Professional Volunteerism in Children and School Libraries in Africa: An Imperative for Children's Information Literacy and Education

Jonathan Ndubuisi Chimah
Ebonyi State University Library Abakaliki, Nigeria
jonachim2000@yahoo.com

Udo Nwokocha
Abia State University Library, Uturu, Nigeria
udoyes@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Generally, volunteerism is recognized as a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development within a community. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation. Public libraries provide safe, welcoming, inclusive spaces and resources to support early literacy, lifelong learning and resources for formal and informal education. For instance, organizing children's story hour, reading and comprehensive competitions could make children develop their love for books. The use of library and information resources enables learners to become effective information seekers. However, only a small percentage of schools in Africa have functional school libraries with trained librarians. Schools in rural areas are located in communities that are characterized by high levels of illiteracy, poor academic performance and a lack of established reading habits. Most secondary schools do not have standard libraries with professional librarians and most homes in rural communities do not have facilities for children to do any meaningful revision. It is based on this backdrop that the paper delves into identifying the need for professional volunteerism in libraries with particular reference to school and children libraries in Africa. The paper examines types of volunteering services, skills and experiences required, the incentives expected by prospective volunteers, challenges, as well as management and support standards by libraries. It is suggestive that, in order to reduce the level of illiteracy among the children in Africa, librarians should develop evolving strategies to promote volunteerism for school/children libraries.

Keywords: Volunteerism, School Libraries, Education, Information Literacy, African children

Introduction

Volunteering has been variously described by scholars and expects who are involved in care-giving. However, what is common to all definitions is the fact that it has to do with care-giving, community service and voluntary unpaid labour often meant for charity. According to Wilson (2000), volunteerism is often perceived as an activity of providing services free from financial or social gain but aimed at benefitting persons, groups or organizations. Volunteering has also been perceived as skill development intended to improve human quality of life. It may turn out to have positive benefits for both the volunteer and the person or community intended. It can also be an opportunity to open contacts for possible employment. There are instances where volunteers are basically trained in their areas of interest which may include disaster management, medi-care and management of displaced persons. There are several reasons why people engage in volunteerism including helping to ameliorate poverty, banditry, kidnapping and terrorism. Other reasons may include to: improve sanitation, health, education and general well-being of the people. All said, volunteerism contributes greatly by providing for the welfare of the people and their communities (UN Volunteers 2018).

Libraries are the very foundation of the school curriculum because they provide information resources and teach the skill that stimulates learning-to-learn skills which are basic to life-long literacy (Ogwu, 2010). In his own view, Agbo (2015) conceptualizes school libraries as those that are found in pre-tertiary institutions such as nursery, primary and secondary schools with the mission of contributing to the intellectual development of pupils and students. In other words, school librarianship involves collection of books and other learning materials organized by trained professionals and placed in one or two big rooms in the school for the use of the pupils and teachers for learning, recreational activities, personal interest, and interpersonal relationship of children in school.

Many schools around the world rely on government support or contributions from volunteers and private donations, in order to run effectively. According to *School Mental Health Project (2016),* much like the benefits of any type of volunteering there are great rewards for the volunteer, student, and school. In addition to intangible rewards, volunteers can add relevant experience to their resumes. Volunteers who travel to foreign countries to assist may learn foreign culture and language. Cultural and language exchange during teaching and other school activities can be the most essential learning experience for both students and volunteers.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) report evidence that volunteers can be significant resources in helping create a supportive and welcoming environment at schools and facilitating students' behavior and performance. As positive role models and student motivators, volunteers are viewed as contributing to better school attendance, improved grades and test scores, matriculation, less misbehavior, better social skills, staying in school, graduating, and going on to college. Evidences abound that professional library volunteers can have a very powerful impact on students and schools.

This paper therefore highlights some research on the types, motivations and benefits of volunteerism; programmes of some volunteer organizations in Africa, and also discuss ways government, libraries and volunteers can move forward in implementing volunteer programmes that are geared towards facilitating education and information literacy of children in Africa.

