

# THE ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The paper looks at the concepts of education and the problems from it in the provision of education to children of school age. It equally discusses the problem of special needs children which resulted to the idea of inclusive education in place of mainstreaming and or integration. It then suggests what should be the role of librarians in the running of inclusive education. Finally, the paper advises the government, Ministries of Education, non-governmental organizations and all the stakeholders in special education to kindly assist libraries with grants so as to enable them be fully involved in supporting inclusive education in Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of giving a child education is to assist him achieve his dreams and be able to develop his potentials. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) defines education as a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills. Educational system according to Taiwo (1980), is a complex one of interactions between independent bodies, voluntary agencies, teachers organizations, the children, parents and the general public. Nothing or no mention was made, whatsoever, about Librarians and Libraries. Today, however, the system is getting more complex in the sense that some other educational issue has been identified such as Nomadic education.

The main aim of education as stated in the opening paragraph is to give individuals (adults and children), the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills which they will rely on for a successful living. But in the process of teaching or imparting knowledge in schools, some groups are identified as special or handicapped children. There include the deaf; the visually impaired; the mentally retarded; the physically handicapped and the learning disabled as distinct from the others commonly referred to, as normal children, hence the need for greater educational integration in special

education for such group of individuals based on the principle of inclusive education.

### **What is Special Education**

The National Policy on Education 1981 (revised 1988), defined special education as education of children and adults who have learning difficulty because of different sorts of handicaps: blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mentally retarded, social maladjustment, physical handicap... due to circumstance of birth, social position, inheritance, mental and physical health pattern or accident in life.

### **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education, integration and mainstreaming sound like birds of the same feather but in actual sense do not connote the same idea or meaning. Integration which is British and mainstreaming which is American mean the same thing in special education. That is, where a "normal school" or "regular school" system decides to bring in special children into the regular system to share the same facilities while special provision is made for their teaching requirements. But inclusive education is quite different from the above explanation.

According to the National Association for Special Education Needs (1999), inclusion is not a simple concept, restricted to issues of placement. Its definition has to encompass broad notions of educational access and recognize the importance of catering for diverse needs... moreover, inclusive principles, highlights the importance of meeting children's partnership with pupils and their parents/careers and of involving teachers and schools in the development of more inclusive approaches. In line with the above, the Salamanca Conference report (1994) on special needs education: access and quality held in Spain, discussed the acceptable definition of inclusive education and to distinguish it from integration or mainstreaming.

The submission was that the essential element of the concept inclusion was concerned with systemic changes at the level of the school and the school district, as well as in planning of educational provision at the level of local and central government. The above suggest a school system that brings both handicapped and the normal children under one school programme with occasional assistance from other professionals which includes the Librarians.

## **ROLE OF LIBRARIANS**

While library is defined as a place where one can interact with the dead and the living (Quadri and Maduagwu 2003). Librarians are the administrative personnel in the library where books and non-book materials are kept for reading. They understand best, how reading materials find themselves into the library which is the nerve centre of any educational institution. Therefore, they have roles to play in inclusive education. They are to support inclusive education as follows:

### **1. Accommodation:**

Librarians must ensure, that in an inclusive education environment, the library must have enough space and good physical environment that will enable free movement among the children, bearing in mind, their handicapping conditions and that "everybody" is represented.

This is to prevent overcrowding and to make room for adapted materials and other facilities.

### **2. Provision of Adjustable Equipment**

In an inclusive educational environment, adjustable equipment are important. Librarians in their selection of book shelves, chairs and reading tables should make provision for "user friendly" shelves of not more than 5 feet, good reading tables and adjustable reading chairs. This will allow both the visually impaired and the physically handicapped who are at a disadvantage to move around the library with their assistants and on their wheel chairs respectively, interact with the materials in the library like their normal counterparts.

### **3. Provision of Reading Materials**

#### **- Books**

In performing its function, the librarian ensures adequate resource availability by acquiring instructional materials in various formats like books, journals and non-book materials and in various subjects to cover courses offered in such schools. These materials find their way into the library through direct purchase, gifts, exchanges and donations.

