Problems and Prospects of Education Resource Centres in Nigeria

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Abstract
Nigeria has good policies on Education and one of such policies is the establishment of Education Resource Centres in every State of the Federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The need is clearly articulated in the National Policy on Education. Despite the lofty plan, most of the centres are not fulfilling the need for their establishment. This paper traces the history of ERC in Nigeria, contemplates on the ideal expectations of ERC and presents the current situation of ERC in Nigeria. It uses critical analysis research approach. As a result of the analysis, it has been found out that poor implementation and misplacement of funding from government have negative effects on the growth of the ERC. Suggestions are also made to help achieve the aim of the already established ERCs in Nigeria.
Keywords: Problems, Prospects, Education, Resource, Centres, Nigeria

1.   Introduction

The need for education resource centres in any country or state cannot be overemphasized since it is a widely accepted fact that the development of good values and wealth depends to a great extent on the education arrangement of a nation. In Nigeria the national policy on education among other things demands the establishment of educational resource centres in States of the federation. As part of the introduction of this paper, it is pertinent to look at some definitions of education resource centre. Turker (1987) defines it as an organization set up to facilitate the realization of education goals through the collection, development and production of resource materials. According to the contribution of Ekpo (1988), educational resource centre is a department that facilitates education training and promotion through the design and production of media and materials and the delivery of support services to the centre system where it is situated. Martens (1975) in his opinion adds that an education resource centre is a multi-media library which makes available to students, teachers and any other interested party; sources of information both in print and non-print forms. The author further expands its scope to include that of having the function of providing a wide range of equipment for the production and reproduction of software by both students and teachers, and also, having a Chief purpose of encouraging self-instruction, either supervised or entirely independent.

From the foregoing definitions, it is quite clear that the essence of an education resource centre is the acquisition, storage and provision of easy retrieval of all what can be called educational resource materials to service the educational needs of a community. The thrust of this paper however is to look at the situation of the E.R.C. in Nigeria, the problems noticed in its running and what could be done to make it more beneficial to the educational needs of Nigeria.

2.1   The History of E.R.C. in Nigeria

The need for education resource centres is well articulated in the Federal Government of Nigeria's national policy on education (1998). Under Educational Services in section 10, it is stated in item 84(1) that "Teachers resource centres where teachers will meet for discussions, investigations, study, short courses and conferences, will be set up in each state/Local Education Authority Area. The centres will also be used for the development and testing of teaching materials". In item 84(4) it is indicated that it should be established at State and Federal levels. There will, however, be close co-operation and constant consultation to ensure the free flow of information in respect of achievements in this field. "The foregoing are some of the general ideas which were raised concerning the establishment of education resources centres in Nigeria but the centres which were eventually started had a basis. Agun (1988), records that most states in the federation developed the E.R.C's upon the already existing audio-visual centres which were attached to the Ministry of Education. He further explains that in the northern parts of Nigeria the E.R.Cs are direct transformations of the audio-visuals unit of the Ministry of Education but in the southern parts, they were haphazardly established in terms of proper breakdown of departments, recruitment of experienced personal and lean financial resources from the Ministry of Education. From all indications, the current concept of educational resource centre in Nigeria developed directly from ideas radiating from audio-visual centres which were attached to the Ministry of Education. In Akwa Ibom State, the E.R.C. developed from the Educational Development Centre of the then Cross River State Ministry of Education and had three units then spread out in different locations of the State: The school library, curriculum development/training unit, and science equipment unit. However, with the creation of Akwa Ibom State, the centre was established in Uyo the State capital and at commissioning in 1991 had six units (Etim,1992). The

sequence of the origin of E.R.C. in different states of the nation follow a similar pattern.