Review of Related Literature

Concept and Roles of School Libraries

School libraries are libraries that supplement the teaching of school children. According to Aina (2004), school libraries are libraries attached to pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. He stresses that a school library caters for children who are eager to read and for backward children who read with difficulty and who require visual aids and all kinds of incentives to study. These libraries contain more of audio-visual and graphic materials such as pictures, photographs, realia, diagrams, etc. than other types of libraries. Many school libraries have transformed into school library resource centres. Items collected in the library have been broadened to include toys and computers, study skills, films and film strips, video and audiotapes, video machines, cassette radios, etc. these items are acquired to ease learning on the part of students. Because of the variety of its collection, a school library is sometimes called a media resource centre.

In some schools, professional librarians are recruited to manage school libraries. However, in most African countries, teachers in the school, especially those responsible for teaching English Language and Literature, are often put in charge of school libraries. They generally do not have any training in librarianship. Some library schools in Africa including the University of Botswana are now offering qualifications in school librarianship. On a general not however, school libraries are poorly developed in Africa.

Commenting on school library, Fasola (2015) notes that: a school library besides aiding in the studies of children and assisting the teachers in their teaching and periodical research is mainly concerned to procreate an urge for reading amongst the children who get firsthand knowledge to use the library resources most effectively in their further careers. The school library, as noted by Bamidele (2015), helps children to discover for themselves by independent study and learning, how to ask questions, when the need arises and this is realized through the services of information literacy librarians who are responsible for inculcating information literacy skills in students through the delivering of information literacy instructions.

Identifying the expected roles of school library staff, Okorafor *et al* (2017) outline the following:

a. monitoring use of library hours
b. identification of social media platforms that students are participating
c. creation of online discussion forums for staff and students
d. organizing of talks on use of the library
e. introducing of use of library as a subject
f. compulsory borrowing and reading of books
g. introduction of holiday reading

Educational and Library Extension Services to Children

Library service is brought into the list of the positive functions of the government, because the success of the government has now come to depend on the state of enlightenment of the several people in the nation, their individual skill in some job – whether manual or clean-collared – and their mental agility to adopt new points of view and new methods of work. To make the state efficient, certain mental dynamism has to be maintained by feeding the mind of all the citizens with new and nascent thought.

Library function is indeed part of its major educational function. The well-being of a state demands, it is now realized, not only physical hygiene, but also mental hygiene. To secure this, the government of a stake has to maintain not only a public health service but also a public

educational service. Just as public health service includes child-welfare work, public educational service includes child education and adolescent education, i.e. elementary and secondary education – general as well as vocational – in short what is known as formal education (Ranganathan 2008).

Apart from such methods of pure publicity, libraries are nowadays developing certain new types of work. To turn the library into a social centre with the encouragement of reading as its ultimate objective is the focus of library extension service. Its aim is to make readers of non-readers, to create and stimulate the desire for good reading, and to bring book and reader together. There are several forms of library extension service, such as reading to illiterates, reading circle, intellectual centre, library talk, musical concerts, festivals and fairs, etc. The one that is of essence to children is story hour. Similar to the library talks for adults, libraries arrange also for story hour, dramatization and other attractive forms of extension service similar privilege issues, to establish, contact with the children of the locality. Again, it is not unusual for the library to arrange occasionally for dramatic performances by unpaid troupes.

Types of Volunteering Services

Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia (2019) list a variety of volunteering services to include the following:

- Skills-based volunteering
- Volunteering in developing countries
- Virtual volunteering
- Micro-volunteering
- Environmental volunteering

- Volunteering in an emergency
- Volunteering in schools
- Corporate volunteering
- Community volunteer work

Motivations and Incentives for Volunteering Services

On the basis of self-determination theory, Grano and Lucidi (2005) developed the Motivation to Volunteer Scale which consists of six subscales assessing amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation, and intrinsic motivation. Framed in terms of reasons for volunteering, sample items include: "I don't know; I can't see what I'm getting out of it" (Amotivation subscale), "For the recognition I get from others" (External Regulation subscale), "Because I would feel guilty if I did not volunteer" (Introjected Regulation subscale), "Because it is a good way to contribute" (Identified Regulation subscale), "Because this activity has become an integral part of my life" (Integrated Regulation), and "For the pleasure and interest I feel in doing this activity" (Intrinsic Motivation). There is evidence that intrinsic and extrinsic measures of motivation to volunteer are positively correlated.

