

LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper begins with a review of the role of libraries and librarians in national development, and recognises libraries and librarians as making a difference in learning opportunities. It also argues that libraries and librarians have a definite contribution to make in the area of curriculum development, for effective use of the library. The paper concludes that librarians should reject the concept of libraries as mere "repositories of knowledge" but must play a full part in the planning and decision-making processes for effective vocational education.

Introduction

Libraries are important educational services which facilitate the implementation of educational policies leading to the attainment of policy goals and the promotion of educational system (National Policy on Education, 1998). Directly related to these roles is the importance of the library as expressed by Anyaoku (1994), that the level of a country's development depends largely upon the library, which has a great deal of "promise and performance" in all educational and information spheres. This is so because it enables its patrons to make gainful use of its resources that have been collected, interpreted, organised, controlled and made available and accessible for use rather than preservation.

Awala-Ale (1996), considered the library as the nerve-centre of educational institutions by virtue of its objectives and functions. The library allows access to its resources and provides services to its patrons who are expected to be converted to habitual library users, thereby making it possible for information to take place from media to minds. Libraries have an important role to play in the intellectual development of every educable child. Learning without library facilities is learning without aid, and learning without books is learning with tears (Fader, 1991). The Federal Military Government gave unmistakable recognition of this fact in the National Policy on Education (1998), when it declared libraries as one of the most important educational services, in furtherance of this belief, the Government further stated that school library services would be established to ensure that teachers are given in-service training in the management and organisation of school libraries. In order to allow and indeed encourage librarians to take part in the operation of the learning environment, the library service must be seen as a major central resource, not a peripheral luxury in many educational institutions (Dipeolu, 1971). According to Osundina (1975), the highest educational level that the majority of Nigerian citizens can hope to attain in this century is primary education but many of the new literates we have produced so far are gradually slipping back into the ranks of the illiterates, for these children have been starved by lack of reading materials while in school. Broome (1975), suggested ways in which librarians and adult educators could be used to overcome illiteracy in the rural areas of Northern Nigeria. One of such ways, being the direct involvement in curriculum design, provision of trade literatures and instructional manuals etc. to back up adult education classes. It is clear that in some schools and colleges, not many librarians are full voting members of their Academic Board. Not many of them sit as full members of the major course development teams. They may not even be consulted about the learning resource support they would recommend for particular types of students. On the contrary, librarians should be allowed to participate fully in course design and development, to allow it to duly support the teaching process and perhaps more importantly extend the students' learning experience beyond the classroom and college.

Definition of Vocational Education

The Committee on Research and Publications of the American Vocational Association (1954) defined vocational education as education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers

to enter or make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. Good (1960) defined vocational education as programme of education below college grade organised to prepare the learner for

entrance into a particular chosen vocation or to upgrade the employed workers. Chester (1960) defined vocational education as education for the work - any kind of work which the individual finds congenial and for which society has a need. Maduka (1980) defined vocational education as a type of education deliberately designed for the development of skills and knowledge, which can be useful to both the individual concerned and the society. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) defined vocational education as "that aspect of education, which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge."

Vocational education here, encompasses subjects like Business Management, Home Economics, Fine Art, Building Construction, Music to mention a few.

Libraries and Librarians in the Curriculum Development of Vocational Education

"Curriculum" here, has been used in its widest sense to refer to the total experience provided for the child/young adult. In recent years this has become devalued into the taught part of a course of study. The librarian must look at the library, and his services as one that meditate the entire learning experience of a student while at the same time providing proper and adequate support to the teaching process. Egwuelu (1995) stated that vocational and (technical) education is not only important to individuals, who already have knowledge of any of them, rather to everybody in the society. It prepares individuals for occupation requiring technological knowledge and usable skills, in job operation such as planning, quality control, maintenance and production. There is no nation that can build a solid technological base for the production of food, raw materials, goods and services without the application of vocational (and technical) education.

Even at that, a lot of problems beset vocational education, which may affect its overall usefulness for national development. There is the inadequacy of teaching facilities within the system; the development and availability of textual materials is another area of concern. Surveys carried out resources available to vocational education reported dearth in pupils' texts and teachers' guides (Oluwole, 1983). Highly skilled professionals who could help with writing these materials are often times ill motivated by the meager royalties offered by the publishers. Unlike the advanced countries, in Nigeria, organisations and individuals especially teachers do not have interest in conducting research in vocational education. The society is very dynamic and to keep abreast of the changes, research studies aimed at discovering new methods of doing things are very necessary. New methods may bring about production at a cheaper goods or easier ways of achieving desired objectives or reduced cost of doing things.

