

Librarians' Skills in Creating Access to Knowledge in Children's Library

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper looks at the importance of Librarians skills in creating access to information in children's library.

Design/Methodology/Approach: An opinion paper which is literature based. This paper looks into (1) the role of librarians in creating access in children's library. (2) The goals of library services. (3) Skills needed by librarian to create access to information in Children's Library. (4) Challenges faced by librarians in creating access to Information (5) Solutions to these problems and (6) Recommendations were highlighted. Librarian's skills in creating access to information in children's library are discussed. Some of the challenges in creating access to information are also highlighted furthermore, solutions to some of the challenges are recommended.

Findings: Children's librarian must possess certain skills to be able to create the right information in the children in order to help them have good information acquisition that will enable them have good reading culture. Librarians deserve government's support in order to create good access to information in Children's Library.

Practical Implications: Part of the goals of library services for children is to facilitate the right of every child to information and to provide children with open access to resources and media. In order to achieve the desired objectives in children's library, the librarian needs to develop and acquire the right skills needed to effectively work with children. This paper recommends that only librarians who are trained and knowledgeable in children's library should be allowed to work in children's library. For democratization of access, more children's libraries should be built in all local government areas so that children in remote areas are reached. Librarians in children's libraries should be exposed to different forms of continuing professional development to enhance their productivity.

Originality/Value: information literacy skills for children's library are discussed.

Keywords – children's library; librarians' skills; access to information.

Paper Type – Opinion paper

Introduction

A librarian is known as a person located in the library to carry out the task of acquiring, organizing, preserving the printed documents besides helping the readers in locating information needed by them. Consequently, the roles of librarians have changed with the emergence of information communication technology (ICT). No longer are librarians called the custodians of shelves and books, but they look after electronic resources too. Librarianship as a profession gives one a unique opportunity of coming in contact with all categories of human beings (Young and Old). This topic dwells on how Librarians can help in creating access to

information in children's library. It is very important to know who children are. According to Mgbodile (2000), he rightly pointed out that children are little human beings aged 01 to 11 years who are found in the family. They are lovable, playful and sociable. They are cheerful, amiable and adventurous, very inquisitive and eager to learn. They are honest, truthful, reliable and dependable. They are little treasures from God whom we ought to love and cherish. It is the responsibility of librarians to help them grow in a most positive and pleasant manner. Services to children should be one of the goals of a librarian as far as librarianship is concerned this is because children have been identified to have special needs, interests and aspirations at every

developmental level of their journey to adulthood, (Ugboma, 2007).

The goals of library services for children according to IFLA/UNESCO Guild lines (2001) is to facilitate the right of every child to information, to provide children with open access to resources and media, to provide various activities for children, parents and caregivers, to facilitate families into the community, to empower children and advocate for their freedom and safety, to encourage children to become confident and competent people, to strive for a peaceful world.

Nigeria is being regarded as neither a reading nor library conscious country, therefore children are being neglected from generation to generation without inculcating in them a reading culture and exposure to library use, Alabi (2008).

Machete, Olen and Chamberlain, in Alabi (2008) opine that children are faced with the challenge of exposure to an overflow of information because their everyday life is characterized by fast developing technology. Librarians cannot shy away from evaluating, interpreting and processing information in order to create access to information. Children need informational materials which will help them to grow both educationally and emotionally in this information age.

One may ask how this can be achieved, when there is no one to lead them step – by – step, hand – in – hand in a society where book is not given much attention and libraries are not built especially children's library. This takes us to the importance, of children's library in our community. The importance of children's library cannot be over emphasised. This is because it is focused on early literacy, what children need to know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. Children are not left out in the era of information explosion. This is with the view of widening the scope of knowledge of children thereby availing them the opportunity of taking wise decision and making choices in life.

Bringing children closer to book is an important aspect of children's library. These books provide recreation, information as well as education. Fayose (1995) acknowledges that literature can satisfy the emotional and psychological problems involved in children's growth because

of the vicarious experiences which they encounter in stories.