In their latent profile analysis linking volunteer motivation to frequency of volunteering, Geiser, Okun and Grano (2014) conclude that the two classes that mostly engaged in volunteering were the High-Low and the High-High classes. Individuals who are high in *external regulation* and *introjected regulation* may respond well to external incentives that provide them with status and which bolter their feelings of self-worth. Thus, for example, among High-High volunteers, public recognition of their efforts and positive feedback about task performance may increase volunteer behavior.

Featured Volunteer Abroad Programs in West Africa

Auken (2018) presents featured volunteer programs in West Africa to include the following: International Volunteer HQ (IVHQ) –2007, Volunteer with Construction and Renovation in Ghana, Volunteer with Agriculture in Ghana, Volunteer with Sports Teaching in Ghana, Projects Abroad – 1992/1997, Volunteer Arts & Crafts in Togo, Volunteer Building Projects in Senegal, Volunteer Teaching Basic Computer Skills in Ghana, Love Volunteers in Ghana and Senegal – 2009, Childcare & Development in Ghana, Volunteer with Creative Arts in Ghana, Gambia Teaching Project, Frontier in West Africa – 1989, Gambia Teaching Project, Senegal Sports Coaching, A Broader View Volunteers Corp – 2008, Medical Volunteer in Ghana, Liberian Refugee Camp School – 1990, Naturally Africa Volunteers – 2010, Ghana Turtle Conservation & Ecotourism – 2003. It is noteworthy however, volunteer programmes directly related to School Libraries is conspicuously missing in the list. Librarians are challenged to advocate for more children and/or school library volunteers.

Name	Location	Purpose/Duties
Children's Saturday Book Club Volunteer	Abuja, Nigeria	To help support and assist with the planning, implementation and running a children's Saturday book club within the library
Volunteer Sri Lanka RoundTrip Foundation	Sri Lanka	Teaching local children at the Tsunami Memorial Library after school, during the holidays and at weekends Roles include home library service couriers, literacy tutors, learning mentors, assistance with preservation and access to our unique archival and heritage collections, and general volunteers.
Street Library Ghana	Ghana	The aim of the Street Library project is to help more children and youths, particularly those in rural areas, discover reading. The volunteers move from village to village, set up tent libraries and welcome children to help them improve their literacy.
(Osu Children's Library Fund)	Ghana	OCLF welcomes volunteers to our libraries, both in and outside of Accra. They bring their own skills and enrich library programs.
Book-Cycle & Thrive Africa	Ghana	Building libraries and provision of books and educational resources from around Exeter and the building of shelves in rural schools
African Library Project	U.S	We make it easy for any U.S. volunteer group to establish a sustainable library in an African community.
New Dawn Foundation	Tanzania	Volunteers in Tanzania are in high demand for social and educational organizations working with youth.

Table 1: Illustrating types of Volunteer organizations working in Africa

Volunteers Organizations offering Library Services in Africa

Talking about volunteerism and well-being, UN Volunteers (2018) notes thus:
Where mainstream economics fosters values of self-interest and competition to achieve maximum satisfaction, a focus on well-being finds greater reason to value compassion and cooperation, both core values of volunteerism. The discourse on quality of life and well-being, and its place in the evolving development paradigm, must recognize the solidarity and reciprocal values of volunteerism as part of the dynamics that enhance human wellbeing.

It further stressed that a healthy society is one in which importance is given to formal and informal relationships that facilitate interaction and engagement and thus engender a sense of belonging. Volunteers are more likely to develop civic skills, to attach more importance to serving the public interest as a personal life goal and to be more politically active. Thus, in going about their voluntary activities, individuals are also cultivating an outlook that contributes to a social environment that nurtures the well-being of all.

Being a Library Volunteer

It is quite interesting and a worthwhile experience to be a library volunteer. Most of the job of volunteers as Marie (2018) experienced include sitting at the front desk, checking books out to patrons, and shelving returned books on perfectly alphabetized and aligned shelves. She further notes that a lot of things can fall into library volunteer duties. Some may be clerical or computer work, like entering information from new patrons into a database. Other duties may involve tidying a children's area periodically or working a help desk. There are also chances to volunteer that involve helping with events at the library. Libraries these days offer programs from story time to career prep, from cookbook clubs to writing workshops. A volunteer has to teach people who are really grateful for the knowledge, and he or she keeps the costs low so that the barrier to entry is small as well. One can also physically bring friends a copy of the book, provided they turn it in on time.

