

THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS IN THE NIGERIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The current day society is marked by a growing need for information skills at all levels, including schools, universities, the workplace and ordinary life. Education must, therefore centre on the teaching of information literacy skills (ILSs) because ILSs are life skills. This paper presents findings of an exploratory research that investigated the teaching of ILS across Secondary Education Curriculum. The study was premised on the Resource-Based Learning (RBL) theory. The findings of the study indicate that ILS are not taught in secondary schools in Nigeria despite the initiatives and measures the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) has put in place in appreciating the promotion of integrating ILS into Secondary Education Curriculum. The study strongly believes that teaching secondary school students ILS would lead to effective and efficient use of school libraries and flourish educational achievements that would lead to turn around in the dwindling standards of our educational sector. This paper therefore proposes the envisaged appropriate interventions geared towards enhancing levels of ILS among secondary school students in Nigeria. Data was collected through focus group discussions, personal experience as a teacher librarians and in-depth interviews. Qualitative data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews was analysed using content analysis technique.

INTRODUCTION

Today's student lives and learns in a world that has been radically altered by the ready availability of vast stores of information in a variety of formats, in which the learning and information search processes mirror each other. Now, more than ever before,

the need for quick, relevant and current information is becoming pervasive in every human endeavour. To reap the benefits of the global information society, students must be information literate on a technological basis and creating a foundation for lifelong learning must be at the heart of the information literacy skills (ILS) programme. For this to be realised, libraries must operate across the curriculum, more so that the Nigeria secondary education curriculum offers the opportunity to connect learning with meaningful life experiences.

ILS IN THE NIGERIA SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM.

Secondary school education in Nigeria runs for a period of six years: three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary. Nigeria Junior Secondary Schools were evolved in the mid 1980s as a result of recommendation no. 24 (a) section 5 of the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1981. Each school was built with a library facility which was later stocked. One important goal of the school library was, and still is, to foster students' information literacy skills across content areas (Keith, 2007). FME's appreciation of integrating ILS into secondary education curriculum is reflected in its nine-year basic education programme which among others strives "to develop critical thinking, problem solving ability, individual initiative, interpersonal and inquiry skills" and "to develop literacy and understanding of the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the world of work and every sphere of life." Thus, if these objectives are realised, FME will benefit as academic results are likely to flourish.

In appreciating the importance of ILS, the Directorate of Secondary Education has since the early 1990's, trained some teachers in school librarianship at Certificate level, with the hope of later manning the school libraries. Unfortunately, the trained teachers later progressed to different Directorates within their respective secondary schools as the library was not then declared a Directorate. Needless to point out, the expertise and knowledge of trained Teacher Librarians was lost as it could not be used in those Directorates. Thus, libraries continued to be run by people not trained in librarianship. Consequently, students were not taught library skills and the few library resources were lost and/or underutilised. In realising this loss of resources, the Directorate of Secondary Education in 2000, called for the need to revisit the provisions of section 11 of the NPE and an immediate implementation of recommendations in section 101, sub section e, f and g of the Revised National Policy on education (RNPE) of 2004 by turning libraries in secondary schools into a department to be headed by a Teacher librarian or Library officer whose main responsibility was, and still is, to ensure that students become information literate.

Another milestone was the establishment of Colleges of Education in the 1980s as a result of the recommendations of NPE, where library studies were introduced as a minor subject. Teachers who graduated later helped in manning the library but not enforcing ILS. Communication and Study Skills was, and still is, also taught at Colleges of Education. In the early 1990s in an attempt to produce information literate graduate teachers who should produce information literate students. Upon completion, these

teachers were expected to infuse ILS in their teaching subjects, but this never saw the light of the day because there was no implementation strategy for the integration of ILS into secondary school curriculum. This was further compounded by the congestion of their teaching subjects. The teacher to student ratio of one teacher to 45-50 students also makes it difficult for teachers to infuse ILS into their teaching subjects as well. Furthermore, limited budgets and lack of implementation strategies and capabilities still hinder the integration of ILS in secondary schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study is prompted by my observations as a teacher in one of the secondary schools in Nigeria. It has thus been discovered that secondary school libraries and the few information resources stocked are not effectively used as schools receive learners who lack ILS. This is also compounded by the teaching load of Teacher – Librarians which limits their endeavours to effectively orientate new comers in library skills and guide them during their information search.

