School Media Centres in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Strategies for Improvement

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Abstract
The importance of School Media Centres (SMC) cannot be over looked in the area of provision of equitable services to Students, teachers, school administration and the community. The purpose of School Media Centres is to provide effective services in meeting the educational needs of its user by providing information resources and services to the needed user and a professional School Media Specialist (SMS) that can withstand the test of today. This paper examines the concept of School Media Centres starting from several terms by which it is used interchangeably such as School Media Centre, Centre for Documentation and Information, Library Resource-Centre, Library Learning Common and Library Media Centre. Functions of School Media Centres which include: Educational Goals Achievement; Reading Culture Development; Learning Experience Opportunities; Information Literacy Skills Development; Information Materials Availability and Accessibility; Organization of Activities; Raising Responsible Citizens are highlighted. Challenges facing School Media Centres include: government's failure to faithfully release due grants to the schools; Poor reading culture (which affect patronage in Nigeria); inadequate coordination of SMC services among Nigerian schools; Inadequate space; problem of unqualified staff (most of the staffs heading SMC are not School Media Specialist). Strategies for Improving School Media Centres in Nigeria were identified which include: library period need to be included in the school time table for users as this will enable them to read their books; SMC need to be well equipped with up-to-date and current information resources and services in order to experience high level of services patronage; SMC need to be well equipped with ICT facilities in order to boost their service and make the facility inviting.
Keywords: School Media Centres, School Media Specialists, School Libraries, ICT facilities, Library Resources

1.1 Introduction

In order to ensure national integration and nation-building among Nigerian children, Federal Government Colleges were established in Nigeria on February 22, 1964. If given the chance at a very young age to live, learn, and play together in a perfect educational environment, Nigerian children will be able to achieve this goal. Three Federal Government Colleges were the first ones established, and they were situated in the following regions: Okposi in the Eastern

Region, Warri in the Mid-Western Region, and Sokoto in the Northern Region (Okoro, 2015). These institutions, along with many more that were eventually built in every state of the Federation, were furnished with the necessary tools and staffed with the best instructors that were at hand at the time. They were meant to be models to be copied by the various state governments. They produced men and women with broad-mindsets from various backgrounds and culture with a common bond of unity that transcends tribalism and ethnicity. An integral part of this philosophy is the inculcation of reading culture in the minds of the students and preparing them to record high academic achievements in their studies, which can quickly be achieved through effective patronage of School Media Centres (SMC).

American Association of School Librarians (2016) defined SMC as a dynamic learning environment that bridges the gap between access and opportunity for learners under the leadership of the School Media Specialist (SMS). Therefore, SMC provides students access to resources, information services and technology, connecting classroom learning to real world events. In order to attract and sustain the attention of the students for effective patronage, Achebe (2011) affirms that an ideal SMC must have quality materials that are related to the curriculum, comfortable accommodation, the location of the SMC must encourage easy, quick access to resources and services and the room must be painted with attractive colours. Therefore, an ideal SMC needs to have a rich variety of resources like books of various types at all levels, audio visual materials and computer based information resources such as CD ROM, database, internet facilities, projectors, cameras, among others. International Federation of Library Association (IFLA, 2015) conceptualizes SMC as a physical digital learning space within a public, private, elementary or secondary schools that serves the information needs of its students and

curriculum needs of its teachers and staff. In its National Policy on Education from 2004, the Federal Republic of Nigeria recommended the establishment of functional school libraries with the right media resources to support sound and efficient teaching and learning activities, encourage students' reading habits, and inspire them to achieve their academic goals through SMC patronage. The strategy states that magazines, at a minimum, should be included along with books, pamphlets, paper cuts, gazettes, government publications, atlases, maps, client photographs, records, films, record players, cassette tape players, film projections, slides, and picture photographs. The policy description specifies that the book collection consists of both fiction and nonfiction reference volumes.

2.1 Literature Review

2.2 Concept of School Media Centres

School Media Centre (SMC) is any media Centre that can be found in nursery, primary, secondary and technical schools. The concept has been defined by various scholars. Agbo (2015) defined it as that centre that can be found in nursery, primary and secondary schools with the mission of contributing to the intellectual development of pupils and students. The American Association of School Librarians (2016) defined SMC as a dynamic learning environment that bridge the gap between access and opportunity for all leaner's, under the leadership of the school media specialist. Therefore, SMC provide students access to resources and services that connect the classroom learning to real world event. SMC can be found within a school where student and staff have equitable access to a variety of information resources and services that would meet the information needs of the users. International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) (2015) defined School Media Centre as a physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry research,

thinking, imagination and creativity are central to students information, to knowledge journey and to their personal, social and cultural growth and this physical and digital place is known by several terms such as School Media Centre, Centre for Documentation and Information, Library Resource-Centre, Library Learning Common and Library Media Centre.

