LITERACY AND THE LIBRARIAN PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This paper basically examined ways of using literacy to raise the consciousness of librarians who should be immersed in the culture of bringing about progress for individuals who are young, literate, less priviledged, and disadvantaged. Therefore, this paper, while defining literacy from a functional point of view, examined the bloom taxonomy and how a librarian can utilise this taxonomy of learning outcomes to make the library a welcoming place for everyone. Literacy and the librarian's public partnership were also discussed. Such partnerships are geared towards offering programmes of activities that could make an individual a functional and useful individual for themselves and society at large. It therefore covered vulnerable groups like children, adolescents, illiterates, and retirees.

KEYWORDS: Literacy, Librarian, Public, Partnership

Introduction

Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing, and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and fast-changing world (UNESCO, 2021). Literacy fosters the development of a critical consciousness about the contradictions and goals of the society in which man lives (Egonu, 1999). The author further stated that it also stimulates man's initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of authentic human development. To subscribe to this, UNESCO (2021) asserted that the multiplier effect of literacy empowers people, enables them to participate fully in society and contributes to improving livelihoods. This idea conceives of literacy as that force which emancipates man from the height of ignorance to the peak of development, which will make the learner a useful participant in society and, by implication, himself.

Literacy has come to be seen as an important aspect in national development since being functionally literate is fundamental to all forms of success in school and in life

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCEMENT IN EDUCATION, MANAGEMENT, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY 5(1), APRIL 2022, CALIFORNIA. ISSN: 2788-7549

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(Rintaningrum, 2009). This therefore incorporates functional literacy, which is the hallmark of self-development and, by extension, society.

Functional literacy therefore encompasses the Bloom's taxonomy of educational objective which include the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

(a)   **Cognitive:** This has to do with understanding, remembering, and producing something learnt. Armstrong (2016) posited that cognitive behavioural objectives involve some intellectual tasks, and the solution to such tasks demands that the individual determines essential problems and re-arrange them in order to tackle the problems. These objectives are thus arranged in hierarchical order, namely: (a) information (or knowledge), (b) comprehension, (c) analysis, (e) synthesis, and (f) evaluation.

(b)   **Affective:** The teacher's fundamental role is to make their students express their emotions in an effort to learn. The affective function of a learnt behaviour has to do with feelings, emotions, aesthetic awareness and appreciation.

(c)   **Psychomotor:** This has to do with behavioural objectives that impart motion. Psychomotor is basically muscle control, which requires great skill. Such skills are instinctive in any human organism. Though they come naturally, education must develop the inherent skills for a complex skill to complement the natural one so that learning can occur. These skills are listed in order of difficulty: (a) reflex movement, (b) basic fundamental movement, (c) perceptual abilities, (d) physical abilities, (e) skilled movements, and non-discursive communication.

Literacy and the Librarian Public Partnership Efforts

From time out of history, communication plays out to reveal the enormous strength in partnership and how two or more (in this case, the librarian in partnership with the public, government, stakeholders, etc.) can combine forces to impact positively on the world and for each partner's ultimate benefit. Librarians are natural partners in community literacy efforts. They are usually resource people who foster human growth and development, promote early literacy, school readiness, develop workforce capacity, and incorporate the aged and illiterate populace into literacy development. To accomplish this goal, librarians must create partnerships with the other key players in literacy development efforts and take an active leadership role in reaching out to the community. Such partnerships may include meeting with community leaders, such as chiefs, council staff, civil organizations, government agencies, or non-governmental organizations, to learn about projects currently under way and the information resources needed to support these literacy efforts. Libraries, in collaboration with other knowledgeable staff, online and print resources to support workforce and literacy development, as well as the literary building and its technological resources, can thus bring many assets. By thoughtfully leveraging these numerous assets in their immediate communities, librarians can become key players in literacy development efforts.

The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (Walzer and Stott, 1998) conducted training with public librarians in rural communities to help them find new roles in supporting local economic development efforts. They reported that library involvement usually depends both on the personality and interests of the librarians as well as on opportunities for involvement in the community. It is, however, sad to note that librarians are not fulfilling this potential. Myburgh

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(2003) offers reasons by asserting that the "librarian mindest", characterised as "a focus on the library as the location of the skills and knowledge that librarians bring to it," Most librarians are hesitant about leaving the confines of the library building to become involved in partnerships. Librarians in public libraries may feel they have insufficient time to "open doors" to information. For successful partnerships, librarians in all types of libraries must reach out to their immediate locale. According to Walzer and Gruidl (1998), library staff should be prepared to spend at least 10% of their time on activities outside the library building. Such partnerships will subsequently prove beneficial to both the library and its parent institution, as well as the community as a whole.

