

Chapter 4

In Quest of Academic Achievement: A Public Library's Partnerships in Onitsha, Anambra State, South East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes various readership promotion activities undertaken by a Nigerian State Public Library in partnership with schools, churches, and the state owned television house. Massive failures in O' level national and regional examinations and the entrance examinations into the tertiary institutions have brought up the fact that the education sector in Nigeria is facing monumental challenges. This combined with a noticeable decline in user statistics, especially amongst school age children in Onitsha Public Library in South East Nigeria. This decline has long been associated with the school-boy drop-out syndrome. The State Public Library Board collaborated with agencies in its community to introduce intervention strategies to halt the trend. These were expected to increase usage of the public and school libraries, make reading attractive to children of school age, support school curriculum, and help students make better grades in examinations.

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries have always played a significant role in the education sector of its local community. They are crucial in inculcating reading habits into children and in improving and sustaining literacy skills throughout a lifetime. Celano and Neuman (2001) see the public library as one institution that plays a vital part in the reading achievement of children who do not have access to books and

other reading materials in their everyday lives. Amongst the listed missions of the public library according to the Unesco Public Library Manifesto (2000) include the formation and strengthening of reading habits from an early age and aiding formal and informal education at all levels. For Koontz and Gubbin (2010), the public library is a dynamic institution working with other establishments and with individuals to provide a wide variety of library and information services to satisfy the ever

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changing needs of its community. Public libraries are therefore expected to meet the information and educational challenges of the local community even as the needs mutate.

The Anambra State Library Board (ANSLB) was established under CAP 82 Law of Anambra State Nigeria 2669 of 1979. The Board is a quasi-independent body under the Anambra State Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. It receives a monthly subvention for the payment of salaries and the provision of library services in the State. The Board has the sole responsibility for collecting, organizing, maintaining and making information resources available to the citizens of the State. The Board members are to be persons who appear to the Government to have wide knowledge, interest and experience in education, research, creative arts, the book industry and other allied fields (Ogbonna, 2010). The State Governor invariably ends up appointing politicians of various hues to the Board.

The Board takes policy decisions while the Director executes them. For any activity outside of normal library services to be undertaken, for example readership promotion campaigns or fund raising drive, the permission of the Board is sought by the Director. The Board is statutorily mandated to meet not less than four times in the year. The Director is also a member of the Board. The appointment of a Director is at the recommendation of the Board to the Governor who normally ratifies their decision. The Director is the chief executive of the Board and is solely responsible for the proper coordination of the Board's daily activities such as general supervision and control of staff and the management of the Board's financial affairs. The Director is also the Chairman of the Management committee which consists of the librarians in charge of the divisional libraries and heads of departments. The post of the Director is not tenured.

The Library which has three divisional libraries at Onitsha, Nnewi and Abagana and seven branch libraries at Atani, Ajalli, Amichi, Ihemboji, Ozubulu, Nkpologwu. Adazi Nnukwu is run centrally

from the State Central Library temporarily located at Ifitedunu while a new structure is being put up at Awka, the State capital. Books and other information resources are acquired and processed centrally at the headquarters. Sometimes though communities where the libraries are located in donate books with the firm proviso that the books remain in those libraries. Each of these divisional and branch libraries are manned by librarians who are directly responsible to the Director. The heads of these libraries receive funds for the running of the libraries but the salaries of all the staff are paid centrally. The Onitsha Public Library has the most functional and biggest children's section out of all the libraries in the system. An average of 621 users make up of 530 adults and 91 school age children use the Onitsha Public Library daily. The library is located in the government reserved area of the town. The Children's Section of the library runs a Saturday story hour program that incorporates other activities like debates, craftwork, quizzes and dancing competitions.

Onitsha is the hometown of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first President of Nigeria. It has a rich crop of intellectuals yet 'money is the king' there because of the booming Main Market and other prospering and continually enlarging markets in and around the town. These markets supply all the other markets in the country and in some parts of West Africa with food items, wears, plastic wares, automobile parts, chemicals, cosmetics and other articles of trade. The presence of these markets impact negatively on the education sector in the town. Young people would rather go into apprenticeship with traders than complete their studies. They point out the fact that those who finished their education hardly get good paying jobs while trading enables the school dropouts to be independent and wealthy even before their classmates finish school. Mass failures in national and regional exams which are fast becoming a trademark in the country's education sector have not done anything to encourage children of school age to take their studies seriously within the community.

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