraries. Yet, these courses of study have been seen to produce well qualified personnel who could ably develop school library services if given the opportunity.

This brings us to the second dimension of the problem—placement and progression for school librarians. Higher institutions may produce qualified school librarians, but there are no positions to fill. So far, most states, and therefore public schools, have been very reluctant to provide a full-time position for school librarians. They are either not employed or are used as classroom teachers. In primary schools, any teacher posted to the library is usually at the discretion of a library-conscious head teacher, and as happened recently in Enugu State, this can be reversed by the authorities at any time.

Where school librarians are employed, lack of progression on a career ladder soon frustrates them out of the service, as happened in Unity Schools in the 1990s and is happening to graduates of the Abadina programs today. Yet it is the knowledgeable person who brings to library and its resources to life, who guides students in learning to learn, and makes the library user-friendly. Increasingly private schools are employing full-time and qualified school librarians; why should children in public schools miss out! Policy must provide both for school libraries and school librarians if the objectives of Nigerian education are to be realized and quality education achieved.

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