Community Resource Centres and their Potentials for Lifelong Education for Igbo Male School Dropouts in Nigeria.pdf

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Community Resource Centres and Their Potentials for Lifelong Education for Igbo Male School Dropouts in Nigeria.

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Abstract  
There has been persistent trend in withdrawal of male children from schools by the Igbos in Nigeria in favour of trading. In recent time, this has caused a dearth of males in professional spheres. Solutions to this problem is being sought both by local and international organizations. For instance, UNICEF by 1998 has set up 45 non-formal education centres of out-of-school boys in the five Igbo states. For effective utilization of these and other resources, Community Resource Centres with special focus on children is being suggested to be established and used for inculcating the spirit of inquiry, stimulate interest, teach study skills and develop healthy reading habit which is necessary for lifelong education.

Keywords: Community Resource Centres; Childhood Education; Children’s Library; School dropouts; Gender Education; Igbo

Introduction

Education has a dynamic role to play in the lives of individuals and society as a whole. One main purpose of education is to equip people with the skills needed to operate in the society so as to achieve individual and national integration. When rightly applied, it is a means of achieving self-reliance. It also stands as an avenue for self-discovery and fulfillment.

Education is important in social and national development. Recent scientific and technological advancement are all products of education. The realities of the dichotomy in development between advance and developing countries can be seen in the disparity, the priority given to education, its content and method. It is only people who are highly and properly educated that can contribute to the technological, scientific, industrial, economic and political development of any nation.
Africa is a continent with multi-ethnic composition. There is need for every ethnic group in any African nation to contribute to national development for proper cohesion and integration. It cannot be disputed that it is only through education that each group can produce competent personnel that can represent their interest in policy formulation in order to avoid marginalization and its consequences.

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria Policy on Education (1981) the Nigerian philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities. The national educational aims and objectives to which the philosophy is linked are:

- The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity
- The inculcation of the right type of value and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and
- The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both moral and physical, and equipment of the individual for the development of this society.

Based on the philosophy and its supportive aims and objectives, education in Nigeria is aimed at survival of every Nigerian citizen and the Nigerian society as a whole. Any collective disregard of these articles is a threat to this survival.

The Igbo’s are one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They inhabit most of the eastern part of the country. Before the Nigerian civil War of 1967-70, education was valued and regarded as a social affair. Families strove to have highly educated sons and daughters, kindred were known to have taxed themselves in order to send any of their relatives to school where parents could not support.

Mbogwu (1998) noted that before the Nigerian civil war, the Igbos were profoundly noted for their lead in education and other professional spheres that relied heavily on education, military, teaching diplomacy, civil service, banking and so on but the situation has now drastically changed as cross philistinism has been elevated to a high art, while de-emphasizing education the Igbos now prefer materialism.

**Statement of the problem**

In recent times, education is regarded by the Igbos of Nigeria as highly irrelevant to the “get-rich-quick syndrome”. Consequently, children, especially males, are either not enrolled in schools or are withdrawn from the ages of ten to fifteen to join the business world as apprentice/shop assistants. This problem is most prevalent in rural areas. These young ones, after stipulated years of service ranging from five to eight years, are helped by their masters to establish
their own businesses. The result is a high male school dropout in the ethnic group.

Consequently, a high percentage of males do not have formal education. Noting the enormity of the problem as it exists even outside the Igbo states, the late Emir of illorin, Ibrahim Sulu-Gambari, advised leaders of Igbo community in Kwara State to allow their children and wards to go to school instead of focusing all their attention on trading and other sundry business (Mbagwu 1998).

The problem of education in Igbo states needs all available solutions. Statistics on lack of male enrolment and dropout is alarming. Below is male enrolment as against that of female in the four Igbo states.

This trend if allowed to persist will not only create a void in professional spheres but could lead to loss of talents. Focusing on Anambra State which has the highest rate of non-enrolment of males and dropout, there are two prominent business towns, Onitsha and Nnewi. Onitsha houses one of the biggest markets in West Africa. Nnewi, is the business nerve centre in the state as a good percentage of the school dropouts are being absorbed into these markets.

### Enrolment of Student in Post-Primary Schools in the Four Core Igbo States

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Source: World Bank

### BOYS Dropout Rate and Pattern in Four Igbo States between 1994 and 1996

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STATES</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>1995</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABIA</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANAMBRA</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENUGU</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMO</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
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Source: A UNICEF Sponsored Survey Showing boys Dropout Rate and Patterns in Four Eastern States (Abia, Anambra Enugu and Imo) between 1994 and 1996.
To reduce the impact and damage of this trend using the state as the pilot study with focus on rural areas, multimedia Community Resource Centres (CRCs) is being suggested to be established in selected local council of the 21 local government areas of the state. The CRCs should be designed to have special focus on children.

