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Meeting the information needs of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD): the role of school libraries in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The paper attempted to look at how school libraries in Nigeria can meet the information needs of special children battling with the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This kind of mental disorder affects about 10% of children worldwide, it is a situation whereby the child is over hyperactive, fidgety, cannot focus or accomplish a task in record time. The paper also looked into how the school library comes in to aid these kind of children in reading and learning. A school library should cater for all its users irrespective of their disposition, therefore, some strategies that can be useful when implemented were outlined. Some of the strategies outlined include: creating an enabling reading and learning space for the children, the interpersonal skills required of the school teacher/librarian amongst others. The paper concluded that a form of feedback mechanism both from the parents and teachers/librarian is very vital in order to help these special set of children.

Keywords: school libraries; Nigeria; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity; children; teacher/librarians

Introduction

Mental disorders is quite prevalent in children. These disorders ranges from depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), psychotic disorder amongst others. These disorders most times can be severe. World Health Organization (WHO) posited that 10-20% children suffer from mental disorders worldwide. Children with mental disorders are at a very high risk of not attaining their educational goals or pursuits due to discrimination, unfavorable laws and policies, non-compliant structures/buildings, most unempathetic teachers/librarians, bullies etc.

A study carried out by Cox & Lynch (2006) showed that students with sight and hearing impairments experience difficulties when trying to access library's facilities, services, resources and technologies. They found out that this was due to lack of appropriate materials, no assistive technologies and the library was designed without considering people with physical disabilities or mental disorders. School libraries are supposed to be a support system in any school, by providing enabling environment and adequate information resources that can meet the information needs of students no matter their health status. It is therefore essential to have an inclusive school library that can accommodate children with or without mental disorders or physical impairments. Such an inclusive school library should be accessible to all, provide services to all and meet the various information needs of users.

The thrust of this paper is to examine ways in which school libraries in Nigeria can meet the information needs of children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Literature review

What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD is mostly prevalent in children though it can persist to adulthood. Polanczyk et al., (2007), averred that ADHD is a common neuropsychiatric disorder of childhood which affects 5% of school-aged children worldwide and sometimes persisting into adulthood. (Faraone and Biederman, 2005). American Psychiatric Association (2013) describes children suffering from Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as those who have heightened levels of inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity for their age. This connotes that children with ADHD will exhibit poor concentration in reading, restlessness (not being able to sit at a spot for long), inattentive, impulsive, reacting unnecessarily, interrupting others while speaking and generally

disrupting activities wherever they are. Learning pattern of children with ADHD can be very challenging in that they lose focus easily, they are easily distracted and this requires that anyone supervising them must be ready to face the challenge and devise strategies to catch their attention.

There is paucity of literature on subjects that borders around people with ADHD in Nigeria. From the few studies found as at the time of this research, it was discovered that teachers (school librarians inclusive) have insufficient knowledge about ADHD (Bahredar & Moeini, 2006, Guerra & Brown, 2012, Ghanizadeh, Bradshaw & Kamal 2013). Jimoh (2014) carried out a survey of 250 teachers in 20 public and private schools in Lagos. In his result, it was found out that these teachers have negative attitudes towards children with ADHD and other mental disorders. Adeosun, Ogun, Fatiregun & Adeyemo (2013) also reported negative attitude of teachers in his study of 144 teachers in Lagos, this goes to show general lack of awareness of this kind of mental disorder in children. Teachers often conclude that children that are hyperactive and act on impulse are mischievous, disruptive and unable to learn; most teachers adopt several strategies such as giving punishments, beating or sending such a child out of the class. Such strategies further aggravates the issue instead of being a solution.

In this part of the world it is assumed that children with mental disorders are weird and are often tagged as witches, wizards or those that have one form of evil spirit or the other. This is caused by the culture, tradition, myths and fallacies embraced by communities.

Signs and symptoms of ADHD

It is normal for children to exhibit signs of inattention and hyperactivity but for children who suffer ADHD it is critical, happens frequently and it affects the way they perform.

The following are some of the signs and symptoms of ADHD:

- Carelessness
- Unable to focus
- Cannot pay attention for a lengthy period while undertaking tasks
- Cannot follow instructions
- Does not like reading or doing school work
- Easily distracted

- ➢ Forgetful
- ➢ Restless
- ➢ Talkative
- ➢ Always on the move
- ➢ Interrupts activities

(National Institute of Mental Health (NHIM), ND)

These signs and symptoms presupposes that a child with ADHD traits cannot make good use of the school library. The behavioral pattern of such a child will not make the library a conducive place for the child to read and learn most especially here in Nigeria where librarians come up with so much rigid rules that must be obeyed by library users.

