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ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR THE REALISATION OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL (MDG) ON NIGERIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Information access is the hallmark of a sound social, economic, political and educational structure of any nation. Consequently, for any educational programme to thrive and succeed, information should be made a vital resource for which every individual can access in order to play their respective roles in the all-round development of the society. This paper therefore examined the relevance of information to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the Nigerian education sector. It highlighted possible problems that pose challenges to information accessibility which by implication would hinder the smooth implementation of the MDG. Information must be processed and managed appropriately and made accessible through diverse formats in order make individuals well-groomed to face developmental challenges of the nation. This paper recommended among other things that the school librarians of the 21st century must fashion ways to ensure that students access adequate information through appropriate information (reading) resources that could help their academic pursuit and also meet the challenges of the Millennium Development Goal on Nigerian Education.

Introduction

The relevance of information to the attainment of any nation's educational goal cannot be over-emphasized. It is a vital raw material to a nation's achievement of its social-economic, political and

educational programme objectives. Information is a veritable tool of power and important resource to which every human irrespective of age, sex or race should have access. One of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals on

education is to make learners acquire essential tools for life-long learning and to promote self esteem. One of the tools to achieve this goal is adequate information. It also proposes the development of a global partnership among national and international communities.

Information is defined as meaningful communication symbols transferred between any two points in human communication or machine networks (Tiamiyu & Aina, 2008). As its need increases, its volume also increases in a proportionate ratio. Therefore, effective information dissemination increases information access and actual utilisation. This may subsequently lead to creation of new knowledge in terms of boosting research output particularly in the Nigerian educational system.

Information is the message of human experience – that is, what is transmitted, a signal, or a stimulus (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). The authors further stated that information assumes a response in the receiver, and therefore possesses a response potential whose message can be made on any subject, in any language and in any medium. Information accessibility typically involves making information available in any format to users and this can be

done through the provision of appropriate reading resources. Since libraries are institutions created to provide information to preserve our cultural heritage, encourage education, research and recreation, the onus lies in librarians as intellectual gatekeepers to make the wide array of information resources available and accessible to students in schools in order to keep pace with the requirements of the Millennium Development Goal on education.

Information is however stored in many formats which include print, non-print, oral, audio, audio-visual, telegraphic or electronic. The primary resources needed for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on Nigerian education are information resources including human resources. Consequently, for students to access these information resources in their varied formats, there must be adequate intermediation of an information professional who will serve as link to the reading resources and optimise their unending utility. Information access determines to a large extent the success and future development of Nigerian educational system. It broadens the knowledge base of students, reduces the level of uncertainty occasioned by illiteracy and increases the variety of choices

available to them thereby making them able to use information as essential tools for the transformation of the Nigerian society to suit the objectives of the MDG on education.

It is however observed that most educational programmes fade with the end of tenure of each government - thereby creating problems in the accountability of funds channelled to education by incumbents. Nigeria's overall success in its achievements of the MDG on education will depend greatly on the level of information resources made accessible to students. One must therefore underscore the critical role that the school library and information science sector must play in order to achieve a qualitative, relevant and functional basic education to which every citizen has a right. This therefore means that librarians as information science professionals are in the best position to ensure that students are adequately informed on the information resources that would best help their academic pursuit and how they could be utilised. Information access and utilisation is the basis of a sound educational programme for Nigeria. Information accessed, processed and managed appropriately will groom individuals

to be well-rounded citizens. This of course can be possible with a well organised library or information centre that has the ability to acquire, store and disseminate information to the end users (Ajegbomogun, 2008).

Currently, African libraries are stocked with foreign literatures that are not only out of date but irrelevant to the information needs and interests of the people. This invariably goes to state that a library must perform its statutory role of making information resources available thereby making access to relevant information able to equip learners for day to day challenges in all spheres of life as a basis for excellence in their academic pursuits. This will ultimately have positive impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on education.

The dearth of libraries in our pre-secondary school system has eroded quality assurance in the educational policy and programmes of government. Since this is the foundational level to the development of any nation, the child must be equipped with and given access to prerequisite information resources needed to make him excel educationally, socially, economically and otherwise. Government has failed to recognise the

complementary role the library can play in making reading resources accessible to students in a bid to hasten the achievement of any educational programme vis-à-vis MDGs. Over the years there seems to be a gap in the provision of appropriate reading resources to primary level students. This paper therefore tries to examine possible ways the school librarian can make these information reading resources accessible to students to help their educational and all round development.

Millennium Development Goal and Information Resources Accessibility

Millennium Development Goals are eight international development goals with 21 objectives and a series of evaluative targets that about 112 United Nations member states and 23 International organisations subscribed to and inferred to achieve by the year 2015. One of such member states is Nigeria. These goals are targeted at:

1. The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.
2. The achievement of Universal Primary Education.
3. The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

4. The reduction of child mortality improving maternal health.
5. Combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
6. Ensuring environmental sustainability and
7. Developing a global partnership for Development

It is hoped that by 2015, all the above goals would have been achieved by the participating countries. This of course can basically be achieved through massive educational programmes which must continue in successive governments.

