Exploring the State of Libraries and Librarians in Primary and Secondary Education

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Abstract

Libraries and librarians remain central to the achievement of quality teaching and learning in primary and secondary education. However, the current condition of school libraries and the professional status of librarians in many educational systems, particularly in developing contexts, raises significant concerns. This position paper examines the existing state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary schools, highlighting issues of inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, shortage of professionally trained librarians, and limited integration of library services into the school curriculum. The paper argues that despite policy recognition of the importance of school libraries, implementation gaps continue to undermine their effectiveness in supporting literacy development, information literacy, and lifelong learning among pupils and students. Drawing on current trends and policy perspectives, the paper advocates for strategic investment, strengthened professional development, improved staffing policies, and stronger collaboration between educators and librarians. It concludes that revitalizing school libraries and empowering librarians is essential for improving educational outcomes and achieving sustainable educational development.

Keywords: School libraries; Librarians; Primary and secondary education; Information literacy; Educational development

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as the foundation for national development, social transformation, and economic growth. The attainment of quality education depends not only on effective teaching and learning but also on the availability of adequate educational resources that support knowledge acquisition, literacy development, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. Among these resources, school libraries occupy a strategic position as centers for learning, information access, and intellectual development. School libraries provide pupils and students with opportunities to access diverse information resources, cultivate reading habits, develop information literacy skills, and support classroom instruction, thereby contributing significantly to improved educational outcomes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2024).

School libraries are integral components of primary and secondary education systems. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and UNESCO describe school libraries as learning environments that provide equitable access to information, foster independent learning, promote creativity, and support curriculum implementation through professionally managed library and information services (IFLA & UNESCO, 2023). Beyond providing books and learning materials, modern school libraries facilitate digital literacy, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and the development of critical thinking skills necessary for success in the twenty-first century.

The role of librarians within school libraries has equally evolved in response to changing educational and technological environments. Contemporary school librarians are no longer custodians of books alone but educators, information specialists, literacy advocates, and instructional partners who collaborate with teachers to improve teaching and learning. They support curriculum delivery by guiding learners in information searching, evaluation, ethical use of information, digital citizenship, and research skills. According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2024), professionally trained school librarians significantly enhance students' academic achievement, reading proficiency, digital literacy, and overall learning experiences through collaborative instructional practices.

Globally, empirical evidence indicates a strong relationship between functional school libraries and improved educational performance. Schools with well-equipped libraries and qualified librarians consistently demonstrate better student achievement, stronger reading culture, enhanced information literacy, and improved critical thinking skills. School libraries also contribute to inclusive education by providing equitable access to learning resources for learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and by supporting learners with varying educational needs (International Association of School Librarianship [IASL], 2023).

Despite these recognized benefits, the condition of school libraries in many developing countries remains a major concern. In Nigeria, although national education policies acknowledge the importance of libraries as essential educational support services, implementation has remained inadequate. Many primary and secondary schools either operate without libraries or maintain poorly equipped facilities characterized by outdated collections, inadequate infrastructure, limited digital resources, and insufficient learning materials. Where libraries exist, they are often managed by teachers or non-professional personnel due to the shortage of qualified school librarians, thereby limiting their effectiveness in supporting curriculum delivery and literacy development (Aina, 2021).

The challenges confronting school libraries in Nigeria are further compounded by inadequate funding, weak policy implementation, poor maintenance of library facilities, limited integration of library services into teaching and learning, and low awareness among educational stakeholders regarding the strategic role of school libraries. Consequently, many learners complete their primary and secondary education without acquiring essential information literacy, research, and independent learning skills that are critical for higher education and lifelong learning. This situation undermines national efforts aimed at improving educational quality and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2024).

Furthermore, rapid technological advancement has transformed the information landscape and created new expectations for school libraries and librarians. Digital learning environments, electronic information resources, artificial intelligence, online educational platforms, and virtual learning systems require school libraries to expand beyond traditional print collections and embrace technology-enabled services. School librarians are therefore expected to possess competencies in digital literacy instruction, educational technologies, information management, and collaborative teaching to effectively prepare learners for participation in the knowledge economy (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2024).