Despite the above, the government of Nigeria appreciates the importance of integrating information literacy skills into the curriculum as reflected in the national aims of secondary education and recommendations of RNPE of 2004. RNPE of 2004 recommendation no.15 of section 3 stated that the goals of the Nine-year basic education should be “to produce students who are skilful consumers and producers of information in a wide range of resources and formats to thrive personally and economically in the communication age.” These documents proclaim the significance of the integration of ILS into secondary education curriculum but fail to suggest how these could be implemented and, as a result ILSs are not taught and students leave secondary schools ill-equipped in ILS. In view of this, students use the school library only to check out books as they are not given instruction or additional assistance on how to effectively use the services of the library and its holdings. The problem of ineffective library use due to lack of ILS by students is compounded by the fact that most school libraries are supervised by an Education Officer who is not trained in Librarianship. Above all, collection development of secondary school libraries is misguided as the Education Officer is not an expert in the area and cannot provide the necessary guidance. Some secondary school teachers were taught ILS during their training with the sole intent of imparting these skills to their learners but the reality is different. The congestion of their teaching subjects and their teaching loads make these good initiatives impossible to realise.

The absence of a comprehensive ILS programme in which teachers will infuse the teaching of ILS in their subjects and give students library research assignments worsens the situation. Due to limited budgets, most school libraries also operate under poor infrastructural settings and lack the necessary resources which make both RBL and Bring Back the Book(BBB) policy of the government difficult. Most of the literature on the integration of ILSs into the curriculum is dominated exclusively by studies that were conducted in developed countries and therefore do not address the context of Nigeria. It is against this

background that the researchers found it necessary to carry out an exploratory research to investigate the seemingly lack of implementation strategy on the integration of ILS into the secondary school curriculum.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to investigate the lack of implementation strategy on the integration of ILS into the secondary school curriculum. Specifically, the study looked at;-

1. The characteristics of an information literate person
2. The measures FME has put in place to promote the integration of ILS into the secondary education curriculum
3. Ascertain the challenges faced by school teachers in incorporating ILS in their teaching subjects.
4. Identify strategies to enhance the promotion of and integration of ILS into secondary education curriculum

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To address the above objectives, the following research questions will be investigated:

1. What are the characteristics of an information literate person?
2. What measures has FME put in place to promote the integration of ILS into the secondary education curriculum?
3. What challenges do secondary school teachers face in incorporating ILS in their teaching subjects?
4. What should be done to promote the integration of ILS into the Nigeria secondary education curriculum?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- Firstly, the findings of the study will function as a reference for the formulation of a conceptual framework for ILS programmes in secondary education in Nigeria. FME could use the findings to guide the formulation of implementation policies on ILS.
- Secondly, the results of this research will serve as a reference point to policy makers in the Directorate of Secondary Education in ensuring that appropriate implementation strategies for ILS will be formulated. It is also hoped to be of importance to trained librarians who will be appointed to supervise school libraries and facilitate the implementation of ILS.
- Thirdly, the research findings will persuade policy makers and stakeholders to realise the importance of teaching ILS and pursue strategies for embedding ILS into the curriculum. The last envisaged contribution of this study would be that the findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on ILS, as the researcher is not aware of any study conducted in this area in Benue State- Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

ILS became a global topic in the 1990s and later emerged through efforts of publications, debates, discussions, literature and information technology. Since then, it had been researched by a number of educational institutions, professional bodies and scholarly individuals (Eisnberg: 2004). However, most of the literature is dominated exclusively by studies that were conducted in developed countries and therefore do not address the Nigeria context. The idea of RBL is well-established and only librarians in developed countries have been involved in teaching the effective use of information resources for over a century.

Currently there is no clear and agreed definition of what is meant by information literacy or information skills, although the latter phrase is most commonly used in the literature. The reviewed literature shows that there is very little difference or hard to notice the difference in meaning between information literacy and information skills. There has been also a lack of agreement as to whether ILS should be integrated into subject areas or taught as a discrete discipline. Keith (2007) enumerated the significance, of teaching information literacy skills as helping learners to formulate and plan their projects or assignments, find information, manage and use information regardless of its format, present information and evaluate information. To sum it up, Riedling (2000) described the qualities of information literate as one who must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate it, evaluate it, and use the needed information effectively. Thus, a student who is information literate weighs information carefully and wisely to determine its quality.

Success in information literacy integration and delivery can only be achieved through collaboration between librarians and the teaching staff who have the expertise in the various disciplines across the secondary education curricula. The integration of ILS into the curriculum should be a well-planned and collaborative exercise between the Teacher-Librarian, subject teachers, students, parents and policy makers (Keith:2007). argued that It should not be done haphazardly and in isolation as it is expensive and time-consuming. Through the integration, today's learners will be better educated to live in a democratic global information society.

Quite a good number of documents indicate that FME of Nigeria appreciates the importance of integrating information literacy skills into the secondary school curriculum. RNPE of 2004, Recommendation no.21 stated that secondary education curriculum must “develop in all children critical thinking, problem solving ability, individual initiative and interpersonal skills”.