It should be noted that information resource available in the state are inadequate. There is the public library owned by the state government. The headquarters of this library is at Awka, the state capital. There are 4 divisional libraries in 4 local government areas and a total of 6 branches under the divisional libraries. There are no library or information centres established and managed by any of the 21 local government areas. Therefore, 17 local government areas do not have this basic information infrastructure to serve their information needs. CRCs could play a good role in providing information to satisfy identified needs and at the same time be designed as a non-formal education centre to meet the educational needs of children.

**Community Resource Centres and Their Potentials: A Review Of Literature**

Community Resource Centres (CRCs) are necessities in rural communities. This is because most areas lack access to basic information infrastructure like mass media, information centres, and libraries. Consequently, the rural populace is denied authentic information to manage their day to day activities. Jaugstetter (1983) listed the following as characteristics of rural areas:

- Inadequate health and social services
- Inadequate education and continuing education institutions
- Limited economic opportunities,
- Non-availability of special services for Women, Children, the elderly and handicap, and
- Restricted choice of mass media

These inadequacies in infrastructure best described the state of rural areas in Nigeria. Adimorah (1986) noted that

“a planned information service element is completely missing in Nigerian rural development planning. Even when services are expected to the rural communities, through mobile libraries, book box services, or the community library, a pre-planned information element is still lacking”

A community Resource Centre has been defined as “a space or building in which a human and other resources in a variety of media e.g. books, journals, newspaper, film, slide video and audio cassettes and equipment such as recorders, cameras, computer, fax machines and so on are arranged or made
dissemination, production, skills and resources sharing... Learning and interaction occur directly within the resources. (Natal Resource Centre Forum, 1992) Rosenberg (1993) sees the rural CRCs as being much more than a library. This is because it acts not only as a resource centre, but as a referral centre producing advice and guidance as well as source of information.

In South Africa, Kaniki (1994) and Magwentshu (1995) have noted the role of CRCs in transformation of disadvantage groups. Magwenshu wrote that CRCs have their origin in the need for community information. This community information relates to survival information used to solve daily practical problems in disadvantaged communities. Donohue (1996) identified two types of information to be provided by CRCs as:

- Health, history, income, legal protection, economic opportunities, political right and so on.

- Citizen action information needed for effective participation as individual or member of group in the social, political, legal and economic processes. On education, Community Resource Centres have been noted to have served as supplementary facilities to formal education and played a role in building a non-formal education tradition in South Africa (Latezen, 1989; Viening, 1993).

CRCs, therefore are community oriented, established according to the environment of its parent community, taking cognizance of their information needs, cultural environment and the need to serve the non-literate majority. Bish (1993) advised that in establishing a CRC, “it is essential to predetermine the role which the centre will play. This role will affect the type and amount of information collected, the population served and the type of staff chosen to perform the duties.

In line with this advice, the aims of establishing CRCs in rural communities in Igbo speaking states, using Anambra as a pilot state should be for the provision of survival and citizen action information, and for educational development. The resource centres will be expected to be supplementary resource and informal learning centres used to influence and inculcate the spirit of inquiry into young children which is central to education (Ogunsheye, 1987) if such spirit is develop in the growing child, total dropout will not be the end result of school withdrawals as he could seek various means available to improve his educational attainment. The centre should therefore serve not only as an
information centre for the adult populace, but as an educational resource centre
grounded towards the needs of children living in rural communities.

In summary, these multimedia centres should be intended to achieve the
following:

- Effective communication of ideas,
- Utilization of available information to achieve specific ends, change
economic, political (educational) and social ends, change economic,
political(educational) and social life conditions, and
- Assist in solving problems of society (Hicks and Tillin, 1977). In Igbo
society, there is the need to encourage functional and lifelong education.

To achieve these, the centres should be source of rapid access, retrieval and
transfer of information, and focal centres which emphasize the importance of
information and knowledge.

The type of information to be collected for the centre should include all aspects
of survival information especially relating to health, house, economic
opportunities, and politics. Emphasis should be on agricultural information.
This should include information on agricultural materials such as fertilizer,
hybrid seeds, farming practices, product preservation and so on.

Materials for children should include books on all subjects; made up of
supplementary readers, fiction collection, junior periodical and non-book
materials including audio and visual (such as educational films, slides, audio
and video tapes, computers, programmed materials, etc), aids and facilities for
making or reproducing some of these materials in order to motivate interest and
stimulate creativity in the children.

Activities should include Saturday story hour. In recognition of the role rural
children play as farm helps to their parents, the story hour, should be fixed in
the evening. That Saturday story hour should include teaching, demonstration,
storytelling, group interaction and children production and presentations. Video-
clips of career presentation should be an integral part of the activities as
frequently children in rural area, lack role models in various fields and the part
they play in some human society. Professionals to man the centres should
include librarians, media specialists, and agricultural extension officers.

In the first two years of experimentation, five of these centres should be
established in five selected Local Government areas to ascertain the responds of
their various communities. This could be part of non-formal education centres being established in Igbo states both by local and international organizations. For instance, UNICEF has established 45 non-formal education centres for out of school boys in the five eastern states (Vanguard 1998). The most prominent is the UNICEF Experimental School in Onitsha Main Market. Another was established in Nkwo Main Market by Nnewi North Local government. It is noteworthy to state that these centres are being established for adults who have imbibed a negative attitude towards formal education; hence the proposal to start with CRCs with special focus on children in order to inculcate the spirit of inquiry at an early age.