Given these realities, there is an urgent need to critically examine the current state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education, particularly within the Nigerian context. Understanding existing challenges and identifying practical strategies for improving school library services are essential for strengthening literacy development, enhancing educational quality, and promoting sustainable educational development. This position paper therefore explores the condition of school libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education and advocates for increased investment, stronger policy implementation, professional staffing, continuous capacity building, and greater collaboration between educators and librarians. Such interventions are necessary to reposition school libraries as indispensable partners in achieving quality education and fostering lifelong learning.

Statement of the Problem

School libraries are widely recognized as essential components of quality education because they provide learners with access to information resources, promote reading culture, develop information literacy skills, and support effective teaching and learning. Professionally managed school libraries also contribute to critical thinking, independent learning, digital literacy, and academic achievement by providing learners with opportunities to engage with diverse learning resources beyond the classroom. Consequently, international organizations such as UNESCO and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) advocate the integration of functional libraries and qualified librarians into primary and secondary education systems as indispensable elements for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education (IFLA & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Despite these policy recommendations, the state of libraries and librarians in many primary and secondary schools in Nigeria remains unsatisfactory. A significant number of schools either operate without functional libraries or maintain poorly equipped library facilities characterized by inadequate infrastructure, obsolete collections, insufficient learning resources, and limited access to digital information technologies. In many instances, available library spaces are underutilized

because they lack current educational materials and appropriate learning environments capable of supporting curriculum implementation and independent learning (Aina, 2021).

Another major concern is the shortage of professionally trained school librarians. Many school libraries are managed by classroom teachers or administrative personnel who have little or no professional training in library and information science. This practice limits the effectiveness of library services, as non-professional staff may lack the competencies required for collection development, information organization, reader services, information literacy instruction, and the integration of library resources into classroom teaching. Consequently, learners are deprived of the full educational benefits that professionally managed school libraries can provide (American Association of School Librarians [AASL], 2024).

In addition, inadequate funding and weak policy implementation continue to hinder the development of school libraries across the country. Although the National Policy on Education recognizes libraries as essential educational support services, implementation has been inconsistent, resulting in poor infrastructure, inadequate acquisition of library resources, limited digital facilities, and insufficient maintenance of existing libraries. These challenges have reduced the capacity of school libraries to support literacy development, digital learning, research skills, and lifelong learning among pupils and students (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014; UNESCO, 2024).

Furthermore, the rapid integration of digital technologies into education has widened the gap between learners' information needs and the capacity of many school libraries to provide technology-enabled services. Contemporary learners require access to electronic information resources, digital literacy programmes, online learning platforms, and technology-supported research services. However, many school libraries in Nigeria lack reliable internet connectivity, computers, digital collections, and trained personnel capable of supporting these emerging educational needs. This situation places learners at a disadvantage in developing the digital competencies required for higher education and participation in the knowledge economy (IFLA, 2024).

Although several studies have examined school library development, literacy promotion, and educational quality in Nigeria, relatively few have comprehensively explored the current state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education from the perspectives of infrastructure, professional staffing, policy implementation, and service delivery. There is also limited attention to practical strategies for revitalizing school libraries as integral components of quality basic education.

It is against this background that this position paper explores the state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education. The paper advocates for increased investment in school library infrastructure, the employment of qualified librarians, strengthened implementation of educational policies, and greater collaboration between teachers and librarians to improve literacy, information literacy, and educational outcomes in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. Examine the roles of libraries and librarians in supporting teaching, learning, literacy development, and information literacy in primary and secondary education.
2. Identify the challenges affecting the development and effective functioning of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.