2.1.1   Ideal Expectations of E.R.C.

Having synthesized the components of E.R.C. from different authors and existing centres, one can safely reason that an ideal and functional E.R.C, should have the following units:

- The Information Unit
- The reference unit
- Curriculum Development Unit
- The Production Unit
- Education research unit
- Science Development Unit
- Language development Unit
- Guidance and Counseling Unit
- Audio Visual Unit
- Examinational/Certification Unit
- Library Unit
- Curriculum and external services unit
- Storage Unit
- Computer Unit

Putting together the different units is not the end of the expectations of an E.R.C. These different components must work in synergy and be functional before the full benefits can be derived. The proper functioning in question involves appropriate staffing of the units and provision of tools, equipment and materials. The information unit if well equipped and well staffed should be able to satisfy all the information needs of the environment where the E.R.C. is situated in terms of education resource. It should also be responsible for the co-ordination of information between all the units of the E.R.C. and external bodies. The reference unit needs to work closely with the other units to preserve and make available to users of the E.R.C., details of the location of resource materials. It is also one of the first units needed to be contacted by a visitor to an E.R.C. setting, apart from the information unit. The curriculum development unit has the job of working hand in hand with the education ministry to monitor the workability of specified curricular for schools within its immediate environment. In the Akwa lbom State E.R.C. for example, the unit selects textbooks and advises government on the choice of continuous assessment workbooks. (Okono, 2002) who works in the curriculum development unit of the Akwa Ibom State E.R.C. says he takes pains to review and sometimes helps to rewrite books which are submitted to be listed for use in schools.

The production unit is saddled with the responsibility of interpreting the result of researches on development of instructional materials and making prototypes and eventually, useful instructional materials. This is the unit where the producers and technicians are supposed to be employed. According to Agun's (1988) grouping, while the producers are the graphics artists, photographers and educational broadcasters, the technicians are responsible for the installation, servicing, operation and maintenance of equipment and materials. The production unit has to ensure that, local materials and resource materials are harnessed to boost the stock of the E.R.C. Another important unit of a good E.R.C. is the educational research unit. This unit should make sure that the educational needs of the community it is servicing are met in response to changes in societal philosophical direction. The employed researchers in collaboration with researchers in tertiary institutions within the environment have to constantly research and supply the production unit with findings which can be translated into educational resource materials. The science development unit of an E.R.C. is specifically left with the responsibility of developing resource materials for science and technology, especially now that the world is fast becoming a global village and there is a lot of competition between states and nations. The unit owes its immediate community a duty to contribute to the development of science and technology and facilitate studies in these areas through organizing refreshers courses for teachers and science quiz competition for schools.

The language development unit in an E.R.C. is primarily set up to make it possible for users to learn languages. It should co-ordinate the studies of well established languages and make provision for the development, standardization, and writing of the local languages of its immediate environment. The guidance and counseling unit has the responsibility of helping schools to give correct orientation to students in choosing subjects according to their envisaged careers. This means the employees in this unit should work hand in hand with schools within its jurisdiction especially with students entering for general certification and tertiary institutions admissions examination. The Audio-visual unit of an E.R.C. is supposed to expose users to the resource materials which are audio, visual and video. In this unit, beneficiaries are guided to study with educational resource materials on audio tapes, audio discs, video tapes, video discs, film strips, slide films, graphics cards and other audio and visual materials available in the E.R.C. The examination/Certification unit takes care of the conduct of state placement examinations for junior secondary and preliminary teachers college

examination which are not national or international certification examinations.

The Library unit is one of the most indispensable facets of a good ERC.   Martens (1975) even refers to E.R.C. as a multi-media library which makes available to students and any other interested party, sources of information both in print and non-print forms. The library unit should be able to make available, print and non-print instructional materials with adequate information retrieval devices. According to Lancaster (1968), an information retrieval system informs the user on the existence or (non-existence) and the where about of documents relating to his request.

