COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR LIBRARIES SERVING VISUALLY IMPAIRED PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN A RECESSED ECONOMY

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Abstract
This study was carried out to determine viable strategy for collection development in libraries serving visually impaired primary school pupils in South East Nigeria. It adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised four librarians in charge of the libraries in four special education centres/ schools in South East Nigeria. Interview schedule, titled "Interview Guide for Librarians" was used to collect data from the librarians. Data collected was analyzed qualitatively. The result reveal that various strategies were used for collection development in libraries for the visually impaired primary school pupils in the zone. Most viable strategies for collection development in these libraries were through gift, donation, assistance from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international bodies, religious groups and philanthropists. Based on the findings, it was recommended that apart from presenting their request to the government, the librarians should solicit help from NGOs, international bodies, religious groups and philanthropists to ensure steady development of their collection despite the present economic recession in the country.

Introduction

The collection of a library constitutes the totality of the library holdings, that is, the library information resources, which include both print and non-print resources with which the library meets the information needs of users. Since information needs of library users are not static, it is important that the library collection should be continually developed to ensure that it meets current needs of users especially, visually impaired primary school pupils.

Development, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 6th Edition, is the gradual growth of something. In this paper, it refers to the gradual growth of the collection of libraries of special education centres for the visually impaired primary school pupils in South East Nigeria. Strategy on the other hand, is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose. Thus, collection development strategy implies a conscious plan for building or developing the collection of libraries serving visually impaired primary school pupils.

Visually impaired users are pupils with sight loss, which cannot be improved by corrective lenses to enable them read as others. Vision is one of the five senses of human beings which is associated with sight. The eye has different parts that work together to create vision. When a part of the eye does not work right or communicate well with the brain, vision is impaired (NICHY, 2012). Visual impaired persons refer to people with irretrievable sight loss and it covers a range of impairment. Friend (2009) opined that 'visually impaired' is a general term used to describe people who are partially sighted or completely blind. Ugwu (2008) asserted that it is an umbrella term referring to various degrees in eye function or structure, ranging from the slightly impaired to the completely blind. However, the Copyright Act. 2004, broadly defined a visually impaired person (VIP), as someone who is blind, partially sighted and whose eyesight cannot be improved by corrective lenses; to allow him read without a special level or

kind of light, who is unable to either hold or manipulate a book or move the eyes to be able to read easily. In other words, any person who is not able to read in a conventional way is visually impaired.

The word 'recessed' is the past tense of the noun 'recession', which refers to a difficult time for the economy of a country, when there is less trade and industrial activity than usual and more people are unemployed (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2000). Economy is also defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as the relationship between production, trade and the supply of money in a country. Simply put, recessed economy refers to any economy that is going through a difficult time, having less trade, industrial activity and unemployment rate is on the increase. In other words, there is less trade, industrial activity and more unemployment than usual in a recessed economy. So, collection development strategies for libraries serving visually impaired primary school pupils is an attempt to determine strategies for building library collection for visually impaired primary school pupils in South East Nigeria in the face of present economic recession in Nigeria.

Visual impairment is a functional loss of vision than eye disorder. Eye disorder that can lead to visual impairment include retinal degeneration, albinism, cataracts, glaucoma, muscular problems that result in the visual disturbance, corneal disorders, diabetic retinopathy, congenital disorders and infection. Visual impairment affects how a child understands and functions in the world. It can affect a child's cognitive, emotional, neurological and physical development by limiting the range of experiences and kinds of information a child is exposed to. This is why Eguavoen and Eniola (2007) noted that a young child with visual impairment has little reason to explore interesting objects in the environment and thus may miss the opportunity to have experience and learn.

Visual impairment puts children in a disadvantaged position. Abosi and Ozoji (1981) pointed out the effects of blindness as isolation, labelling, stress, disadvantage in the acquisition of normal experiences, loss of earning power, dependent status, loss of physical integrity, loss of confidence in the remaining senses and loss of visual background. Visually impaired persons like other persons with disability are neglected and abandoned in their homes. Some culture view people with disabilities as having been cursed.