3. Propose strategies for strengthening school libraries and empowering librarians to enhance educational outcomes and sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What roles do libraries and librarians play in supporting teaching, learning, literacy development, and information literacy in primary and secondary education?
2. What challenges affect the development and effective functioning of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria?
3. What strategies can be adopted to strengthen school libraries and empower librarians to improve educational outcomes and sustainable educational development in Nigeria?

Literature Review

School libraries are widely acknowledged as indispensable components of quality education because they provide access to information resources, support literacy development, foster independent learning, and enhance teaching and learning processes. According to the IFLA–UNESCO School Library Manifesto (IFLA & UNESCO, 2023), school libraries are integral to the educational process, serving as learning hubs that equip learners with information literacy, critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning skills. By providing equitable access to diverse information resources and creating learner-centered environments, school libraries contribute significantly to academic success and holistic learner development.

The role of librarians within primary and secondary education has also evolved considerably. Traditionally regarded as custodians of books, school librarians are now recognized as instructional partners, information specialists, digital literacy educators, and facilitators of inquiry-based learning. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2024) emphasizes that professionally trained librarians collaborate with classroom teachers to integrate information literacy into the curriculum, guide learners in locating and evaluating information, promote ethical information use, and support digital citizenship. Such collaboration enhances students' research competencies, reading proficiency, and academic achievement.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between functional school libraries and learners' educational outcomes. According to Lance and Kachel (2021), schools with well-resourced libraries and professionally qualified librarians record higher levels of reading achievement, improved academic performance, and stronger information literacy skills than schools without effective library services. Similarly, Todd (2021) reports that school libraries positively influence students' motivation to read, independent learning abilities, and overall academic engagement by providing access to diverse learning resources and creating supportive learning environments.

The promotion of literacy and information literacy remains one of the most important contributions of school libraries. Reading culture developed during primary and secondary education significantly influences learners' academic performance and lifelong learning habits. UNESCO (2024) emphasizes that literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write to include the capacity to locate, evaluate, interpret, and ethically use information in different formats. School librarians therefore play an important role in developing learners' critical thinking, digital literacy, and media literacy competencies required for participation in today's information society.

Rapid technological advancement has further transformed the operations of school libraries. Digital libraries, electronic books, online databases, educational applications, virtual learning environments, and artificial intelligence (AI) have expanded opportunities for information access and collaborative learning. Consequently, modern school libraries are expected to integrate digital technologies into their services to support blended learning, online research, and technology-enhanced education. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2024), digital transformation has strengthened the relevance of school libraries by enabling wider access to educational resources while supporting inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

Despite these developments, the condition of school libraries in many developing countries remains unsatisfactory. In Nigeria, numerous studies report that many primary and secondary schools either lack functional libraries or operate libraries characterized by inadequate infrastructure, obsolete collections, insufficient digital resources, and poor learning environments. Aina (2021) observes that inadequate funding and poor implementation of educational policies have significantly limited the development of school libraries across the country. As a result, many learners have limited opportunities to develop reading culture, information literacy, and independent learning skills.

Another critical challenge identified in the literature is the shortage of professionally trained librarians in primary and secondary schools. Many school libraries are managed by classroom teachers or administrative personnel without formal training in Library and Information Science. This practice undermines the quality of library services because professionally trained librarians possess specialized competencies in collection development, cataloguing, information organization, reader services, digital resource management, and information literacy instruction. According to the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL, 2023), qualified school librarians contribute significantly to curriculum implementation by collaborating with teachers to improve learners' academic performance and research skills.

The literature further identifies inadequate policy implementation as a major constraint to effective school library development in Nigeria. Although the National Policy on Education recognizes libraries as essential educational support services, implementation has remained inconsistent due to inadequate funding, weak monitoring mechanisms, and insufficient political commitment (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Consequently, many schools have been unable to establish or sustain functional libraries capable of supporting quality teaching and learning.