The same policy through Recommendation no.73 stated that the goals of out-of school education should be stated so as to establish a learning society in which education is seen as a lifelong process. Some of the aims of the curriculum blueprint: The Nine-

year Basic Education Programme's objective 3 reads "to develop critical thinking, problem solving ability, individual initiative, interpersonal and inquiry skills"

The Curriculum blueprint for senior secondary school education programme revised, states one of the programme features as "to utilise innovative learner centred approaches to teaching." This therefore augurs well with the conceptual framework of this research which is resource-based view of learning. In line with RNPE of 2004, the senior secondary school syllabus encouraged learner- centred approach which aims at catering for and improving performance in all learners in Nigeria including those with special needs and different abilities.

Teaching information literacy skills is increasingly difficult. Bucher (2007) contented that, policy makers and the administrative staff seem not to believe in and support it. Waugh (2005: 64) stated that RBL cannot be fully implemented in developing countries if policy makers and the administrative staff do not budget, schedule and convey its importance to educators/teachers and students. Due to limited budgets, school libraries also operate under poor infrastructural settings (Allan: 2003). The shortage of computers and lack of connectivity to the Internet by most school libraries in developing countries are cited by Walton & Pope (2006) as one major reason hampering effective learning processes and/or integration of ILSs. In addition, Teacher – Librarians are expected to have a teaching subject and this limits their endeavours to effectively orientate new comers on library skills and guide them during their information search (Molebatsi 2004:8). Again, the syllabus content is too congested for teachers to teach ILS or give students library research assignments. Students are therefore not assisted in making the most effective use of materials appropriate to their assignments and course work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a survey method as it was extensively used by similar studies. Generally, a qualitative research approach was used in this study. The target population for the study was Officers in FME, State Ministry of Education SME, Secondary School Heads, Teacher- Librarians, Secondary School Teachers and students from the selected secondary schools. The study used both purposive and simple random sampling. The informants were identified according to their responsibilities in relation to the integration of ILSs into secondary education curriculum. Data was collected from six secondary schools in Makurdi, the capital town of Benue State Nigeria: two senior secondary schools and four junior secondary schools. The two senior secondary schools are Special Science Senior Secondary School and Government Model Secondary School. The four junior secondary schools are UBE Junior secondary school NAF Base, UBE Junior secondary school St. Theresa's Wurukum, UBE Junior secondary school St. Catherine High Level, UBE Junior secondary school Apir.

Data was collected from 215 informants being 3 library officers who were also 4th year students of the Bachelor of Library and Information Studies programme at the Benue State

University Makurdi, 120 students, 77 teachers and 6 Teacher Librarians who hold a certificate in School Librarianship and have been promoted to principal senior Assistant Education Officers. Additional data was collected from six School Heads of the target secondary schools and three officers at the Ministry of Education. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis technique. Data was analysed using qualifying words and descriptions deduced from respondents' answers to record the findings.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Generally, 90.69 % (195) respondents thought that ILS are competencies in constructing strategies for locating and assessing information. ILS confers the ability to compare, evaluate and extract information from different sources, and to select accurate and reliable information sources. The definitions of information literacy skills centre on capabilities that lead students to have productive lives in the Information Society.

207 (96.28%) defined an information literate person as a person is be able to recognize that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making. These findings are similar to the qualities of an information literate person outlined by Riedling (2000) which include one who must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use the needed information effectively. In a nutshell, an information literate person identifies potential sources of information, develops successful search strategies and integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge, and uses it in critical thinking and problem solving. Thus, information literate people have the necessary skills to make choices and decisions that will impact on their lives as students, as researchers and in the workplace. Respondents cautioned that becoming an information literate person, however, is not a quick and easy process but part of lifelong learning.

The findings suggest that teaching ILS across the curriculum would ultimately produce information literate students. This was the view of 179 (83.26%) These findings corroborate Riedling's (2000) contention that teaching ILS in secondary schools will help produce a learner who is competent and can precisely articulate his/her information needs; who is independent and socially responsible; who displays confidence in his/her ability to solve problems; who knows how to locate relevant and accurate information, and who can manage technology tools to access information and to communicate. The teaching of ILS in secondary schools would, therefore promote learner centred teaching approaches and/or RBL. To sum up, the concept of empowering users to be independent learners is now widely embraced and the integration of ILS across the curriculum has become topical issues in educational settings. The underlying purpose of teaching ILS is to promote independent and autonomous learning now and beyond.

The study found out from documentary evidences, that the efforts by FME to promote the teaching of ILS in secondary school include training of teachers at workshops in Library Studies, inclusion of Communication and Study Skills into teacher-training courses at Colleges of Education and, training of some teachers for Bachelor of Library and Information

Science, and the creation of the post of teacher librarians. The study also found out that FME has made compulsory, library studies as a minor subject at the Colleges of Education. These results reflect that FME has done the ground work for the integration of ILS in secondary schools but seem to lack the implementation capabilities.