**Why community resource centres with special focus on children?**

There is general lack of educational facilities in rural areas in Nigeria. This is compounded by the fact that teachers prefer to live and work in urban areas. In addition, most rural parents are illiterate and therefore cannot contribute to the educational development of their children. Therefore the rural child lives in an environment which is characterized by paucity of educational institutions. Manpower, resource and role models (Ndu, 1984). This is a contributing factor to the school withdrawal syndrome prevalent in Igbo speaking states, adding to the craze” to get rich quick syndrome” which has resulted in the massive male dropout from schools in the ethnic group.

Qualitative education is a basic right for every child. Decisions for non-enrolment and withdrawal are mostly taken by adults who do not know that education is a worthy enterprise and lasting investment and best legacy any man would leave behind for his children (Mgbagwu, 1998). So programmes aimed at providing opportunities for these children to continue their education despite the disadvantages of their cultural environment could help in curtailing this trend. These programmes should be planned and systematic focusing on other media. UNESCO (1974) recommended that lifelong education should be disseminated through all available media and not merely through school, through part-time and correspondence course, radio, television, public library and so on.” Again, UNESCO (1984) pointed out that “because high repetition and dropout rate usually occur in early grades, careful attention must be paid to pre-education
community and non-formal educational resources must be used and incentive must be provided”

CRC with special focus on children act as a supplement to the limited educational facilities available. The resource centres will be a means of implanting the value of education in the mind of the growing child. The idea is to teach the children to seek and find knowledge outside the formal school settings. This therefore lays the foundation for future utilization of any resources available, other than the formal school to improve their educational attainment.

The centres could equally be the means of taking advantages of the critical period concepts as it affects learning. Colombo (1980) defined the critical period as a time during the life span of an organism which may be affected by some exogenous influence to an extent beyond that observed at other times. Simply, the organism is more sensitive to environment sensitive to environmental stimulation during a critical period than at other times in life. Miller (1986) observed that:

Since ancient times, perceptive observers of human nature have believed that the early training of children is especially important in shaping their latter lives. Now, scientific evidence is accumulating to show that this belief was not a baseless superstition. What is particularly striking is the revelation this evidence makes about the crucial role that certain periods in the way early years of life play in the development and behavior of the individual. For these critical periods, the presence or absence of certain environmental factors can have a strongly detrimental effect on what the individual will become and capable of.

The proposed centres will provide the basis for the children to appreciate and be able to take advantage of the various means and media available including the non-formal education (NFE) centres currently being set up by UNICEF in Igbo speaking states to improve a child’s education even if he or she is withdrawn from formal school setting. This is because the centres will lay the necessary education foundation through encouraging creativity, stimulating interest, and developing critical thinking. This will be achieved through the use of resources to extend the frontier of the children’s knowledge beyond their immediate environment. Appropriate educational skills and abilities will equally be developed. These include good study skills and healthy reading habits that are the balm of lifelong education. The children will be taught how to extract
information from what they read and organize them into useful and meaningful whole.

**Problems That Might Affect the Full Utilization of the Centres**

A significant part of the problem of education in Igbo speaking states stems from the socio-economic background of the indigenes. The role of the adult populace is quite pronounced. As observed earlier, there is a general negative perception of the relevance of formal education in day-to-day survival. A resource centre that the adults see as another formal education institution will not be fully utilized. Thus there will be little encouragement by the adults to the children to utilize the centres. To solve these problems, campaign must start with the adults. UNESCO (1974) recognized that “adults as parents can exert a positive influence on their children’s education. The two must be educated so that they do not oppose the new values and techniques taught to their children” Lees and Smith (1975) also shared the same view. They opined “that a full-fledged community education programme embracing adults as well as children and embracing adults in their parent capacity could assist people both to make the best possible use of resources when offered and to create the kind of organization and pressure that might be necessary in view of this.

Initial activities in the centres should include the study of information needs especially agricultural information needs. These needs could be satisfied by the agricultural extension officers visiting the indigenes in their various associations like age grade, village women association meetings etc. These people meet from time to time. A lot of information is shared within the groups. The officers should disseminate useful agricultural information. At the same time, reference should be made to the centres as a form of image building. This will encourage the adults to see the centres as advantageous.

**Conclusion**

Education is important in social and national development. Because of this, the disregard of functional education by a good percentage of Igbo males in Nigeria could create a void with its attending consequences. It is also right to assume that a lot of hidden talents are being lost in the process. Planned and systematic programmes focusing on other media apart from the formal school system could provide opportunities for interested ones to continue their education. Community Resource Centres (CRS) have not been fully explored in Nigeria. Yet they have potentials to provide information for rural dwellers and at the
same time could be designed to serve as non-formal education centres. In Igbo states, these centres could be explored as social service geared towards educational development.

References


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