To address these challenges, scholars advocate increased investment in school library infrastructure, recruitment of professionally qualified librarians, integration of digital technologies into library services, continuous professional development, and stronger collaboration between teachers and librarians. The IFLA–UNESCO School Library Manifesto (2023) also recommends that governments and educational authorities prioritize school library development as an essential strategy for improving literacy, educational quality, and lifelong learning. Strengthening advocacy, policy implementation, and institutional commitment will therefore be critical for revitalizing school libraries and ensuring that they effectively contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education.

In summary, the reviewed literature demonstrates that libraries and librarians remain fundamental to the success of primary and secondary education. Functional school libraries support literacy development, information literacy, curriculum implementation, digital learning, and academic

achievement. However, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, insufficient professional staffing, limited digital technologies, and weak policy implementation continue to hinder their effectiveness in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts by governments, educational institutions, professional bodies, and other stakeholders to reposition school libraries as indispensable components of quality education.

Summary of the Review

The literature reviewed establishes that school libraries and librarians are indispensable to the achievement of quality primary and secondary education. Functional school libraries provide learners with equitable access to information resources, promote reading culture, support curriculum implementation, enhance information and digital literacy, and foster critical thinking and lifelong learning. The review further demonstrates that professionally trained librarians play significant roles as instructional partners, information specialists, and literacy advocates who collaborate with teachers to improve teaching effectiveness and students' academic performance (IFLA & UNESCO, 2023; AASL, 2024).

The review also reveals that despite international recognition of the importance of school libraries, many primary and secondary schools in Nigeria continue to face serious challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, obsolete collections, shortage of qualified librarians, limited digital resources, and weak implementation of educational policies. These challenges have constrained the ability of school libraries to effectively support literacy development, information literacy, and quality teaching and learning. Consequently, scholars advocate increased investment in school library development, recruitment of professional librarians, integration of digital technologies, continuous capacity building, and stronger collaboration between librarians and educators as essential strategies for improving educational outcomes (Aina, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

Knowledge Gap

Although substantial literature exists on school library development, literacy promotion, and educational support services, there is limited recent literature that comprehensively examines the current state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education in Nigeria within the context of evolving educational reforms and digital transformation. Most existing studies concentrate on the importance of school libraries without sufficiently assessing the combined effects of inadequate infrastructure, professional staffing shortages, policy implementation gaps, and technological readiness on the effectiveness of school library services.

Furthermore, there is inadequate attention to practical policy strategies for revitalizing school libraries through sustainable funding, professional development, stronger collaboration between teachers and librarians, and the integration of digital technologies into school library services. The preparedness of school librarians to support digital learning, information literacy, and twenty-first-century educational competencies also remains underexplored.

This position paper addresses these gaps by providing a contemporary examination of the state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education. It advocates strategic investment, strengthened policy implementation, improved professional staffing, and technology-driven library services as practical measures for repositioning school libraries to support quality education and sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings from the literature demonstrate that school libraries and librarians remain fundamental to achieving quality primary and secondary education. Although educational systems worldwide are increasingly embracing digital technologies and learner-centered pedagogies, the role of school libraries as centers for information access, literacy development, and independent learning remains indispensable. The evidence reviewed indicates that learners who have access to functional libraries and professionally managed information services generally demonstrate better reading habits, stronger information literacy competencies, improved critical thinking abilities, and higher academic performance. This reinforces the position of the IFLA–UNESCO School Library Manifesto (2023) that school libraries are essential educational resources rather than optional support facilities.

The discussion further reveals that librarians have become integral partners in the teaching and learning process. Contemporary school librarians are expected to collaborate with classroom teachers in curriculum implementation, literacy promotion, research support, and digital learning. Their professional expertise enables learners to acquire information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and ethical information use skills that are increasingly required for success in higher education and the modern workplace. Consequently, the absence of qualified librarians in many Nigerian primary and secondary schools represents a significant gap in the delivery of quality education and undermines efforts to prepare learners for participation in the knowledge economy (AASL, 2024).