The findings of the study also indicate clearly that FME supports the integration of ILS into secondary school curriculum. The majority of the respondents 93%(200) were aware of the documents which support the integration of ILS into secondary school curriculum such as virtually all syllabi for secondary school subjects, the Nine-year basic education programme, Nigeria Vision 2020-20, and the RNPE of 2004.

It emerged from the study that secondary school students are not information literate and ILS are not taught. The findings reveal that ILS are important and must therefore be taught to secondary school students This position is upheld by an overwhelming majority of the study population.

The study again, found out that the integration of ILS into the curriculum should be a well-planned and collaborative exercise between the Teacher-Librarian, subject teachers, students, parents and policy makers. The findings suggest that teacher-librarians are well vested in the area of ILS and must therefore spear-head under the supervision of an officer, with librarianship qualification.

The findings indicate that there are still some obstacles that attribute to the delay of integrating of ILS into secondary school curriculum hence they are not yet taught despite the documentation that supports their teaching. Both the teacher-librarian and subject teachers' efforts to impart ILS to secondary school students are frustrated by their teaching load and insufficient resources that could support RBL. ILS teaching in Nigeria secondary schools is hampered mainly by lack of funding inadequate staffing and lack of time This is the position of the teacher librarians, School heads and other subject teachers.. The findings also clearly indicate that there are no Education Officers who are well vested with good school librarianship practices.

The findings reveal that ILS are important and therefore FME must enforce their integration into secondary school curriculum as a matter of urgency through:

1. Formulating a conceptual framework for the implementation of ILS programmes in secondary education in Nigeria.
2. Creating the posts of Education Officer II (Library), Education Officer I (Library) Principal Education Officer II (Library) Principal Education Officer I (Library) as well as Chief Education Officer (library) and appoint trained school- librarians to these posts of responsibility.
3. Introducing Literacy skills as a core subject in secondary schools.
4. Improving the conditions of secondary school libraries and provide the necessary materials that would support resource-based learning.

5. Exempting the Senior Teacher Librarian from his/her teaching subject teaching in order to spear- head the teaching of ILS in secondary schools.
6. Introducing library clerks at Junior Secondary schools as it is the case with senior secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCEPT OF ILS

Currently there is no clear and agreed definition of what is meant by information literacy skills. An information literate person is that person who is able to recognize that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making, identify potential sources of information, develop successful search strategies and integrate new information into an existing body of knowledge and use it in critical thinking and problem solving. Becoming information literate ultimately empowers students to be independent learners.

KEY PLAYERS IN THE INTEGRATION OF ILS INTO SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Success in information literacy integration and delivery can only be achieved through collaboration between librarians and the teaching staff, students, parents and policy makers.

MEASURES THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS PUT IN PLACE

In support of the integration of ILS in secondary schools, FME supports the integration of ILS into secondary school curriculum as reflected by virtually all syllabi for secondary school subjects; the Nine-year basic education programme, Nigeria Vision 2020-20, the NPE of 1977 and RNPE of 2004. However, FME seem to lack the implementation capabilities. Thus, the measures the government through FME has in place to support the teaching of ILS across the curriculum in secondary schools are not effective.

ILS IN THE NIGERIA SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Ministry of Education in Nigeria has put the necessary measures in place to support the teaching of ILS across the curriculum in secondary schools. These measures include training teachers in library and information studies, introduction of library studies as a minor subject at Colleges of Education, and teaching teachers information literacy skills through communications and study skills course which is compulsory for all training teachers. Other measures are the development of Teacher-Librarian cadre and redefining the place of libraries in the existing directorates with a view to put them at par with other educational services.

FACTORS HINDERING THE TEACHING OF ILS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The findings reveal that both the teacher-librarian and subject teachers' efforts to impart ILS to secondary school students are frustrated by their teaching load and insufficient resources that could support it. ILS teaching in Nigeria secondary schools is hampered mainly by lack of funding, inadequate staffing, and lack time. Above all, there are no Education Officers trained in librarianship who are committed to ILS teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FME must formulate a conceptual framework for the implementation of ILS programmes in secondary education in Nigeria. It must formulate ILS implementation strategies/policies.
2. FME must create the posts of Education Officer II (Library), Education Officer I (Library) Principal Education Officer II (Library) Principal Education Officer I (Library) as well as Chief Education Officer (library) and appoint trained school-librarians into these posts of responsibility.
3. FME must introduce Literacy skills as a core subject in secondary schools. The Ministry of Education must exempt the Senior Teacher Librarian from his/her teaching subject teaching in order to spear-head the teaching of ILS in secondary schools.
4. FME must introduce library clerks/assistants at Junior Secondary schools as it is the case with senior secondary schools.
5. FME must upgrade and/or improve the conditions of secondary school libraries and provide the necessary materials that would support resource- based learning.

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