Oyewo (2012) referred to SMC as an educational resource Centre that facilitates and coordinates selection of information resources and services in order to encourage the development of reading skills, support the curricular and educational school project. Ncube and Tsekea (2012) also remarked that a SMC is a dynamic centre for reading and disseminating knowledge produced by the school community, this therefore constitutes a concrete opportunity for access to information resources and services as the patronage of this service will enable the user to be a critical thinker, decision maker and lifelong learner in the society. Vance (2010) submitted that in the past, the SMC was a repository of books or a depot where one visits to pick information materials, but as the World becomes increasingly globalized which leads to the decentralization of information, SMC has evolved into more of a learning centre. Therefore, it fosters collaboration and creativity and also becomes a space which focuses on the learning process rather than passive delivery and information retrieval only.

3.1 Functions of School Media Centres

The function of School Media Centre has been highlighted by Elonye (2013), as followed:

Educational Goals Achievement: The School Media Centre (SMC) supports and enhances educational goals. This is facilitated by the school librarian who studies the school's mission and curriculum and thereafter aligns them with the school media

centre (SMC) operations through acquisition of relevant information materials in diverse formats. This function is imperative because once relevant resource are available and accessible, it assists the pupils and teachers to fit into the school's mission, thereby prompting the school to achieve its educational goals.

Reading Culture Development: The SMC has a mandate to inculcate reading culture in young pupils. It has been found to develop and sustain in children; reading habit and learning enjoyment. This is likely to transcend willingly to use of library or independent learning among the pupils throughout their lives. It is necessary to catch the pupils young and introduce them to effective use of library at primary and secondary school levels. This would assist them in studying responsibly in higher institutions and prepare them well for the larger society.

Learning Experience Opportunities: Another function of SMC is to provide different opportunities for learning activities or experience. SMC offers opportunities for different experiences that can lead to learning. Such experiences in SMC include; knowledge expansion, reading to understand, imagination and profitable use of leisure time. Another form of learning opportunity in SMC is playing of games such as ludo and scrabble which boost logical reasoning and spelling abilities respectively among pupils.

Information Literacy Skills Development: Apart from learning development, effective use of SMC could assist pupils in developing information literacy skills. Introducing them to books arrangement or organization, training them to ask questions and allowing them to source for information and use them independently would definitely prepare them for future which include information analysis and dissemination. The information literacy skill developed in secondary schools is an asset

to the pupil as he utilizes information while furthering his studies or while participating in community activities.

Information Materials Availability and Accessibility: One cardinal function of SMC apart from information provision is accessibility. Information materials are useless if not accessible. SMC makes them available in different formats or mediums with contents that cover local, regional, national and global inputs that expose learners to diverse ideas, experience and opinions. The trained school librarian is expected to judiciously use the SMC budget to procure necessary information materials needed by both staff and students. They are made accessible through proper organization and conservation of the materials.

Organization of Activities: Children love to partake in activities such as drama, quiz, debate, author's day, spelling competition and so on. This has been found to stimulate learning in them especially when the atmosphere is conducive. Therefore, SMC functions in this regard by organizing these activities in school from time to time so that pupils can fill belong, relate, show case their skills and at the same time learn. Such activities encourage cultural and social awareness among pupils which in the long run prepares them for societal harmony and development.

Raising Responsible Citizens: SMC provides the needed services to children at a very tender age. As a result, they assist the society in shaping their minds to become responsible citizens. It promotes intellectual freedom and information accessibility which are essential to building effective and responsible citizens. That is, the inculcation of right societal values into the minds of children by SMC would create consciousness in them and prepare them to be fit for community development and responsible living. According to Barker (2017), there are four key components of a School Media Centre that makes it unique to any other library these component are values, vision, voice and visuals.

1. **Values**: These form the core of the SMC's brand, inform the SMC's practice and provide a point of reference for decision making. Focus on three to five essential ideas that drive the school media centre program, answering the question, does this SMC program exist?"

2. **Vision:** This is the written clear vision and mission statements to provide short-term and long-term direction for the SMC. Vision and mission statements are part of a SMC overall vision.

3. **Voice**: This represents the unique personality of SMC program and should come in both written and verbal communications. Tone of brand voice should be consistent and support the values of the SMC programme. A thoughtfully defined brand voice expresses professionalism, awareness, and authenticity and gives credibility to students' cause by aligning their communication style to their goals.