Despite the acknowledged importance of school libraries, the current state of many school libraries in Nigeria remains unsatisfactory. The literature consistently identifies inadequate funding as one of the most significant barriers to effective school library development. Insufficient financial resources have resulted in poorly equipped library facilities, obsolete collections, inadequate furniture, limited technological infrastructure, and poor maintenance of existing libraries. In many schools, libraries exist only in name, with little capacity to support curriculum delivery or encourage independent reading and inquiry. These deficiencies reduce learners' opportunities to develop strong literacy and research skills during their formative years (Aina, 2021).

The shortage of professionally trained librarians also emerged as a critical challenge. In many primary and secondary schools, library services are managed by teachers or administrative personnel without formal education in Library and Information Science. While such personnel may provide basic library support, they often lack the professional competencies required for collection development, information organization, reader advisory services, digital resource management, and information literacy instruction. This practice limits the educational impact of school libraries and reduces their contribution to teaching and learning. Employing qualified librarians should therefore be regarded as a strategic investment in educational quality rather than an additional administrative cost.

Another important issue highlighted by this paper is the need for school libraries to embrace digital transformation. The integration of information and communication technologies into education has fundamentally changed how learners access and use information. School libraries must therefore move beyond traditional print collections by providing access to electronic books, online databases, digital repositories, educational applications, internet-enabled learning spaces, and virtual information services. Such innovations will not only improve access to educational resources but also strengthen learners' digital competencies, creativity, and collaborative learning experiences (IFLA, 2024).

The discussion also underscores the importance of effective policy implementation and stakeholder collaboration. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education recognizes libraries as important educational support services, implementation has remained inconsistent across many states and schools. Government agencies, educational authorities, school administrators, and development partners need to work collaboratively to ensure that every primary and secondary school has a functional library staffed by qualified librarians. Regular monitoring, adequate funding, and policy enforcement are essential to achieving this objective. Furthermore, stronger collaboration between teachers and librarians will facilitate the integration of library resources into classroom instruction and improve learners' academic engagement.

Finally, the paper emphasizes that revitalizing school libraries is critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Investment in modern school libraries should therefore be viewed as an investment in national human capital development. Well-resourced libraries and empowered librarians can contribute significantly to improving literacy rates, strengthening educational outcomes, reducing learning inequalities, and preparing young people with the knowledge and skills required for national development. The future of quality basic education in Nigeria will depend, to a large extent, on the commitment of governments and stakeholders to reposition school libraries as central pillars of teaching, learning, and educational innovation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the state of libraries and librarians in primary and secondary education and established that they remain indispensable to the achievement of quality teaching, learning, literacy development, and sustainable educational development. The review and discussion revealed that functional school libraries provide learners with access to information resources, foster reading culture, develop information and digital literacy skills, and support curriculum implementation through collaboration between teachers and librarians. However, the effectiveness of school libraries in Nigeria continues to be constrained by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortages of professionally trained librarians, limited digital resources, and weak implementation of educational policies.

The paper therefore concludes that revitalizing school libraries and empowering librarians are critical to improving educational outcomes and preparing learners for participation in the knowledge society. Achieving this requires sustained government commitment, strategic investment, effective policy implementation, and the recognition of school libraries as essential components of the education system rather than optional support services.

Recommendations

1. Governments and educational authorities should prioritize the establishment and revitalization of functional school libraries by providing adequate funding, modern infrastructure, current print and digital information resources, and technology-enabled learning facilities in all primary and secondary schools.
2. Qualified librarians should be recruited and continuously trained to effectively support teaching and learning, promote literacy and information literacy, integrate digital technologies into library services, and collaborate with teachers in curriculum implementation.
3. The Federal and State Ministries of Education, school administrators, and professional library associations should strengthen the implementation of school library policies through regular monitoring, stakeholder collaboration, and advocacy programmes that recognize school

libraries as indispensable instruments for improving educational quality, literacy development, and sustainable national development.

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