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REVITALIZING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN NIGERIA THROUGH SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

The paper takes a broad view of social responsibility as the awareness and responsiveness of both individuals and corporate business organizations to the social needs of their places of domiciliation. It notes that despite its value, the school library is largely undeveloped in Nigeria – a fact supported empirically by several research studies across the country. Since poor funding by the government appears the central problem of the school library, the paper calls on various segments of the Nigerian public to participate in the provision of school library resources such as library building, books and audio-visual materials, and library equipment as a demonstration of social responsibility. This is the only rescue option for the school library in Nigeria if it must be repositioned for effective service delivery to the students and their teachers.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Individual Social Responsibility, School Library, Community Development, Philanthropy, Town Unions, Women Unions, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Underlying the concept of social responsibility is an ethical concern for the society in which men and businesses thrive. Social responsibility crusaders have always reminded business organizations of their obligation to act benevolently toward their host communities. In his pioneer writing on social responsibility, Bowen, (1953) stated, “it refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” p.6. A similar definition was offered by Frederick (1960) as follows:

Social responsibility in the final analysis implies a public posture towards society’s economic and human resources and a willingness to see that those resources are used for broad social ends and not simply for the narrowly circumscribed interests of private persons and firms p.60. Later definitions, as Carroll (1999) has shown, have either skewed the focus of social responsibility or

amplified these early definitions, but have retained the core concern for business favorable disposition to the society.. Hence, the emergence of concepts such as Individual Social Responsibility (ISR) and Personal Social Responsibility (PSR) as complements to the more common Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In their academic discourse on “Individual and Corporate Social Responsibility”, Bénabou and Tirole (2010) outlined some acts of individual social responsibility as giving to charities, investing on socially responsible funds, consuming green products, donating blood, giving time and sometimes, even own life for good causes., while Verghese (2015) defined individual social responsibility as prosocial actions to do good for society by people in their personal capacities. The idea of social responsibility has thus been liberalized to incorporate both individual and group benevolence to the community hosting them either as indigenes or settlers. For the purpose of this paper, social responsibility is defined as the awareness of, and responsiveness to the social needs of the operational environment of an entity, be it an individual, a group or business organization. The focus of this paper is to challenge the public in Nigeria to direct acts of social responsibility to support for the school library. The school library is the form of library located in the lower educational institutions, primarily stocking and granting access to teachers and students, an assortment of information resources to support their educational goals. In the next segment of the paper, an attempt is made to present “as-it- is” report of the state of the school library in Nigeria as a basis for the call for rescue from non-government sources.

THE STATE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN NIGERIA

The school library is by design, a veritable facility to support the educational programmes of primary and secondary schools. The UNESCO/IFLA school library manifesto identified the services of the school library as:

- Supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school’s mission and curriculum.
- Developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning and the use of libraries throughout their lives.
- Offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment.
- Supporting all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluation and using information regardless of form, format or medium including sensitivity to the modes of communication within the community.
- Providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions (UNESCO, 2000).

The school library thus affords the young learners a rich learning experience. However, despite its essence, the school library in Nigeria is largely underdeveloped. Although there is evidence of

government policy support for the school library, there is a marked gap between the policy statements and their implementation. The result is that the school library in most parts of the country is a travesty. This is supported by countless empirical studies of the school library conducted across the country. Owate and Okpa-Iroha (2013) studied the availability and utilization of school library resources in school libraries in Rivers State and found that school library services were either lacking or shoddily provided in most of the secondary schools. In the few schools where library spaces were provided, there was no compliance with the standards for establishing the secondary school library. Books in the libraries were not only few, but poorly organized. In a study of the use of school library resources in Ogun State secondary schools, Adebamowo (2011) found inadequacy of library resources, inadequate or outright lack of library space, unqualified library personnel and ineffective use of school library resources by students in the surveyed schools. A similar study was conducted in Lagos State by Obajemu (2002). The researcher evaluated the resources of eight secondary schools in Oshodi/Isolo Local Government Area of Lagos State using the Lagos Library Board for School Library Standards. The findings were that the school libraries were completely undeveloped, understaffed, improperly organized and underused. Facilities were inadequate and collections were obsolete.