The above is done, to bring fulfillment to Dr. S. R. Ranganathan's five laws of library science as stated in Quadri and Maduagwu (2003), which state as follows:

a) Books are for use

- b) Every reader his book
- c) Every book its reader
- d) Don't waste the time of the user
- e) The library is a growing organism.

The implications of the above are that:

- i) Books are for use means library books are for use and consultation irrespective of who you are: normal or handicapped, there are no demarcations on library book usage.
- ii) Every reader his book means that as long as one is a registered user of a library or a pupil in an inclusive education system, he should be able to get a book of his choice in the library to read. This is reflected in different titles being acquired by the library.
- iii) Every book its reader is the direct opposite of every reader, his book. Somehow, someday, somebody will come for a book that has not been touched for months.
- iv) Don't waste the time of the user. This means that through the organization of materials by librarians in form of cataloguing, classification, indexing and abstracting services, access register, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) as well as library automation, library users should find it very easy browsing and searching for information or locating book titles of their choice.
- v) Library as a growing organism here means, that as long as new titles are published, the library grows in volumes and titles by the librarians acquiring them, both in Braille form or print.

#### - **Talking Books (Voice Tapes)**

Talking books or voice tapes are alternative ways of presenting information. They are not in print form but recorded. They should be provided by libraries, because very important texts and reference materials are provided not only in print form.

Librarians can work with volunteers to prepare voice tapes or talking books. This has been supported by Kremer (1990) who stated that Libraries for The Blind which produce their own materials already has some 500,000 titles on cassette. Here in Nigeria Inlaks library can beat its chest as having come close to such a figure.

There are other reports of achievements similar to the above, Tanaka and Kitagawa (1988), reported that since 1986 Japanese articles in librarianship are being put on tape monthly by volunteers. Dister (1988), reported the case of 300 volunteers employed by the Dutch library in the same direction. Nigerian librarians can borrow such ideas in order, to sustain inclusive education.

Apart from the provision of talking books, electronic newspapers are now available. Sturt (1990), and Smith (1990), gave accounts of the origin of electronic or talking newspaper services for the blind in the United Kingdom in 1970, and the provision of text newspaper for the blind, by the Royal National Institute for the Blind in Britain librarians should work towards providing such facility, here in Nigeria

#### - ***Large Print Books***

Large print books are important for the partially-sighted. There should be a policy statement for the acquisition of materials so that large print books are given some percentage.

#### **4. Improvisation of Materials**

Most libraries cannot boast of having adequate and current reading and instruction materials. That wise, Librarians can improvise materials like Brailled books by using old calendars to Braille reading text. According to Maduagwu and Kazeem (2002), where a library cannot afford to buy Braille books due to its cost, which has made publishers uninterested in its production, (The library) can improvise by transcription of exiting books into Braille, using old calendars where thermoforms are not available.

#### **5. Inter-Library Loan/Cooperation**

Librarians can support and make inclusive education survive through the practice of inter-library loan or cooperation. This means getting materials not available in one library from others that have, through an agreement to share resources.