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

Ideally, a school library according to International Federation of Library Associations (2015) is supposed to meet the information needs of its users irrespective of their abilities or background and also equip the teachers with professional capacity to handle children with different temperaments. In meeting with the information needs of school library users, it is important to provide infrastructure, facilities and an enabling ambience that will enhance reading and learning. To cater for children with ADHD, it is essential to take the following into consideration.

Enabling Space for Children with ADHD in School Libraries

School libraries are one of the institutions established with the responsibility of satisfying information needs of various users especially pupils and among these are one unique set of children who make use of the school library are those who have ADHD. DuPaul, Weyandth and Janusis (2011) however opined that these group of children usually face difficulties when it comes to being educated of which making use of the school library is a core part. There are however strategies that can be put in place to enhance the level of satisfaction derived from these group of children when making use of the school library.

One important factor to put into consideration is the study space or reading space for these children in school libraries. The reading, studying and learning environment of the children who possess ADHD needs to be patterned to suit their unique characteristics in order to attain maximum satisfaction of their information needs. An intervention strategy to put in place when creating an enabling space for children with ADHD is the learning environment. Their learning environment should be made to look different from the convention classroom environment as they will learn better with the feeling that they are not in the usual classroom. The physical arrangements of the furniture in the reading and learning environment should also be made to enhance their learning process. The usual classroom environment may enhance learning for the normal pupils but for a child with ADHD they are prone to distractions and therefore it is paramount that their study environment in the school library has provisions made for timeout or break when needed, educative games, and very colorful environment as all these will boost their learning. Similarly, the United States Department of Education (2006) opines that provision should be made for 'escape valve' outlets, this is simply a provision for the pupils to have some minutes break while studying. They noted that 'it is an effective means of settling them down and allowing them return to the room ready to concentrate.

Closely related to that, the children with ADHD achieve better learning when they work in groups hence it is pertinent that their reading space has flexible facilities that can be used for group reading and studying such as big round tables, couch chairs, sound proof walls to avoid distracting other users when a group study is taking place, etc. the desks and chairs used by children with ADHD should be their appropriate size to avoid unnecessary fidgeting by these young library users (United States Department of Education, 2006)

Due to the fact that these group of pupils are easily distracted it is necessary that the librarians make the study environment highly organized; that is, it should be free from anything or anyone that may pose as a source of distraction to these users. In the classroom environment, it is advisable to allow them seat in the front to control distractions to the barest minimum. In the same vein, the Training and Technical Assistance Centre (2017) reiterated that the pupils with ADHD should be placed far away from distraction, close to the teacher/librarian, close to other attentive library users, etc. It was also noted that there should be provisions for music in the study space of

these children; this act helps to create a calm study environment free from distractions for these pupils (Adebayo, Zubair and Ogunsola, 2018).

The importance of audiovisual materials and resources to these unique set of pupil cannot be overemphasized. These pupil may encounter challenges in their academics and also relationship with other peers if the proper intervention strategies are not implemented to enhance their learning process and one of the ways their learning process could be enhanced is through the use of materials that they can see and hear e.g. the use of overhead projectors to display mathematical sums could speedup up the process of assimilation for these pupils. Other visual aids that could be used in the school library to enhance the process of studying by pupils with ADHD include charts, lists, pie graphs, etc. (Segal and Smith, 2018; United States department of Education, 2006). McInnes et al. (2002) as quoted by Gingrich (2016) suggested that diagrams, illustrations and charts are vital tools for processing information because it drastically reduces the quantity of information for both the verbal and visual-spatial memory.

Interpersonal Skills/Relation of the School Librarian/Teacher Librarian

The school/teacher librarians are the information professionals chiefly responsible for the satisfaction of the information needs of clientele in the school library of which the children with ADHD are not excluded. It is therefore paramount that these professionals possess adequate skills, behaviour and characteristics that would enhance the process of learning and studying for these young users. The unique nature of children with ADHD makes it mandatory that the school/teacher librarian has anger management skills.