Furthermore, a survey of school libraries in Benin City was conducted by Idiegbeyan-Ose and Okoedion (2013); they found that the school libraries in Benin City lacked adequate accommodation, materials and funds as well as trained staff. The libraries were stocked with outdated books. Igwe, Aliyu and Ukah (2013) conducted a study to determine the information needs and seeking behaviour of teachers of science subjects in Offar Kwara State, their sources, perceptions on the state of their school libraries and challenges of accessing information. Regarding the teachers' perception on the state of their school libraries, the researchers reported the teachers' view of the poor state of libraries in their schools which acted as a challenge to their access to information. It seems obvious that school management's attitude to the library would influence library services in the school. Akerele and Elaturoti (2014) sought empirical confirmation of this. They investigated the extent to which school management members' attitude predict service delivery in school library media centres in Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria. They found a significant positive prediction of school management members' attitude on service delivery of the school library media centres. The researchers further reported that these school management members exhibited 'indifference' attitude toward the school library which implies a non-commitment on their part to the provision of this essential service in the schools. This could mean non-release of necessary funds for the library which has negative ripple effects on stock, facilities and services. The research result thus suggests that the school library media centres in Federal Government Colleges are not exempt from the poor condition characteristic of school libraries in state-owned schools in Nigeria. Sadly, the findings of these later studies corroborated the findings of an earlier study by Selbar, Akintunde, and Abimiku (1995). The researchers assessed the condition of school libraries in Nigeria, using Jos Metropolis as locus. They found that the surveyed libraries had acute shortage of personnel, inadequate funding, obsolete collections with zero audiovisual component, grossly inadequate

library space and seating capacity. The evidence from these studies shows that the school library in Nigeria is in a deplorable state. Poor funding appears to be the nexus of the challenges confronting the school library in Nigeria. Despite the various programmes of mass education sponsored by the governments such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) of the Federal Government and the free education projects of some state governments, it has been demonstrated that the school library component of the education needs, has not received the expected government attention in terms of funding. It becomes necessary therefore to enlist civil society participation in funding and sundry support for the library that supports the foundation level of education. Since higher education builds on the foundation of the lower levels of education, this foundation must be firm. The school library is an integral factor in the provision of a firm educational foundation at the primary and secondary school levels. Hence, its absence in most schools explains in part, the buzzed poor quality of school leavers, a good part of which enrolls for higher education. To mitigate this negative norm, it is essential that members of the public, as stakeholders, partner with government in the provision of this crucial educational facility in the schools. As stated in the UNESCO/IFLA school library manifesto:

The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with lifelong learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens (UNESCO, 2000) An investment in the school library is a guarantee for tomorrow's good citizenship. Thus, the public in Nigeria should be sufficiently concerned about the poor state of the school library in the country to intervene as an act of social responsibility.

THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

This segment of the paper intends to sensitize identified groups of the Nigerian public on the possibilities of channeling acts of social responsibility in favour of the school library. The groups include philanthropists, town unions, age grades, women unions, Parent-Teacher Associations, sons-in- diaspora, old boys, librarians and corporate business organizations.

Philanthropists

Social responsibility is directed by environmental sensitivity. Philanthropists may deliberately recognize the need for school libraries in their communities and offer to intervene. Thus, they could channel their philanthropy toward the school library in form of erection of school library buildings, purchase of equipment or stocking the library. The Carnegie Corporation of New York which today is a major benefactor of libraries across the world began from the individual philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie based on his understanding of the value of libraries. Philanthropists in Nigeria could replicate Andrew Carnegie. However, most philanthropies in Nigeria are aggrandizement-motivated and thus the school library may not be readily appealing

to the philanthropist. Librarians and the Nigerian Library Association thus have a role to play in enlightenment on the value of school libraries and thus win their interest.

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA):

This is a long-standing organization in schools whose aim is to forge a healthy relationship among teachers and parents of school children. In its long history in schools, the PTA has proved a veritable organ in achieving infrastructural development in schools. Parent - Teacher Associations appear to have found some justification in playing social responsibility role in the school, since both parties have a stake in the schools. For the parents, their children - their long term investments - are receiving education in the schools while for teachers, the school is their area of business. Thus in some schools, PTAs have built classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, donated school buses or dug water boreholes for the school according to the perceived need of the school at the moment. This partnership in infrastructural provision in schools should be extended to the provision of library facilities for the benefit of the teachers and students.

Town Unions:

Town unions are usually development-oriented where undue rancorous politicking does not stifle that purpose. In the absence of government provision of social amenities, town unions initiate and carry out self-help development projects such as road maintenance, market, electricity and hospitals. These development projects are in themselves an expression of social responsibility. Through such projects, the community members and their leaders register their value for an improved living environment. What is left is an understanding that this sense of social responsibility could be extended to the provision of school library facilities to schools in the community as a means of securing a better future for the community. Thus with enlightenment via informed talks on the floor of town union meetings or informal interaction with union leaders, a town union can embark on a school library project as a development option within the community.