The structural adjustment of the Nigerian educational system from Universal Primary Education to the present Universal Basic Education has been on going for about a decade. Principally, all the MDG seeks to achieve revolves around education because to succeed in other sectors, citizens must have the basic education. Education in Nigeria has gone through series of epileptic policy changes thus increasing school enrolment as well as the number of schools both in the private and public sectors. In 1976, the National Policy on Universal Primary Education had given every child the right to free education. Subsequently, the 6-3-3-4 system of education was introduced, followed by the National Literacy Programme

for adults and then the establishment of nomadic education to address the needs of children of migrant cattle rearers and fishermen in riverine areas. In October 1999, Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched, making it compulsory for every child to be educated free of tuition up to the junior secondary school level, all in an effort to meet Nigeria's manpower requirement for national development (Garba, 2008).

Also, the five main national objectives were written in a bid to meet Nigerians development plans as documented in the National Policy on Education (2004) include:

- i) a free and democratic society;
- ii) a just and egalitarian society;
- iii) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- iv) a great and dynamic economy;
- v) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The objectives of the school library which was drafted in line with the above national objectives as highlighted by Gaji (1987) include:

- i) to support the curriculum offered in the school;
- ii) to provide basic collections aimed at educating the child in a broader sense, that is beyond the curriculum offered in the school;

- iii) to teach the child to read independently;
- iv) to encourage reading for pleasure;
- v) to assist the classroom teacher in preparing his/her lesson notes;
- vi) to get the teacher and the pupils to keep abreast of the latest, as knowledge is not static but grows. It is only the library that keeps the teacher and students informed of latest developments in various subject areas;
- vii) to cultivate good reading habits in the child. He/she does not have to be told to read after school hours. These objectives shape the acquisition and actual dissemination of information resources to guide the broad goals of education as stated in the national policy of education above.

The above objectives of a school library complement Nigeria's philosophy of education which 'is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system' (FGN, 2004). Despite these objectives and the national philosophy on education, it is

observed that the Nigerian education system has been characterised by poor facilities, examination malpractices, untrained teachers, and lack of appropriate and adequate information resources and consequently, poor performance in external examinations. Garba (2008) questions how a system of education that is characterised by gross inefficiencies as portrayed in the method and techniques of instructional delivery, the style and nature of its administration can ensure the development of analogy into a sound and effective citizen.

For a complete overhaul of Nigeria's educational system in order to meet the challenges of the MDGs, the need for adequate, appropriate, purposeful acquisition of knowledge (through reading resources) and skills is required. Garba (2008) asserted that successful development entails acquiring and using knowledge. Knowledge in this context is used to refer to information made accessible and utilised.

This invariably means that librarians as professionals are required to bridge this knowledge gaps through adapting and adopting both global and indigenous knowledge to facilitate the acquisition and absorption of knowledge in learners. Even though

the Millennium Development Goals have received a significant acceptance since its inception in the year 2000 by all tiers of government, it doesn't however seem altogether comprehensive because like other projects, it is also froth with lapses. Based on goal number 2, the MDG seems to target only primary education without any reference to secondary and post secondary education. Does this therefore mean the acquisition of secondary and tertiary education is optional? Even though it is a known fact that qualitative primary education is very fundamental to life-long development of an individual, mention should have been made about other levels of education that is suffering serious decline.

Despite these problems, the MDG on education can still be used as a measurable tool and project to actualise Nigeria's educational development goals. Addressing illiteracy from the foundation will be a landmark developmental stride. This is why the Federal Government of Nigeria has borrowed from the Cuban and Kenyan experience to negotiate introducing the literacy education by radio programme to educate Nigerians down to the grassroots on the importance of basic education. No stage of development is most important than the formative years of early

childhood. As such, children need to be exposed to the appropriate information resources if indeed the MDG on education are to be achieved. One of the factors that influence literacy in young children from the disadvantaged environment is the lack of access to books which may influence parents' participation and involvement in the educational experience of their children (Lamme & Russo, 2002).

To bridge the existing gap between schools and culture, schools and public libraries must rise up to the challenge of empowering literacy from childhood. Olanike (2007) stated that what the challenged children are facing today is their exposure to an overflow of information since their life are characterised by fast developing technology resulting in information literacy. Information literacy in turn entails the need for linguistic competence besides reading, writing and cognitivity. Thus Indergaard (2004) rightly posited that to encourage children's joyful access to and exploration in books and also to maintain this ability throughout an entire period of schooling is a major task for parents, teachers and librarians. Since education makes a man useful to both himself and the society, children who are well informed will reach a high literacy level. Teachers, librarians as well as libraries have critical roles to play.

The educational sector is froth with problems, so are libraries which are the heart of any institution. Most researches and reports tend to point to the fact that most public schools have poor libraries or non at all. In a study by Daniel (1998) on the state of school libraries in Nigeria (with the Federal Capital Territory as a case study, it was discovered that the 32 schools sampled, only four had what looked like library buildings, 8 had professional librarians, 2 had tables and chairs, most materials were obsolete and unclassified while many schools converted the so-called libraries to staff rooms. This is to say that school libraries have suffered neglect instead of being a footstool for learners' all round development. Similarly, the special programme unit of the Federal Ministry of Education Monitoring Report (1991) lends credence to the above study when it asserted that most primary schools in Nigeria were without libraries. This is specifically true of the fact that books are locked up without 'use in enclosed shelves in principals' offices.