Literacy Programmes and Tools for Children

A child is a young person in society, ranging in age from one day to seventeen years. The age at which a child is terminated may differ from one cultural milieu to the next. Therefore, librarians in partnership must rise to the challenge of meeting the information needs of this group. In terms of early childhood needs, reading to and exposing this age group to a variety of books meets their basic information needs (Aloysius & Ebong, 2021). The authors further explicated the various ways in which a librarian can partner with various stakeholders to bring about literacy to children, namely: reading from the cradle, the establishment of a home library, organising reading competitions for children, donating books to children as birthday gifts, and frequent visits to public libraries and book fairs to engage students.

There are thousands of volumes of literature from which a teacher-librarian can draw his lessons. Books and audio-visual materials stand astride on book shelves waiting to be chosen. Thus, Ugboma (2007) states that the classroom cannot effectively contain and exhaust all available knowledge in any area of interest to a child. The author further asserted that child education should continue outside the classroom, where, with minimum interference, the child can learn in an orderly and organised form. This goes to emphasise that there can be a synergy between libraries, such as a partnership between school and public libraries. When such libraries work together, there will be a "connect" between the two, and children will therefore become the primary beneficiaries. Fitzgibbons (2000) asserted that it is becoming widely accepted that both school and public libraries have a role in providing resources to complement students' curriculum and literary needs. The author stated further that "in addition to the impact that computer and information literacy have had on the community, this is driving the need for better partnerships between the school and public library." There is therefore an urgent need for libraries to partner with each other and the public as well, because no library or institution is self-sufficient in this information age.

Considerable research has been carried out in the United States to examine the growing importance of the roles and relationships between school and public library services. One of them is that of Fitzgibbons (2000), who explores the range of successful, co-operative relationships between such libraries in the context of United States government education reform policy and the goal of improving student learning. A co-operative relationship, it is assumed, will improve library services and provide children with better access to resources in their search for "information, knowledge and learning" (Fitzgibbons, 2000). However, Fitzgibbons however, assumes that it is the co-operative relationships between two separate institutional settings, and not joint-use facilities, which are the essential ingredients in achieving the educational reform and increased student learning that the United States

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government is seeking. For many libraries, it is the general stakeholder efforts and collaboration after due consultation that will enhance service delivery for children, particularly in relation to literacy development as well as reference and information services.

The literacy of the child is of utmost importance to the building of a fully functional individual. Therefore, it is vital that the child grows into an acceptable and active member who can contribute more to society. Thus, the role of the libraries in partnership should be to inspire children and get them in contact with all the media of presentation so as to stimulate their interest and make them useful and literate people in society. The entire spectrum of children's knowledge is communicated in literary forms, from graphic texts to picture messages or texts. The first tool that a librarian in a partnership can use to aid literacy development is appropriate literature for light reading. Thus, Ugboma (2007) stated that the body of children's literature is designed to get the attention of the child to put into visual and audio expression the images and thoughts of a child's world and to keep them well informed about all spheres of life. Children's literature must therefore incorporate such light reading texts (fictional and non-fictional resource materials) as picture books, folklore texts, short stories of family life, animal stories, adventure stories, fantasy and science fiction, historical texts, children's encyclopaedias, or information handbooks. This literature is meant to teach, instruct, advise, or elicit an idea.

Television is the most potent audio-visual medium which a growing child needs for communication, skills, and literacy development needs for cognitive expansion. Children at all levels of development learn with all their senses: eyes (sight), ears (hearing), tongue (taste), hands and legs (touch), nose (smell).

Literacy Programmes for Adolescents

Adolescent age is rated between 11 – 17 years old, though it varies between cultures. Since this is the last stage in the cognitive development of a child, there is a need to model their young adults into adults that will contribute meaningfully to society. Typically, the adolescent is torn between two worlds (that of childhood and adulthood) and, characteristically, he is energetic, explorative, exuberant, and full of illusive vision.

The librarian in public partnership needs to have an understanding of the adolescent developmental stage and how this stage affects information needs, communication, and literacy development. It is through an understanding of the environmental context in which adolescents operate that the librarian in partnership can best offer services that will aid literacy development because information needs change as individuals progress from one developmental stage to the other. Therefore, to achieve these efforts in partnership, the public library, school library, government, and stakeholders can have a shared vision, common goals, and joint policies and procedures. With respect to school and public library partnerships, Fitzgibbons (2000) identifies the following opportunities:

- the sharing of information about respective resources;

- development of open communication channels, for example, facilitating assignment alerts;

- joint collection development;

- the teaching of information skills; and

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- instituting homework help centres

Research has also been undertaken into the linkages between school libraries and academic achievement (Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000). The public library definitely has a social responsibility to provide equality of access and literary development to children and adolescents. It can also contribute to their learning process, especially of adolescents, by investigating and pursing options that facilitate the best delivery of information, communication, and literacy services to the adolescent's learning.