These obstacles and negative attitude have placed the visually impaired in a disadvantaged position in society. Visual impairment affects a child's educational opportunity, acceptance in the society and access to the world of information since they are unable to see and read print resources. The most viable way to help the visually impaired come out of this disadvantaged position is through the provision of educational facilities. With the provision of better education opportunities, suitable and adequate resources, the visually impaired will overcome their disability and fulfill their potential.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in her *National Policy on Education* identify the school library as one of the educational services to be provided for children irrespective of their disability or status. The school library plays a very important role in the educational development of children by providing library and information resources for teaching and learning. Majority of library resources are in print. Since the visually impaired cannot access information in print, there is need to repackage information in a format suitable to them, that is, alternative formats. Alternative format includes Braille, audio/talking books, large print and ICT resources. Braille is a system of reading and writing whereby organized raised dots are used to represent letters and numerals that are read by touching. Audio/talking resources are audio recordings on tapes, cassettes and compact disks which the visually impaired can listen to. Large prints on the other hand are materials that have their print size enlarged to be read by

people with low vision. Moreover, a wide range of ICT facilities now exist to provide access to information, giving visually impaired users equal opportunity as the sighted. Availability of these resources is crucial for effective teaching and learning in special education centres. Ajobiewe (1999) was of the view that the provision and use of alternative formats such as Braille, large prints, talking books and the availability of reading aids, volunteers and transcription services in libraries serving persons with visual impairment in Nigeria would go a long way in making information accessible to the blind and partially sighted users.

Challenges of Collection Development for the Visually Impaired.

Developing collection for the visually impaired has its own challenges. Based on this premise, Eskay and Chima (2013) identified the following as some of the challenges militating against library and information services for the blind in Nigeria:

- Limited financial and human resources in this aspect of library services;
- Lack of production and distribution of facilities for reading materials;
- Lack of properly trained library personnel
- Architectural barriers such as steps, high book shelves, narrow doorways and lack of elevators;
- Inadequacy of appropriate reading materials.

Considering the present economic recession in Nigeria, it becomes obvious that limited financial and human resources negatively affect collection development for visually impaired library users. The government may not be buoyant enough to supply all the resources needed. In the same vein, limited financial resources will also be consequential to lack of production and distribution of facilities for reading materials, and even lack of properly trained library personnel. In the end, it may result to inadequacy of appropriate reading materials.

Over the years, the visually impaired have had restricted access to information. The probable reason is that the production of formats readable to them is slow and expensive, thus only a small number of published works are available in alternative formats. Golub (n. d.) noted that the problem of conversion to adjusted formats is that the process is rather time-consuming and expensive. The resultant consequence is that books become available to the visually impaired several months after others have read them. Thus only a small amount of published work is ever made accessible to the blind. Hence Golub and Atinmo (2000) stated that a common feature of schools in Nigeria is the lack of library facilities and consequent dearth of reading materials. They were of the opinion that dearth of materials for the visually impaired may have been caused by difficulties associated with producing the reading materials in readable formats. Meanwhile, Anjiode (2010) concluded that information resources and services available for the physically challenged in special education institutions in Plateau State Nigeria, were inadequate for any significant impact in teaching and learning. It is in the light of these that Eskay and Chima (2013) stated that the library lacks most of the materials that can be accessed by visually impaired users. They concluded that there is urgent need to improve the current level of library and information services available to the visually impaired in Nigeria.

With regards to assistive technology, Tank (2000) opined that information technology poses challenge to libraries for the blind all over the world. She asserted that while it is now feasible to establish true equality between visually impaired and sighted people as a result of technological advances, libraries for the blind would have to go through a range of changes and development processes in order to benefit from the new possibilities. Craven (2003) also reiterated that the technology can still present barriers. According to the researcher, people with disabilities are at most risk of being excluded from access, and in particular those who are blind or visually impaired and who use assistive technologies such as screen readers. He stated that

although assistive technologies can enable people with disabilities to 'read' online materials, barriers to access will still exist unless the materials are designed in a way that can be interpreted by the assistive technologies.

In view of these challenges, coupled with the economic recession in the country, the question that begs for an answer is 'What strategies could be adopted to enhance collection development in special education centres in South East Nigeria? If good strategies are devised, they will help reduce the financial burden of collection development on the government in the face of the present recession.