Another problem associated with this (shortage of books) is the irrelevance of the available texts to Nigeria's local conditions and needs. This is due to the fact that few books available in vocational education have a foreign bias. Complete reliance on them will not yield the desired results. It is essential for the library, whether school or academic and the librarian to seek to provide his services to support the widest development of this discipline through direct involvement in the curriculum development.

For librarians and information scientists, the implication here is that whether you belong to the public, special, research or academic libraries, there is quite a lot of data generated internally that they are begging for collation, synthesis and dissemination to various institutions of learning. Consequently textbooks in this field of knowledge with local background can be made available. Huge sums of money are being spent to buy services and information provided by foreign "experts" who only come here to use data already available in scattered and unknown form in this country. The information aspect of library services is not that of propaganda but that of up-to-date, accurate and unbiased information available in book and non-book formats which, can be stored and retrieved when needed. As Nwinkina (1961) stated that the library be propagated as the epitome of contemporary civilization and a constant and direct stimulus for further achievement in learning. The role of the library as a facilitating centre for the spread of learning which helps in practically every activity, which touches on the culture and information activity of the nation must be well made and seen to be so.

New Challenges in the 21st Century

The librarian who is forced to spend the whole of his professional life operating solely within the library building is never going to be able to develop services in a way that will enrich library provision or the teaching or more particularly the curriculum for the student. Librarians must now recognise their responsibility as facilitators of learning opportunities in the development of a modern library system. The Librarian as a participating member of the Board of Studies should participate fully in the development, proposing, management and assessment of the school course of studies in all its aspects; the librarian should bring to the board, the general educational expertise and experience gained from working across a variety of subject areas; he will bring to the board information gained from the practical operation and teaching methods used in other subject areas, which should, enable best

practices to be maintained on all courses; he will be able to suggest appropriate teaching materials and methods and to undertake to advise how the library and learning resource areas could properly be integrated into the learning life of the students; by understanding the course in depth, the librarian will be able to ensure that the teachers of the course are properly supported by the provision of current materials both during the development of the course and during its continuity once validated. It is only from this intimate relationship with the course that librarian can refine his services and importantly to properly support educational opportunities.

Back in the library, since the information gained must be properly disseminated, the librarian must ensure that staffs at all levels are aware of the directions the course is taking; ensure that proper selective dissemination of information services is set up to collate and disseminate appropriate information; commence an assessment of existing library stock to see if any re-organisation is necessary, to select additional materials, to review the staff training programme and to ensure full student support at the enquiry points; draft any induction or educational programmes for submission to the course team for inclusion within the syllabus of the course to teach the use of libraries and information (where it is not already in existence).

One of the areas where librarians have for some years placed a great emphasis has been that of user education. This is perhaps a rather contentious role for the librarian. While we are concerned that the user should be able to operate our particular library satisfactorily, it is perhaps more important to teach the student to understand the structure and flow patterns of the literature of his subject. We are not talking about producing a list of recommended textbooks, which the student can take away, but an integrated course of preparation for information retrieval. The librarian as an academic should therefore get the academic staff and other members of the school community to know and accept the fact that the library and information services go beyond social services; build up rapidly, a stock collection covering all aspects of vocational education, which is required for national development; publishing regularly, a list of theses and dissertations accepted for higher degrees, especially in social sciences, vocational, technical and natural sciences; access information through full bibliographic control and bibliographic services.

Recommendations

While it is true that the library is the facilitating centre for the spread of learning which helps in practically every activity, which touches on the culture and information activity of the nation, there are still some unique roles recommended for libraries and librarians in the areas of:

Collation, synthesis and dissemination of information on all aspects of vocational education to various institutions of learning. • Up-to-date, accurate and unbiased vocational information available in book and non-book formats

which should be stored and retrieved when needed.

Publishing regularly, a list of theses and dissertations accepted for higher degrees, especially in social sciences, vocational, technical and natural sciences.

Providing access to information through full bibliographic control and bibliographic services.

Conclusion

This changing role for libraries has costs other than in terms of more books. It will mean more staff, and of an appropriate quality. The growing importance of information technology means staff development programmes that are as comprehensive as any provided to any other academic members of staff. While the paper has put great emphasis on the role and work of the librarian outside the physical library building, the paper is obviously aware that the service stands and falls by what happens within the library. It is no use devising learning strategies, which require the students to prepare materials for themselves or in small groups, if the library is not conducive to that type of learning. The more the librarian is involved in the course, there will be re-organisation and integration of learning materials, improvements of any inter-library lending arrangements, a more supportive advisory function, and a staff development programme that induces all library staff to participate more objectively in the support of the student and the teacher, through involvement in the teaching process

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