Age Grades:

Many communities, especially in the south-east of Nigeria operate the age grade system. Age grade is a system of grouping children born within an age bracket of (usually) three years together primarily for social control. In many communities, these age grades operate as mere social groups for welfare purposes. But the age grade could be a veritable instrument of development. Usually, the inauguration of an age grade is done in an elaborate ceremony. At such occasions, the community leaders could challenge the initiates to embark on development projects for the community. They could be influenced to choose the school library project.

Women Unions:

Women constitute a powerful development force in many communities. In the past two decades, women in Nigeria, especially those in the South East have been able to institutionalize their integrated Home and Abroad Union as a platform for community development and conflict resolution. What is now popularly known as “August Meeting” is an annual convocation of women in their matrimonial communities usually held in August. The event usually witnesses a mass return of women from towns and cities in the country and beyond to their rural home communities. The forum is primarily to discuss development challenges of their communities and strategize on combat measures. Notable projects undertaken by the women unions in some communities are skill acquisition centres, hospitals, markets, water boreholes and oil mills. In the same spirit, the school library could be taken as a project by the women unions.

Elite Groups:

In some Nigerian communities, members of the educated and political class organize themselves into a group and serve as opinion moulders for the community and thus direct development. By their composition, they are assumed to have a high sense of social responsibility and that they appreciate the value of the library. Therefore they should influence support for the school library.

Sons-in-Diaspora:

It is not unusual for indigenes of a community residing in another part of the country or in other countries to organize themselves and execute a development project for their home community. For instance many years ago, Imo-Americans shipped dozens of books to the Imo State University, Owerri Library. In the same spirit, community sons-in- diaspora, can team up and realize a school library project as an act of social responsibility in favour of young pupils at home.

Families:

Children could mark the birthdays of their aged parents with a donation to the school library. Special remembrance of departed loved ones could also be in form of benefaction to the school library.

Old Boys Association:

Indeed, social responsibility as a reciprocal act for the good will of a system is (part of) the philosophical basis for the formation of old boys’ associations. Hence schools that have thriving old- boys’ associations enjoy the support of the old boys in diverse ways. Although statistics is not handy on how much of this support is for the school library, the sorry state of school libraries across the country indicates that old boys’ support for school library is either very low or null. Old Boys’ Associations should direct part of their social responsibility obligations to their alma mater to the school library as a demonstration of their appreciation of its value.

Librarians:

Librarians have double-barreled platforms to perform school library-related social responsibility: their profession in particular and the society at large. Since their profession gives them social identity, librarians must take up the social responsibility to promote the profession by whatever means that are lawful. Also since the society provides them with the sphere of practice, they must reciprocate the society by offering some professional services gratis when necessary.

In the communities from where librarians hail, they should convert every available opportunity to a “library sale” time - a time to enlighten community leaders, known and potential philanthropists, age-grades and even market associations on the need for the school library, with a view to winning their support. Also, they should offer voluntary services in school libraries as their own work time permits them. These voluntary services could be in form of training teacher-librarians, cataloguing and classifying books, teaching library skills to children etc.

Corporate Business Organizations:

There is a high visibility of business organizations in discharging social responsibility obligations to host communities in Nigeria either by choice or by coercion. For example, oil companies embark on community development projects such as roads, hospitals, schools, markets, electricity, water borehole and even scholarships for the communities where they operate. The school library has not featured significantly as a social responsibility project of the business organizations - an indication of lack of understanding of its value among the community leaders and the representatives of the organizations. However, the importance of the school cannot be overemphasized. Where it is provided, it enhances the students’ learning and equips them with information skills to face life confidently in a knowledge-based world. It can meaningfully engage students, thus diverting their attention from restiveness and other social ills. Business organizations should therefore lend support to the school libraries in their communities of operation in diverse ways as part of their social responsibility. For instance, they could build new school library structures, or renovate existing ones, equip the libraries with relevant books and other information sources, purchase library equipment such as shelves, reading tables and chairs, computers and accessories, or even sponsor the training of personnel for the school library.

CONCLUSION

It is desirable that the school library operate optimally in schools to enable students maximize its potentials. Government is not adequately providing the required funds and hence the poor state of school libraries across the country. It has therefore become necessary to call for the public partnership with government in the provision of funds, facilities and stock for the school library. Various segments of the public have been sensitized on the need to direct acts of social responsibility toward the library and some suggestions on what could be done have been made. It is hoped that this clarion call would be heeded in order to revitalize the school library in Nigeria for effective service delivery.

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