Statement of the Problem

Visually impaired primary school pupils need information resources in alternative formats so that they can exploit and access information for educational development. Textbooks and other learning resources need to be provided in Braille, audio and digital forms so as to facilitate the teaching and learning process. If these resources are not adequately provided in special education centres, teachers will not have materials to teach and pupils will not have resources to read in order to acquire knowledge. Due to the economic recession in Nigeria, it appears that the library collection of special education centres in South East Nigeria are not adequately developed. Hence, there is need to determine the strategies that would enhance collection development of libraries of special education centres in the zone.

Research Question

What are the strategies that could be used to enhance collection development of libraries in special education centres in South East Nigeria?

Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised four librarians in charge of special education centre libraries in South East located in Umuahia, Abia State; Isulo, Anambra State; Opefia, Izzi L.G.A of Ebonyi State and Oji River in Enugu State. The instrument for data collection was interview schedule titled “Interview Guide Librarians”. Data collected from the interview of librarians were analyzed qualitatively.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the interview revealed that the librarians adopted many strategies in developing their collections, one of which was depending on government to supply. According to the librarians, since the special education centres were operating on the principle of free education, it is imperative that the government both state and federal and other stakeholders should devise adequate measures to develop special education centre libraries in the zone. A major problem with this is the uncertainty of when the supply would come. This was confirmed by one of the librarians during the interview when he said "the principle of free education is in paper and not in practice", "you can wait till the end of the year and nothing comes".

Result of the study also showed that there was no policy for developing the collection of the libraries of special education centres. Developing a written policy on collection development for the visually impaired will help to a high extent. Such policy statement will give guidelines on collection development. It will give details of what should be provided and how it should be provided. The finding is in line with that of Benardi (2010) who observed that a significant minority of library authorities did not have a specific policy statement concerning the needs of visual impaired. Ajobiewe (1999) recommended that library authorities should have a written statement of policy on library services for people with disability so that the policy may serve as guide during the planning of library services for them. If this is done in Nigeria, it will enhance collection development for the visually impaired. Thus, Ajobiewe (1999) concluded

that the future development of library services to the visually impaired depends on government effort to formulate good policy for professional practice.

It was also evident from the findings that liaising or linking with international organizations, religious bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions for the blind would go a long way to enhance collection development in special education centre libraries. NGOs like Nigerwives Braille Production Centre, Lagos, Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the blind (ANWAB) Lagos, Inlacks Library at the Vocational Training Centre for the Blind, Oshodi Lagos, Gindiri Materials Centre for the Visually Handicapped near Jos and Hope for the Blind, Zaria, have helped immensely in the production of audio and Braille resources in the country, especially Nigerwives. All the centre libraries under study contained Braille textbooks in English and Mathematics produced by Nigerwives. Braille books by Nigerwives were offered for sale and sometimes sponsors pay for them to be produced and supplied to the libraries.

Through the interview, it was also discovered that presenting requests to the Federal Government, stating the needs of the requesting centre was another strategy to build collection, as the case in Anambra State when in 2012, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) supplied the centre with Braille textbooks in some subjects, library furniture and refurbished the library building. This was based on request.

The study also revealed that collections could also be built through in-house production of resources if they had facilities and personnel. For instance, if there were Braille typists, they could help to transcribe print resources into Braille, and if they had tape recorders and recording studios, they could produce audio tapes. Unfortunately, one of the librarians complained that old Braille typists were retired and new ones are not employed. In addition, none of the centre libraries under study had audio facilities.

Considering the present economic recession in the country, it becomes necessary that the government alone cannot shoulder the responsibility of building the collection in the special centres. Hence, librarians in these centres need to look elsewhere for assistance, soliciting help from NGOs, religious groups, philanthropists, the government and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

Due to the economic recession in the country, the government alone cannot shoulder the responsibility of collection development in libraries of special education centres in South East Nigeria. Other strategies that could be adopted for collection development in the centre libraries include soliciting for assistance from NGOs, religious groups, philanthropists and embarking on in-house production of some of the alternative formats of information resources. This will ensure that the centre libraries contain modern resources to facilitate teaching and learning in the special education centres.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Federal Government should have a written policy on collection development for the visually impaired. Such policy statements will give guidelines on collection development to ensure steady provision of resources in the special education libraries.
2. Librarians could present requests on the peculiar needs of their centre libraries to the Federal Government through their State Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC).
3. Government should make resources and facilities available for the centres to be able to embark on in-house production of alternative formats of information resources.

4. There is need to train and retrain library personnel in charge of the production and provision of these resources.

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