The library will provide books that will give them the opportunity of acquiring language skills especially those between the ages of 2 and 5 years. Children will also develop love and understanding, self confidence which will lead them to success in life. They will develop children's literacy and aesthetic taste (appreciation of beauty).

Children's libraries go far in encouraging and exposing children to a print rich environment which helps them to see book as object of tremendous values and great assets of lifelong learning which encourage reading habit in children. Good reading habit makes learning to be permanent; improves knowledge and skills for positive, productivity, makes the child to develop his potential and widens the range of his perceptions, interests and skills (Metzger, 1991).

Children's library helps tremendously in developing a child's intelligence (IQ). Ugboma (2007) carefully classified the evolving of the cognition of the child as follows:

1. Sensory – Motor Period (infancy)
2. Pre-Operational periods – early childhood 2 – 7 years
3. Concrete – operational – middle – childhood, 7 – 11 years\
4. Formal operational period (12 – 16 years) – (teenage)

The library at this time helps to catch them young with picture books, storytelling, literature books, dramas, poetry etc.

Children's library encourages socialization of children; it organizes activities for children to interact among themselves. Children learn at very early age what it means to be a boy or a girl in our society. A lot of activities give those opportunities, encouragement, discouragement, overt behaviour, covert suggestions and various forms of guidance. Children experience the process of gender role socialization. It is difficult for a child to grow to adulthood without experiencing some form of gender bias or stereotyping (Martin, Wood and Little, 1990). Tucker (2010) emphasised that young children need to be socialized as early as possible in a setting that will promote learning.

Children's library helps in developing skills that will help them to find and use information. It will give them the opportunity or ability to

interpret some of the search terms used in finding books on the shelves and also engage them for personal interest. This is to help them develop the skill search to information on their own without the help of a librarian. They make use of different information systems to seek for information in a digital environment. It stimulates intellect and creativity of the child in all fields.

Children's library in many ways explores children creative potentials, through play, language, the expressive art, music, movements, dance and drama. A wordless picture book can stimulate creativity by combining the various outlets and literatures can offer opportunities to top creative, potentials and provide a natural outlet for creative thinking. Children have their own innate curiosity and problem solving skills. It is certainly the early childhood stage that librarians can effectively have the responsibility to elicit and encourage those natural abilities.

What Does a Children's Librarian Do?

Selection and Acquisition

In libraries, book selection and acquisition is core responsibility of a librarian in any type of library. It determines the relevance of materials or information in libraries. In children library, librarians must be skilful in the selection and acquisition of books. Fayose (1995) says that certain factors encourage children to read while others inhibit their desire to read. What children like to read in their leisure time does not always correspond to what adults recommend for them. It is the readers need and interest that should ultimately count in the matter of book provision. It is the work of the children's librarian to select books for the library and In making these selections the librarian must choose materials which have:-

- high quality of information
- age appropriate
- a reflection of a variety of values and opinions
- reflection of local community culture and
- Introduction to global community.

When the selection of books is over, the librarian makes his demand from the publishers or vendors with his list and asks for a Performa invoice. The librarian crosses the check to make sure the prices are well tagged with the number of copies he wants to buy. The request is sent to the authority for approval. These books are paid

through cheques issued, Bank draft, book coupons or cash (Ugboma, 2007).

Reference Questions:

Helping with reference questions is an important task for a librarian in children's library. Children come to the library to do their home work and special projects. It is the duty of the librarian to know what they want and direct them to the right material they need in order to complete their assignments.

Cataloguing and Classification Skill

New books are meant to be catalogued and classified. This is an important function of a librarian. It exposes the librarian to master his core professional job. The process of cataloguing and classifying these book help for easy identification and retrieval.

Drama Skill

A librarian should have flare for drama. This is because according to Fayose (1995) drama is the very essence of Nigerian life. It exposes the children to various acting skills. Children are sent to school to learn. They are taught different subjects ranging form language, mathematics, arts, religion etc. They study these subjects in order to gain knowledge and pass exams. We can find out that there are talents in them that are hidden. Most of them pass through schools being so secretive; some even find it difficult to express themselves because they are shy. The librarian should bring these children together and give them roles to play. This will help a long way to make them become social individual and creative artists.