Usually this unit apart from having the materials should provide catalogues, classification schemes and on-line computer aided retrieval system for easy location of materials. The circulation and external services unit is necessary in a good E.R.C set up in that it is important for E.R.C at different locations to have links. This facilitates exchange of ideas and instructional materials. A functional E.R.C needs a well coordinated storage unit which takes care of keeping and maintaining the facilities and non-print materials for instruction. The workers here should be skilled in the use of the equipment and should be able and willing to assist users to achieve their goals especially in the process of self-instruction.

In recent times, it is necessary to have a Computer unit in an E.R.C. This is necessary because though computers can be attached to the library unit, users of internet services may be too noisy for the library environment. There should be a cyber café as it is currently called, where users' can log onto Libraries, bookshops and other places of interests and get instant information from books and very recent developments in the subject areas of their interest through appropriate web sites.

Apart from the already discussed units, the director of an E.R.C should be very sensitive to the needs of the organization in such a way that if there is a need to create more units, that can be done to enhance the desired effect of the E.R.C on the community where it is situated. The last but one of the most relevant needs of an E.R.C is the staffing of the units and central management. Shodeinde (1988) lists three main categories of personnel needed in an E.R.C. These are media specialist, media technicians and the Aides. The media specialist is a highly trained personnel who is responsible for the development and operation of programmes in the centre. Agun (1988) however expands the categories into four. The media specialist, the producers, the technicians, and the aides. According to him the media specialist should be skilled in the following areas:

- curriculum development
- media administration and management including library services
- design and production of materials
- psychology of learning
- research evaluation of educational media services
- operation of equipment

The producers should have sufficient training to understand the directives they receive from the specialist. They are those to interpret the guidelines given by the specialist and convert such into actual specification in practical terms. They should be skilled, graphics artists, photographers, cartoonists, illustrators, printers, cinematographers and educational broadcasters. The technicians are responsible for installation, servicing, operation and maintenance of equipment and materials. The aides carry out simple secretarial duties.

With a combination of appropriate units, adequate staffing, good acquisition of materials and commensurate funding and awareness of users, an E.R.C should be able to cater for the learning needs of users.

2.2   Current General Situation of E.R.C. in Nigeria

Judging by the dissatisfaction of some of the workers in E. R.C. in Nigeria, one is tempted to conclude that the situation is a far cry from what it is supposed to be. Having assessed the E.R.C. situated in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, it is clear that staff were employed regardless of the need for specialization; the units are not complete and those existing are not fully functional and the learning resources in stock are mostly outdated and there is no regard to the current need for information technology devices. The director who is supposed to be a media specialist should also be skilled at managing external constituencies but where a director is chosen by government arbitrarily, managerial problems set in. For example, Akwa Ibom State E.R.C. management feels that the establishment of the bureau of science and technology is causing a conflict of functions between it and the technical unit and the educational science and technology units of the E.R.C. (Ekpo,2002). This may not necessarily be so if the director of the E.R.C. uses his skills of dealing with managers of other arms of educational services departments as specified by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) and Hughes (1998).

It appears the workers are only interested in getting their salaries instead of making efforts to develop the E.R.C. This situation is made worse by the fact that government has not followed up its policy thrust as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (1998). It is also quite glaring that the E.R.C. is not well funded. The library's stocks of books are outdated and are worse than what is noticed in schools which the E.R.C. is even supposed to assist. The equipment in the production units are broken down and the producers and technicians are now involved in activities not originally meant for them. For example, the technical unit of the Akwa Ibom

State E.R.C. does the following:
- Advises government on science policies
- Organizes refresher courses for science teachers
- Liaises with Federal Government on Science Issues
- Organizes Quiz competitions for secondary schools in collaboration with NNPC

The only seemingly active E.R.C. in Nigeria is the one in the Federal Capital Territory at the FCT Education Secretariat, Abuja. As at September, 2013 it launched its new web portal and equally organized computer training for students. It also held a reading competition within that year. Its divisions include Planning Research and Statistic, Teacher Development Department, Measurement and Evaluation, Educational Information, Guidance and Counseling, Library Services and Curriculum Development (Mabos, 2011). Going by the inadequate activities at some of the E.R.Cs in States of Nigeria it appears government is not honest about teaching and learning in Nigeria.