Challenges facing Information Literacy and Education of African Children

Several issues have been identified as factors militating against the education and information literacy programmes for the African child. One of such is poor state of reading culture especially when compared with Western reading culture. On this challenge, Ilogho (2015) notes that the art of reading could be an interesting experience for children and adolescents if they are properly guided. The reading habit of children in the African continent is waning and this can be traced to poor reading culture of Africans generally and non-availability of reading materials. In the same vein, Okorafor, et al (2017) further emphasize that:

> "Reading is the key to educational revolution in any nation. A nation where children lack the reading culture would be enveloped in slow pace of development. The success of many nations in the world is hinged on education and there can be no meaningful education without reading existing in the first place. A critical examination of the Nigerian educational system shows that reading culture is lack among the Nigerian child." p.131

The other factor which has adverse effect on African children's education and information literacy is the poor state of most school libraries which cuts across the African region. From their study Amusan, Oyetola&Ogunmidele (2012) reveal that the state of school libraries is deplorable and not all public primary and secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria have school library. Problems of school libraries are compounded by their reliance on foreign book donations, poor management of school libraries and neglect of school libraries by political leaders.

Furthermore, there are many challenges likely to hinder the functionality of school libraries in Africa. Amaechi&Dicke (2013) point out three of these challenges thus: i) non-compliance with schools standard, ii) unavailability of finance; iii) indifferent attitude of school proprietors towards library development.

By the foregoing it is a well-established fact that pupils and students in primary schools and secondary schools in Africa are suffering undue deprivation of the relevant educational tools, library facilities, and professional librarians unlike their developed countries' counterparts that are provided with these facilities from the pre-primary schools onward to the college. However, this situation does not suggest non-existent of the required resources but they are rather inadequate and not proportionate to the individual country's population of the African continent. This is where advocacy for professional volunteerism come in.

In their view (Igwe&Onah 2013) assert that globalization era demands that all users of information should be information literate. Librarians and information practitioners in all environments and contexts should as a matter of necessity advocate for, drive, implement and inculcate information literacy skills in their users. The delivery of information literacy instructions, which can be face-to-face in a conventional learning environment or web-based via the online platform, should be one of the key priorities of practitioners. They identified the following as challenging scenario of library and information services in contemporary Nigeria:

    i) lack of standards and total neglect of school libraries.
    ii) inadequacy of human, infrastructural and information resources in the existing
       libraries
    iii) poor state and or absence of libraries in public primary and secondary schools
       across the federation
    iv) passive library and information practitioners, many still exhibit apathetic attitude
       towards delivery of user services.

According to the United Nations Volunteers (2015) more than 1 billion people volunteer globally, the majority of them serving in their own countries. Many are in the forefront of efforts to improve the way they and their fellow citizens are governed and engaged. Moreover, volunteers are playing a vital role in making governments worldwide more accountable and responsive to their citizens. They are working with governments and civil society to hold those in power to account and to represent the voices of those who are often left out of development decisions such as women, youth and marginalized groups. The end result is more inclusive and ultimately more effective development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Available evidence suggests that when adult volunteers are present, pupils and students see that adults take school and education seriously and respect learning. This promotes positive attitudes towards school. A variety of types of volunteerism as well as roles and functions of school librarians have been identified. Extrapolating from a wide range of research, it seems safe to conclude that library volunteers can be a valuable asset in enhancing efforts of schools in supporting teaching and learning.

It is recommended therefore, that in order to reduce the level of illiteracy among children in Africa, librarians should develop evolving strategies to promote volunteerism for school/children libraries through the following ways: -

- Advocacy – creating awareness and raising the profile of volunteers in school and children libraries;
- Involving school and managers of children libraries to create knowledge in volunteer management;
- Engagement of youths who are either secondary school leavers or undergraduates in library volunteer programmes;
- Encouraging employers to support volunteers who are active in volunteering work in libraries;
- Development of appropriate policies and legislations to outline the rights and responsibilities of volunteers in libraries;
- Developing standards on library volunteer selection/recruitment, management and support.