Information Inaccessibility as Hindrance to the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goal on Education

Information accessibility is still alien to many people in

developing countries despite the availability of information resources in some libraries and information centres. This is to say that availability is not necessarily accessibility and useability. There could be information available in diverse formats but impossible for one to have access, let alone use it. The major problems that negate Library Science Law 1 – “Books are for use” are as enumerated by Aguolu and Aguolu (2002):

- i) ignorance on the part of the user at accessing information,
- ii) poor education or illiteracy occasioned by a devaluation of information,
- iii) non-availability of appropriate learning resource guides to aid information location,
- iv) lack of information resources accommodating the users' information needs,
- v) non-availability of information resources within the users' time frame,
- vi) lack of appropriate library and information services,
- vii) failure to approach information professionals on queries relating to information resources availability and accessibility, and
- viii) incompetence at handling information in their varied formats.

These array of problems require the indispensable intermediation of

libraries and librarians if the objectives of the MDG on education in Nigeria must be attained.

The Role of the School Library and Librarians in Achieving the MDG on Education in Nigeria

The role of the school library and by implication the school librarian, in meeting the challenges of the 21st century cannot be over-emphasized as it has a complementary role to play in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal on education by the year 2015. The school library is a collection of print and electronic information resources stored in a building within a school (nursery, primary or secondary), commonly used to achieve the objectives of the school and by implication, the broad goals of education. It is however common knowledge as revealed by studies (Onadiran, 1977; Udoh, 1986; Gupiyem, 1997) that there is negligence on the part of school authorities and educational planners towards school libraries. Since the overall success of any educational programme begins and depends on the quality of school library services offered, it is therefore exigent for school libraries as well as librarians to play complementary roles towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal objectives of Nigerian education.

The librarian as an information gate-keeper must as a matter of necessity, effect necessary changes in the educational developmental process of these young learners. Librarians should be made active participants in the design and implementation of the curriculum because sustainable educational development can only be achieved through adequate facilities for teaching and learning, provision of reading resources and well equipped libraries (Udofia, 2001). It is common knowledge that government is not funding education adequately especially at the primary level and of course the library information resource materials become obsolete and antiquated. Ombu (1977) rightly posited that libraries in Nigeria are starved of necessary funds by government for their operations.

Since the pre-primary and primary levels of education are the bedrock to which higher educational system is built, librarians at all levels must collaborate to facilitate educational development in its entirety. Librarians at all levels should encourage school management, authorities and stakeholders to fund school libraries with librarians forming part of the literacy radio programmes since this is the bulk of their professional practise.

School librarians are expected to use their wealth of knowledge in developing the cultural taste of young learners. This will invariably serve as an index for Nigeria's realisation of the MDG on education. School libraries in both public and private schools should ensure the employment of qualified teacher-librarians or school librarians so that better services can be provided through the selection of relevant materials or resources making them accessible to users. Creating access to timely, relevant and accurate information resources is a sine qua non for students' good educational achievement and integration into the society as functional citizens. This is the primary role of librarians who are bridge builders between information resources and information users.

In this electronic age, librarians must go beyond just providing books but also non-book electronic formats to assist schools fulfil their educational objectives of producing well-grounded individuals. These will in turn use their knowledge as useful citizens in the society.

Conclusion

The MDG is universally accepted because it embodies every level of government and has intellectual power and good intentions for the Nigerian education

sub-sector. This is why MDG is dear to the heart of the Nigerian government as illiteracy or semi-illiteracy has never been considered an option. To achieve the educational development goal by the year 2015, functional school libraries with facilities for access to information internally, internationally and globally should be provided to stimulate students' interests thereby enhancing functional and life-long learning. This will stem the tide of failure as experienced in previous educational programmes.

Recommendations

Based on the need for information literacy, computer skills and well equipped libraries, the following recommendations are made:

- a) A policy on standardisation of the employment of librarians should be formulated and enforced by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria because as long as non-experts who do not possess information literacy skills themselves are made to serve as 'librarians', users will continue to suffer frustration arising from inaccessibility.
- b) All organs of Government should recognise the library as an institution that helps educational development at all levels, prioritise its cause and recognise that librarians are intellectuals as well as information gateways who are indispensable to national development. This is to say that organised information is a national resource which until librarianship is accepted as a profession essential to the nation's welfare, conscious efforts will be wasted and under utilised.
- c) A radical implementation strategy should be adopted by education boards to ensure the availability of well stocked and constantly updated libraries in a school for the purpose of quality assurance.
- d) Academic and school librarians need to shift their paradigms from policy utilisers to policy contributors so that such internal issues as information literacy policies can be addressed formally.
- e) School libraries should shun apathy in consortium building and networking to bridge information divide.

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