2.2.1   Noticed Private Sector Intervention

Recently, it has been noticed that Multi-Choice Nigeria, through its Innovative Technology Literacy Services Ltd., has so far offered education resource services to 265 schools in 26 States of Nigeria. The resource centre activation project is a corporate social responsibility of the provider of premium pay-TV services on DSTV. It involves provision of a TV set, a HD PVR decoder, satellite dish, a power generator set, Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS), a set of chairs and desks for the laboratory as well as educational bouquet. Multi-Choice first established its resource centre in Nigeria in 2004 (Faloln, 2014).

The corporate citizen through the Managing Director of the project has indicated that the primary objective is to integrate the programmes into the education curriculum in order to further enhance teaching and learning process in the classroom. At the moment students from 10 public secondary schools in Plateau State have become beneficiaries of the Multi-Choice Nigeria resource centre project and 50 selected teachers, five each from the benefiting schools have been trained. According to Ugwu (2014) Bayelsa State has joined the project as the next beneficiary State with the same number of beneficiary schools, students and teachers.

Skill G. Nigeria Ltd has also been noticed, trying an intervention project, 'No child left Behind Education Initiative in Kwara State, with emphasis on science and technology education (Skill G, 2012).

2.3   Remedial Measures for Achieving Functional Educational Resource Centres in Nigeria

1. Government should provide adequate funding for the E.R.C. This is not only in the area of paying salaries to workers but should cover provision for repairs, maintenance and replacement of equipment; acquisition of print and non-print materials and research grants. The money must be put directly in the right hands.
2. Employment of workers for the E.R.C. should be based on appropriate specialization instead of mere political appointments.
3. There should be a monitoring machinery set up to assess and report for implementation, necessary facility changes to keep the E.R.C. abreast of what obtains globally.
4. The management of E.R.C. should make efforts at working hand in hand with experts in the field of educational technology to enhance the services of the centres.
5. Workers in the E.R.C. should be given adequate exposure to make them really understand the purpose of their work and to be more involved in the process of helping to bring about effective teaching and learning.
6. More corporate citizens should emulate Multi-Choice Nigeria in contributing to the development of te E.R.C., not on periodic basis but on a more permanent term.

2.4   Advantages of well distributed Functional Educational Resource Centres

There is a great potential in the E.R.C. if it is well handled and evenly distributed throughout Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (1998) clearly states the objectives of Educational Services within which E.R.C. exists. The objectives are:

1. *to develop, assess, and improve educational programmes;*
2. *to enhance teaching and improve the competence of teachers;*
3. *to make learning more meaningful for children;*
4. *to reduce educational costs;*
5. *to promote in-service education;*
6. *to develop and promote an effective use of innovative materials in schools.*

The national policy also specifically states that Educational Resource Centres will be established at State and Federal levels and that there will be close co-operation and constant consultation to ensure the free flow of information in respect of achievement in this field. If these lofty ideas are fully implemented, monitored

and maintained, Nigeria would witness a gradual growth in the direction of self-instruction. Apart from this, the much desired open Universities and distance learning would be enhanced and the situation would encourage individuals to learn for knowing and application instead of the blind search for undue certificates. The presence of functional E.R.C. could encourage learning for self employment and learning materials can be developed locally to guard against excessive importation.

3.   Conclusion

Having assessed the history, ideal expectations and current situation of E.R.C. in Nigeria, the paper has looked at remedial measures to enhance the establishment and has highlighted the advantages of having well distributed functional E.R.C. in Nigeria. The writer has a strong belief that the idea of E.R.C. is a viable one, only if the implementation can be pursued enthusiastically. With good handling the E.R.C. can make a contribution to the educational development in Nigeria which may be unprecedented.

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