Storytelling Skills

Storytelling skill workshop organized by Heather Forest and some Guest Artists advocate that the basic tools of storytelling are voice, body, imagination and metaphor. Through demonstration discussion, and playful improvisation, participants will explore a range of story telling methods, story composition, character expressiveness, and inventive ways to liberate spontaneous, evocative, descriptive speech. A librarian cannot neglect storytelling as a teaching tool and as a useful skill for children. Pollicino (2008) rightly pointed out that storytelling conjures up the most traditional of images about our earliest memories. Our diverse cultural background has in common the tradition of an oral sharing of tales that seek to explain nature, religion or human strengths and

weaknesses. Storytelling can be enjoyable for children and even adults and can also promote a love of reading. It enriches literacy. Working with children as a librarian and with storytelling skill one will be amazed at the power of storytelling because it moves both the teller and the listener.

Book Club Skill

A librarian who works with children must be skilled at conducting book club activities. The librarian should be well versed in children's literature from toddler books to young adult novels. The librarian goes through Journals that contain extensive review of books that are currently available for young people and choose books that will give them a sense of what the world is like. The librarian justifies children's feelings about the book(s) they have read. It is good to discuss with the children why they liked or did not like the book they read. The librarian discusses some salient points raised in the discussion with the children in order to encourage them to think about the book they have read. Awards are also given to the child that performed best.

Reading Aloud Skill

This is a skill which is not much practised in children's library. Picture books, counting books and other beginners' books make for a better stimulation of the intellect and creativity of the children. Pack (2000) opined that reading in children is more than simply providing access to books but reading aloud to them directs encouragement (either by suggesting reading and even little to them) and having a role model. The librarian has a role to play because the early stage is the most critical task. Obama (2008) in his speech stressed that we have to find out time and energy to step in and help out children to love reading. We can help them, talk to them about what they're reading. This is what librarians do. The library should be a place where parents and children come to read together and learn together.

Librarians Creating Access to information

Access to information should be the priority of our society, and the extent to which this information can be accessed through any library is the best indicator of the achievement to that library. Children can gain access to information through media programmes, excursions, literature books and enabling environment.

Media Programme

This can help in providing opportunity for children to have a feel of what goes on around them. Some television programmes are quite exciting, like "tales by moonlight" which dramatizes folk stories, children's world programmes animal stories, social and political events and historical events. These stories and events that children watch help to relate the past to present. The age of information technology is a pride to the world at large.

Excursions

According to Windell (2009) excursion are appropriate for children because they are exposed to parts of the community which are new to them. This increases their understanding of the world and allows for follow up at the centre with books and stories. Excursion can be intellectually and educationally stimulating. Excursion which can be wonderful adventure for children include: fire house or station, zoo, petting farms, TV or radio station, colleges etc.

The University of Nigeria children's centre library organizes excursions to many places like NTA and COSMO FM in Enugu and other exciting places which help to keep the children abreast with first hand information and unforgettable time. Excursion also brings a cordial relationship with the children and the librarian

Literatures

Children's literature is central to childhood development beyond the traditional notions of literacy and learning. Children engage with stories in the form of books, films and news media and from these texts they learn ways to interpret their world and develop models for participation in their culture. Literature offers insight to human experiences both past and present. Literature reflects the changing patterns in social, economic and political nature of our society. Literature exposes the children to the traditional beliefs and practices.

Furthermore, it gives them insight to problems encountered while in school for example, 'Eze goes to school' by Nzekwe and Crowder.

Enabling Environment

Children gain access to information through an environment that is stimulating, challenging and

above all fun. Equipment in the children's library reflects positive images that challenge children's thinking to help them embrace difference in gender, ethnicity, language, religion and culture. The resources of the library should be challenging and interesting that stimulate children's development in variety of ways. Children's library must be easily recognised with special furnishing, decorations and colours that will make it to be distinct from other libraries.