4. **Visuals**: All visuals should communicate the SMC value, vision and voice. All graphics should feature a consistent font and colour palette SMC logo should appear on all SMC property, such as office supplies, technology, book carts, and instructional materials. When the logo is featured on everything one creates, the stakeholders will come to recognize it and more clearly understand how valuable the SMC is to the school and the community.

From the ongoing definitions and the key component of SMC, all the scholars agree that SMC are to support teaching, learning, accessing and make available information resources and services to meet the needs of the

user. The researcher agrees with all these definitions of SMC but defines SMC as an intellectual development unit within the school environment that provides and organises materials ranging from books to e-resources materials in order to support the teaching and learning of users from primary to secondary school level. It also offers same services and promotes effective patronage of SMC collection and meets the needs of its user.

3.2 Purpose of School Media Centres

The main purpose of SMC is to provide effective services in meeting the educational needs of its user by providing information resources and services to the needed user and a professional School Media Specialist (SMS) that can withstand the test of today. In line with this, International Federation Library Association (IFLA) (2015), stated that the purpose of SMC is to provide information and ideas that are fundamental to function successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society by equipping students with life-long learning skills and developing the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens through the provision of adequate resources and services.

Streatfield, Shaper, Markless and Rae-Scott (2011) in Teravainen and Clark (2017) give definite purpose of SMC that it promotes leisure, reading, contributes to the social development of the students, provide a place to study and do homework. They explain further that SMC supports all the predominant modes of teaching and learning in the school, ranging from teacher–led lessons to independent learning and e-learning. A SMC supports school programmes as well as the teaching learning process by providing relevant materials to meet their various information needs.

When describing the purpose of SMC, Achebe (2007) states that SMC is an extension of classroom activities and its purpose is to make education in the school more effective. Therefore, SMC is both a place of learning and place that houses the tools of learning. While the SMS uses the organized materials in the SMC to help the user to learn and the teachers to teach the student.

The school library guidelines as published by IFLA (2015) stressed that there are three categories of SMC resources namely human resources, physical resources (traditional) and digital resources (technological). The human resources comprise the school librarian that is professionally and adequately supported by other qualified staff to plan and manage the SMC. He is rated like graduate teachers and his area of competence include teachers, collection development, information processing, reading engagement, communication and commitment to lifelong learning. Other staff that work with the school librarian are known as paraprofessionals who support the works of the librarian through their clerical and technological functions.

The physical resources as stipulated by IFLA are textbooks, fictional materials, reference materials, journals, newspapers, and non-print resources (audio, visual and audio-visual), while the digital resources include computers, internet facilities, database, e-books, e-journal, e-newspapers, CD Rom. The comparative advantage of digital over physical resource is that with technology, access to SMC can be provided through the school beyond and round the clock. IFLA observed that digital resources assist in managing effectively the library space and also move the modeling of traditional SMC from resource-centered model to learner-centered model.

To fulfill these functions effectively, SMC need to make available necessary information resource and services, which include relevant text books, newspaper,

journals, reference material, catalogue cabinet, map, globe, 2x2, slides, educational films, regalia, computer, Internet facilities, television, magazine, documentaries, real objects, audio player, societal mocha tools video player interactive board among others. Furthermore, SMC fulfills these functions through the services they provided to meet the information needs of the users by selecting, acquiring resources, providing physical and intellectual access to information resources and services, providing instructional facilities and employment of trained provisional staffs. Other services to be provided according to Achebe (2010) are, teaching library skill, reading culture promotion, information dissemination Internet similes organizing activities such as book club, author visit story have literary debate, curriculum development loan services story telling book handing skill among others. They provide these services in order to enhance effective and efficient patronage of resources and services by user to meet their information needs through the School Media Specialist (SMS). School Media Specialists are professionals that are responsible for the school's physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking imagination and creativity are taking place and they are known by several names, such as, school librarian, school media specialty, and teacher among others. When describing SMS, IFLA (2015) stated that the school librarian is the professionally qualified staff member responsible for planning and managing the SMC, supported by staffing as adequate as possible, working together with all members of the school community and liaising with the public library and others. American School Library Association (ASLA) (2014), also lay emphasis on SMS and stated that SMS support the vision of their school communities through educating and building effective library and information services and programmes that contribute to the development of lifelong learners of the

student. The Association explained further that SMS is a teacher within the educational community and their valuable role focuses on learners and learning, teachers and teaching, resourcing and curriculum, facilitating access to information and developing the physical environment.

To sum it up, Achebe (2007) recognized the importance of SMS when she stated that SMS is the most important resource in its makeup. Therefore, the image of the school media centre is important to its ability to serve its users, because it is the SMS that users meet when they patronize the SMC. So, they are image makers and information managers in the SMC without whom the SMC can neither exist nor function.