Daley and Birchwood (2009) quoting the American Psychiatrist Association , averred that the children with ADHD display characteristics like talking excessively, difficulty in taking turns, intrudes into other children's games, absent minded when talked to, etc. these features may pose a serious challenge to the school/teacher librarians if they do not possess the anger management skills but with proper anger management skills the information professional would be able to understand the unique feature of that user and still help the student study better. Closely related to the anger management skill, the School/Teacher librarians should also have gone through behaviour management training as this is very vital for the librarians who would be interacting with children with ADHD. (National Childcare Accreditation Council, 2009)

It is also important that the school/teacher librarian possess the ability and skill involved in identifying the available strengths and weaknesses of the children with ADHD. The librarians need to play down on their weaknesses and highlight their strengths; the information professionals can go further than highlighting the strengths and commend their laudable efforts when the situation arises. Murdoch Children's' Research Institute (n.d.) refer to it as strategic praise, that is commending their little efforts for positive actions, this makes them have the zeal to perform even better.

The School/Teacher Librarian must have a high level of creativity and innovation as this is necessary when making provisions to satisfy the information needs of library users/children with ADHD. These unique group of library clientele usually need more the normal attention in every aspect to get maximum satisfaction when using the school library. The librarian therefore needs to be creative as regard the kind of furniture made available for them; their study environment also has to be creatively organized to avoid distractions and make provisions for 'escape or break' periods when needed and the audiovisual resources put in place for them in the school library has to have a touch of creativity and uniqueness.

It is highly paramount that the librarian also possess good communication skills, this is because dealing with children with ADHD involves a lot of communication such as communication with the parents/guardians, verbal and non-verbal communication with the pupil and most especially feedback. Feedback is very necessary when educating children with ADHD, that way there would be better understanding and any area of gaps can be cheaply identified. The National Childcare Accreditation Council (2009) further corroborated this by noting that feedback from parents, teachers, peers and guardians of the child is necessary for assessment and this assessment will in turn help the librarian to assist the child in the study process.

The school teacher/librarian can also engage the following strategies to help children with ADHD:

1. **Reward system**: the teacher librarian should come up with a reward system for children that behave and exhibit decorum while in library. This will motivate the children especially those with ADHD to be at their best behavior when in the library. The reward is not

necessarily something extraordinary, it could be few claps, a hi-five or a hug. The teacher librarian can also come up with a chart, where names of the children are written with a space to fix in stars according to the children behavior for example, a gold star can stand for best behavior, silver star for average behavior or black star for bad behavior. This chart should be pasted where all can see in the library; this gives every student a chance to see they behaved for a particular period while in the library.

2. **Freedom of choice:** children with ADHD make a fuss out every situation, therefore to make them to cooperate, it is important for the teacher librarian allow them choose where they want to sit in the library, the book they want to read and how they want to read it. For example, such a child can decide to look through the pictures in a book first before reading the written contents.

3. **Freedom to read at their pace**: they should not be rushed to finish a particular book. This is why a library needs to acquire multiple copies of books. Instead of mounting pressure on the child to finish a book, the teacher librarian should always reassure the child by saying "you can do it".

4. **Applauds**: another strategy that can be employed is to applaud every accomplishment of such children. When they complete a task, it is good to make them feel loved, important and secure. The teacher librarian can announce the task accomplished and by who (social praise). This will motivate others to put up their best when given a task.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition characterized by a combination of characters like impulsive behavior, difficulty in sustaining attention and hyperactivity. It is a condition common with children and sometimes stretches into adulthood. Their unique features makes the process of learning quite cumbersome if they are not given the proper attention needed. Besides the process of learning carried out in the classroom these children also study and learn in the school libraries hence we can refer to the school library as a good avenue for learning for children with ADHD. Besides the books available in the school library for learning and studying, there is also provision made for other learning resources like audiovisuals, games, etc. It is therefore paramount that the learning environment and study space of the school library

is tailored to accommodate the unique features of these pupils. This includes suitable furniture for studying, proper lightening system to curb distraction to the barest, audiovisuals, etc.

It is however necessary that parents play their own role when it comes to literacy of children with ADHD. The work should not be left for the teachers and librarians alone. The parents need to play the feedback role as this would help the librarians and teachers in the area of assessment. It is also necessary to carry out regular training for school librarians and teacher librarians to boost their skills in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the children with ADHD and also handling their special needs.

The institution where the school libraries are located should also furnish the libraries with needed facilities and maintain the already existing facilities and resources such as the projectors, tables and chairs, group reading areas, etc.

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