Challenges in Creating Access to information in Children's Library

Vital as the roles of children's library in our society are, there are still some factors hindering effective services and access to information. The information age demands that librarians must sit up in order to join the band wagon and understand the needs of users and what their roles are in the new world.

Children's librarians are yet to acquire some skills which will conform to the guiding principles of the information age just as Umaru (1986) rightly pointed out that skill is one of the basic tenets of a librarian. These skills have a far reaching effect in creating access to information in children's library. Skills can be grouped as leadership and managerial skills. Skills of an effective administrator as identified by Ivy (2001) are technical, human and conceptual.

- Librarians in children's library good technical skill like:
- Basic knowledge of a personal computer,
- Internet knowledge,
- Software knowledge,
- Networking knowledge,
- Hardware knowledge and
- Other computer concepts.

Other skills which are most challenging in children's library are: not being familiar with the major works in children's literature, not being able to answer a variety of reference questions correctly, not having an understanding of the needs and interests of children in order to provide excellent services, not having a knowledge or skill in cataloguing and classification for easy retrieval of books in the library.

For human skill or leadership skills, children's librarians are faced with the problem of developing good leadership skills not only to motivate employees in their department but also to lead and motivate children, communicate with youngsters of all ages and assist them in becoming the adult library users of tomorrow.

Proximity is also a big challenge in having access to knowledge. In many areas fewer libraries are open and available for children and this presents real difficulties in terms of access. This in particular affects mostly children in rural areas where there is little or no means of transportation. It affects drastically their access to library resources.

Librarians in children's library do not engage themselves in advocacy and lobbying work. Raseroka (2002) is of the view that advocating and lobbying will make decision makers to be aware that information can support development, help to reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life.

Librarians in children's library are not keen to work with publishers and booksellers even writers, to know the needs of users, rather they buy books that do not capture the interest of their clientele, thereby making them not to be interested in reading and having hatred for the library. This is why Obokoh (1991) confessed that this will help breed a generation of children who hate reading and detest using the library.

Acquisitions of children's book are made without putting into consideration that children live in homes where the language they grow up with are not what they come across in printed form. These children are denied access to know what is happening around them.

Librarians are not given the opportunity to attend workshops both national and international, to acquire more ideas or knowledge on how to improve on the already existing services in the library.

Hence, information services are provided on the basis of equality of access for all. Most children's library do not provide access to knowledge for those who cannot for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials (the physically challenged)

Above all, funding seems to be the major challenge in the creation of access to knowledge. Governments are showing nonchalant attitude

towards repositioning children's libraries and making them world standard for children.

Conclusion

Children are the adults of tomorrow, and the future of the nation. They need to be properly guided and informed. Children's library is the right channel or gateway to information for children's development. Librarians are most suited to handle the information needs of children in the library if they are well equipped. However children's librarian must possess certain skills to be able to create the right impression in the children and librarians deserve government's support in order to create access to information.

Recommendations:

1. More children's libraries should be built in all local government areas so that children in remote areas will have equal access to knowledge through the library. This is in support of United Nations (1989) declaration that, "we must ensure that the children have access to information and materials."
2. Librarians who are trained and knowledgeable in children's library should be allowed to work in children's library. Running children's library should not be any comer's job. We need to recruit qualified people to work in children's library.
3. Librarians working in children's library should be keen to liaise with publishers, booksellers and writers in order to know and then meet the acquisition requirements of their clientele to give them the right products
4. Librarians in children's library should be encouraged to attend workshops at all levels in order to update their knowledge and technology information skills to create the required access with children in this new technological era.
5. Librarians in children's library should be able to advocate and lobby for support from government and philanthropists. They need not just fold their hands and wait for manner from heaven.
6. Children's librarians need to develop good skills to lead and motivate children, parents and teachers. Through these human skills, children's librarians

must communicate with youngsters of all ages and assist them in becoming the adult library users of tomorrow.

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