4.1 Challenges Facing School Media Centres

School Media Centre (SMC) service patronage is facing so many challenges and this has resulted into poor services patronage in them SMC in Nigeria International Federation Library Association (IFLA) (2015) stated that to ensure the currency and vitality of the School Media Centre, instructional and information base, the SMC needs an appropriate budget allocation, taking into account local reality. But Nigeria Government has not provided serious financial budget to support SMC and as a result of this, those that exist have few materials and low service patronage. When stressing the challenges facing SMCs in Nigeria, Ajeghomogun, and Salami (2011) recorded that about 90% of the SMC are substantially government funded but government has not faithfully released due grants to the schools. For this reason, there no positive change in SMC services patronage in Nigeria. Elaturoti (2009) observed that poor funding has been a constraint to SMC development. As a result of this, SMC find it difficult to organize activities such as debate, authors visit, drama, storytelling among others. And also this leads to an inability to

change old facilities/resources and replace them with modern equipment's such as CD ROM, computer, projector and Internet facilities among others. The implication of this is that if SMC are not well funded by the Government, SMC would not be able to extend the scope of SMC services to the larger segment of the children that really need the services.

Poor reading culture is another challenge facing SMC services patronage in Nigeria. It has been stated in the works of Lulu-Pokubo and Akanwa (2017) that "In an age when browsing the internet playing with funky hand set and passing non-stop short message services (SMS) seem to be the order of the day, reading a book in a peaceful corner of a library has become an archaic idea for most people, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual life, reading culture/ habit is fast vanishing into thin air." Akintunde (2011) recorded that majority of Nigerian youths have lost interest in reading and the greater part of their time is devoted to watch home videos, Internet, photograph, sport, stories and so on. Beside this, those who claim to have reading culture are reading questionable materials which could be either wealth accumulation materials or any other corruption oriented materials. The implication of this is that students will not visit SMC to read scholarly materials that could help them to achieve success in examination.

The advent of technology also is one of the challenges facing SMC because students and teachers believe that the Internet has done it all. So, instead of coming to SMC for information needed they would prefer to go to the Internet to download all necessary information. Kachel, Steffens, Preuß and Simpson (2020) buttressed on the perception that books, libraries and librarians are no longer essential because the Internet has all of the information students, teachers and educators need. According to Ilogho (2015), since the advent of the Internet, the habit of reading books has continually dwindled. People instead of reading now spend more time chatting.

Another challenge facing SMC is inadequate coordination of SMC services among Nigerian schools. Saka and Mohammed (2009) supported this view by stating that the inability of the government to develop a clear cut condition of services has led to lack of standard of structure, poor motivation, unclear understanding of SMC roles by school principals and unclear understanding of SMC advocates by lawmakers and other stakeholders. All these hinder SMC services patronage in Nigerian secondary schools.

Inadequate space also is another challenge facing SMC service patronage in Nigeria. It has been observed that SMC seem not to have high regard for SMC development in primary and secondary schools. This informs the idea of creating just any place as SMC in public and private schools. At times, the place is not spacious and is unreasonable when compared to the population of users. Ajegbomogun (2011) supported this view when she stated that the building housing the SMC do not merit the standard specification in terms of library space per pupils while the furniture is grossly inadequate. The implication is that users will be discouraged from patronizing SMC services.

The problem of unqualified staff is also affecting SMC in Nigeria, most of the staffs heading SMC are not School Media Specialist and this has been an age long barrier to SMC development. Sanusi, Akerele, Adegbite and Afolabi (2017) affirmed that insufficient qualified staff has been a constraint to services development over the years. The implication of this is that the services of SMC have been left in the hands of amateurs who do not have passion for the job and are not ready to promote the tenets of the profession. When stressing the importance of qualified staff library media centre facilities.

Guideline IFLA (2015) stated that without a professional who has the prescribed competencies various components of the SMC programme may not be available to students and staff and if they are available they are ineffectively implemented. Akerele, Egunjobi, Awoyemi and Ogunniyi (2018) stated that some secondary schools in South West, Nigeria did not make use of any classification scheme to organise their resources though they had certain places they referred to as SLMCs. Any collection of information materials that is not systematically organized through cataloguing and classification cannot be referred to as a library and media resource centre. According to Falade (2007), the majority of SMCs lacked proper infrastructure and media resources. Apart from that, Elaturoti (2002) noted that few secondary schools had SMC, and those that did could not uphold the IFLA/UNESCO minimal criteria for SMC. Additionally, they lacked skilled staff, retained minimal statistical data, failed to teach library usage skills, and many schools did not have a library period.