The pervasive lack of reading books is characteristic of children within this age bracket. Due to the developmental as well as emotional problems that pervade this group of individuals, there is a need for librarians to partner in a bid to create literacy development, thereby encouraging adolescents to make the overall use of knowledge to their advantage. Because this group has advanced illusory reasoning and views of life, capable of hypothesising and jumping to hasty conclusions, it is critical to introduce literary criticism through fiction to help them judge and explain the importance and meaning of each action to everyday living. Ugboma (2007) subscribes to this when she asserts that this more natural child can reason about prepositions, about states of affairs or experience. She states further that we can identify layers of meaning in a given plot. One can think about the form and pattern of reasoning as well as the contents.

During library hours, the librarians, in partnership with the class teachers, should be able to decipher adolescents with reading problems. The librarian should stimulate the adolescents' interest in accepting and using varied literary materials, including fiction materials, to their advantage. The class teacher should find ways to complement the librarian's effort by incorporating reacting sessions into the classroom to enable the adolescent to make use of all forms of literature, including classroom texts.

Literacy Programmes for the Illiterate Populace

These are users who are unable to read and write. This group comprises artisans, traders, farmers, and rural people. Aina (2004) stated that in Africa, they constitute the largest proportion of information users. The author further states that this group of clients are often in need of information for social, economic, and political development. Librarians in public libraries have to partner with the media and government agencies that provide information to get information ready for this group of users. This group embodies general readers, made up of children, adults, artisans, rural dwellers, the physically handicapped, etc. Aina (2004), however, notes that the library often meets the needs of this group by organising book talks, lectures, and audiovisual presentations. The librarians in public libraries in partnership with agencies of government have to re-assert their role of providing free access to these users to meet their individual information needs, as the public library is known for its role as an information provider to all citizens.

Hamilton public library's first partnership, as Hovius (2005) stated, was to create a vision of a large integrated network of programmes where adults could learn to read and upgrade their education skills in a positive, adult-oriented environment without shame or stigma. The author further stated that the association hired project staff (originally only for 3 months since that was all the funding there was) to raise awareness of adult literacy issues, provide referrals to existing programmes and identify gaps and weaknesses in the service network from the customer perspective. This is to say that by raising awareness of literacy issues, more adults could

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actually register their interest in learning. Reference and referral services, as well as classes led by retired teachers, are examples of community-based programmes in which the library can collaborate with the government or organizations. This can help librarians identify their literacy needs by providing information at an appropriate reading level. Librarians can collaborate with school districts and the federal government to establish library career resource centres that offer counselling to those who have struggled with existing programmes and design ways to accommodate slow learners. A librarian can thus organize the content for this group to include local history, religion, etc.

Literacy Programmes for Retirees

Retirees are people between the ages of 60 – 65. They are older adults who are deemed not fit to contribute to a country's workforce anymore. Retirees are not always comfortable with the fact that they will, on their own, be viewed as useful. Compulsory retirement can, however, undermine one's sense of self-worth. Librarians, on the other hand, can restore a sense of self-worth and usefulness to retirees by collaborating with government, non-governmental organizations, media agencies, and others and developing programs. This can be achieved through engaging in productive activities that can fill many fundamental needs of retirees, provide a sense of meaning and fulfillment, and may even provide some income. Retirees can be taught with both print and audio-visual materials. Programme content for literacy development for retirees can include:

- Cultivating interest in fresh new areas, such as art, sculpture, word games and crossword puzzles, learning a new language.

- Interacting with a variety of people, socializing and conversing to sharpen their minds.

- Reading and discussing, local history.

- Recalling and relating news items from radio or TV news-casts to exercise, their short and long term memories.

- Physical games such as using their non-dominant had (left hand, if they are right-handed, or vice versa) to operate the television remote control and the telephone.

- Using local history to learn about and go on excursion to interesting places.

Conclusion and Recommendations

All in all, literacy programmes are always geared at offering professional assistance to different categories of people in order to make them improve their skills and become useful to themselves or the society. This paper therefore explicated on areas which the librarian can engage in partnerships in this 21st century in order to provide functional literacy to individuals who have never had the advantage of any formal education, to develop in illiterate adults a knowledge of aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment, to provide entertainment and cultural integration to senior citizens of this country and to supplement and broaden the educational backgrounds of adults by exposing them to reading and writing.

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