Acknowledgments

References

Agbo, A. D. (2015). School libraries and development of library skill in Nigerian secondary education system. *Research Journal of Library Science*, 3(2), 1-4

Aina, L. O. (2004). *Library and Information Science Text for Africa*. Ibadan: Third World Information Services Ltd.

Amaechi, N.M.& Dike, C. A. (2013). Strategizing Nigerian school libraries to meet the needs of the contemporary society, In *J. Ezema et al (*eds.) *Future Libraries, Infinite Possibilities: Empowering the Nigerian Society.* Proceedings of the 13th AC &AGM of the NLA, Enugu State Chapter. 20th – 22nd Nov. 2013, 141-144

Amusan, D.A., Oyeteola, S. O. & Ogundele, T.A. (2012). Influence of library and information services on attainment of millennium development goals on education: a case study of Oyo State, Nigeria. *American Int'l Journal of Contemporary Research*, 2(8): 213-222

Auken, R. V. (2018).Volunteer abroad opportunities in West Africa: Togo, Ghana, Senegal Retrieved 22/4/2019 from: https://www.volunteerforever.com/article_post/volunteer-abroad-opportunities-in-west-africa-togo-ghana-senegal

Bamidele, I.A. (2015). The library use habits of senior secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. Cloud Publications: *International Journal of Academic Library & Info Service*, 3 (1), 170-181

Fasola, O.S. (2015). Library collection as correlate of library use: a study of secondary school in Oyo State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy & Practice (E-Journal).* Paper 1279. Retrieved 15/3/2019 from http://digital commons.unl.edu/libphlprac/1279

Grano, C., & Lucidi, F. (2005). Motivazioni e determinanti alla base delvolontariatonelle personeanziane. *RelazioniSolidali*, 2, 109-130.

Geiser, C., Okun, M. A.&Grano, C. (2014).Who is motivated to volunteer? A latent profile analysis linking volunteer motivation to frequency of volunteering. *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling*. 56(1). pp. 3–24. Retrieved 25/4/2019 http://www.psychologie-aktuell.com/fileadmin/download/ptam/1-2014_20140324/01_Geiser.pdf

Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, SEDL. Retrieved 24/4/2019 http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf

Igwe, K. N. &Onah, E.A (2013). Issues &concerns in the service delivery system of libraries to users in the globalization era. In: A. O. Issa, K.N. Igwe& C.P. Uzuegbu (eds.) *Provision of library and information services to users in the era of globalisation*, Lagos: Waltodanny Visual Concept p.31-32

Ilogho, J.E. (2015). The role of picture books in promoting reading culture among Nigerian children: implication for libraries and development of leadership qualities. *International Journal of Academic Library & Information Science*, 3(2): 65-71

Marie, L. (2018). Why you should become a library volunteer https://bookriot.com/2018/02/15/become-a-library-volunteer/

Ogwu, M. F. (2010). School library development & attainment of the universal basic
education objectives in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Education & Society*, 1 (2 &3),
41-46

Okorafor, K., Onyemoke, V.B., Nongo, C.J. &Anyalebechi, L. I. (2017). Expected roles of
school library staff in re-engineering reading culture in the digital environment. In: N.E.
Achebe & Mole, A.J.C. (eds.) *Global Best Practices in Library & Information services in
Contemporary Era.* Paper presented at the 1st Int'l Conf. & Home Coming of the
Department of Library &Information Science, University of Nigeria Nsukka. 25th – 30th
June, 2017. 130-140

Ranganathan, S. A. (2008). *Library Manual for School, College and Public Libraries (with
Revised examples of Subject Classification).* New Delhi, India: Ess Ess Publications.

*School Mental Health Project (2016) Volunteer teaching effort can help students to learn
students to learn better in schools.* Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.
Retrieved 25/4/2019.http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/volunteer/volunt.pdf

UN Volunteer (2015). 2015 State of World's Volunteerism Report: transforming governance
Retrieved 25/3/2019 from: https://www.unv.org/.../2015-state-worlds-volunteerism-
report-swvr-transforming-gover...

UN Volunteers (2018). The power of volunteerism
https://www.unv.org/volunteerism/power-volunteerism

Wikipedia the free encyclopedia (2019) Volunteerism. Retrieved 23/4/2019
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volunteering

Wilson, J. (2000). "Volunteering". *Annual Review of Sociology (26):
215.* doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.215. Retrieved 12 April 2018.