In addition to this, literature has shown that services such as teaching library use skills, reading culture promotion, information dissemination, Internet services, curriculum development, loan services, and organizing activities such as book club, author visit, story time, literary debate and so on are in short supply and demand in various SMC in Nigeria (Hassan, 2000; Akande, 2001; Elaturoti, 2002; Alabi, 2007; Falade, 2007). They are mere passive collection of books and not dynamic because majority of the SMC are not manned by qualified School Library Media Specialists (SMC) and do not have necessary facilities, adequate print and non-print media, which could make pupils to develop interest in learning and know how to handle and utilize information both within the school and in the society. Oysiku and Oduwole (2004) stated that economic recession, especially in Africa,

acquisition of relevant and current books and journals is a very difficult task for most university libraries and is a major factor affecting library patronage. Other factors influencing library patronage by faculties of the university community include inadequacy of library materials, inadequate funding, non-availability of library resources probably due to mutilation and stealing by delinquent users and lack of integration of library resources and services in planning, administration, scarcity and shortage of foreign exchange

4.2 Strategies for Improving School Media Centres in Nigeria

In order to tackle the problem facing SMC, library period need to be included in the school time table for users as this will enable them to read their books, write their assignment and listen to stories, if effective services patronage must be promoted in SMC. Achebe (2011) made this suggestion when she stated that it is during the library hours that the user can make judicious use of the SMC to develop reading skills. SMC need to tackle the advent of ICT by providing Internet facilities into SMC that will meet the test of today and motivate users to patronize the services in SMC.

SMC need to be well equipped with up-to-date and current information resources and services in order to experience high level of services patronage as suggested by Omah and Urhiewhu (2016) that a well-stocked SMC will facilitate the planning and implementation of learning programs which will equip users with the skills necessary to succeed in life. Achebe (2011) also emphasized that SMC need to develop their collection of resources in term of relevance and quality because it assists students to gain useful knowledge which leads to quality education. If SMC are well stocked with current information resources and services and the users have equal access to it, this will create awareness in the school environment

and encourage good service patronage among the users.

Beside this, SMC need to be well equipped with ICT facilities in order to boost their service and make SMC inviting. Achebe (2010) buttress this view when she stated that the type of services the SMC need to provide should include photocopying and typesetting literature search internet browsing information on scholarship, desktop publishing, space for general reading book, talks, film show and other equipment including complete computer set with printer and scanner, TV and video cassette players and recorders, satellite dish, dedicated telephone line and trusted server, CD/DVD player and recorder (Camcorder) film projector film projector slide and its projector children magazines and comic films generators set among others. With all these, users will be convinced and patronize SMC services with satisfaction.

The importance of space cannot be overlooked when solving the challenges facing SMC service patronage. Surendran (2014) corroborated this when he explained that to organize different activities, SMC need space to satisfy the emerging needs of the young generation and this involves determining how large spaces within a building are arranged and relate to each other within a larger area. Therefore, the spaces needed for SMC should forecast and meet a future need.

For SMC to experience maximum patronage, Surendran (2014) submitted that SMC should be located in an area of maximum accessibility to the user, it should have good ventilation and ample area to conduct other activities as this will achieve maximum service patronage by user. Similarly, Babalola (2007) pointed out the various ways and methods of presenting SMC services to student in a more lively way, serene state and most conducive atmosphere as all these will motivate them to patronize SMC.

Conclusion

The important of School Media Centre (SMC) cannot be underestimated due to the role they play in Nigerian secondary school education. According to the literature, the school media centre play a significant role by meeting the information need of secondary school student, in order to be critical thinking and lifelong learner in the society. Aside these, the School Media Centre (SMC) supports and enhances educational goals, it has a mandate to inculcate reading culture in young pupils and it also provide different opportunities for learning activities or experience. However there are still some hurdles to be crossed in the School Media Centre such as; Lack of financial budget to support SMC, Poor reading culture and unqualified staffs heading SMC. This calls for concerted effort from all stakeholders in School Media Centre.

Suggestions

i) School media centre should always create awareness when new resources are acquired and about any intended services.

ii) Adequate provision of fund is necessary for the provision of current and up to date information resources and also for the employment of qualified and trained teacher librarian.

iii) School Media Centre are expected to provide facilities like more spaces for study, services, personal computers, workstation, online databases, internet facilities and information literacy instruction.

iv) There should be training and retraining of staff in order to satisfy the information needs of users.

v) There should be guidance and support in the way students will patronize resources and services and train them on how to use them effectively.

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