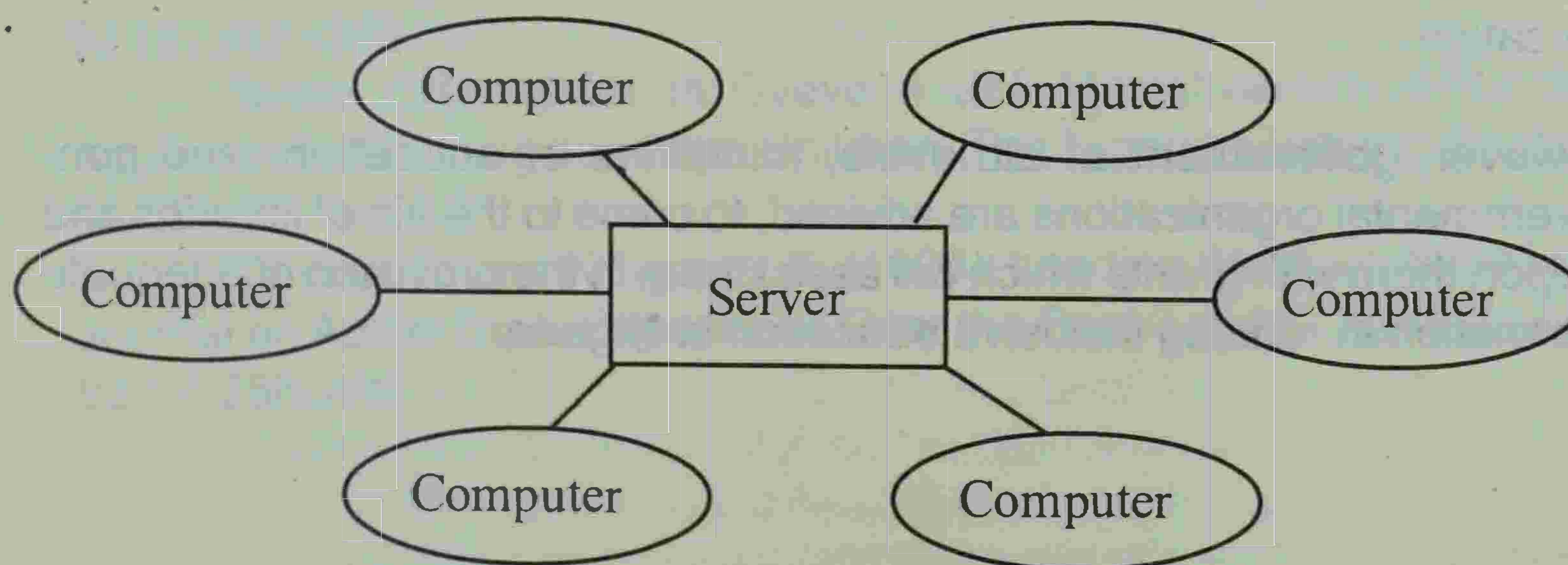
#### **6. Library Automation**

Library automation, according to Maduagwu (2003), is the use of computers in providing library services. To support inclusive education librarians should get their libraries automated. This could be achieved with about 12 computers, depending on the size of the library to allow for free browsing and searching. These computers

should be deployed in such a way that all the units or sections of the library will benefit.

Library automation will assist users including the visually impaired, physically handicapped and others to sit and have independent study and searching. The issue with automation is the use of user-friendly software and good or appropriate networking. Networking, in this case, is inter-connection of all computers in such library with a central server. An ideal software one would want to recommend is the X-Lib software. The software is an indigenous software produced by Raw Material Research and Development Council (RMRDC) Library Abuja. To Omotosho (1998), RMRDC developed version 1 of the above software in 1996 and the 2nd version in 1997. To Maduagwu (2003), X-Lib automates the management of a library in totality, which enables duly authorized individuals or groups to make requests for books and other publications of the library.

The librarian should guard against using a wrong topology for networking. There are many of them. We have the ring, star, linear/bus, mesh and tree topologies. Star topology should be appropriate because it has the advantage of continuous operation. When a cable connecting a work station or computer is having problem other work stations are not affected because of the central server.



## STAR TOPOLOGY

### 7. Smartview Processor

Smartview processor is a reading aid for the partially sighted to read texts. It has to be connected to a computer monitor of any size but preferably a 15-inch monitor. It could be used for photographs

as well as newspapers. It has a size control for the smallest magnification which allows characters to be comfortably and clearly seen.

Libraries should provide this smartview since it allows for best reading speed. Smartview is a product of Putse Data International Limited, Christchurch, New Zealand.

#### **8. Adapted Computer**

Libraries can acquire adapted computers for the visually impaired to use. Though expensive, this equipment is adapted to emit verbal message or information on the computer screen. Equally, the otacon can convert print to Braille while the Braille "N" print converts brailled materials to printed form.

#### **9. Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf (TDD):**

This is an electronic device for the deaf which allows typed phone messages through network to be relayed on the screen of the Television.

### **CONCLUSION**

Provision of information and other reading materials, to make a library functional, is the job of Librarians. The involvement of librarians in inclusive education will afford a group of professionals the opportunity to always show case the professionalism in them in their support for inclusive education.

However, government at all levels, ministries of education, and non-governmental organizations are advised, to come to the aid of libraries and support them with grants which will assist them in the provision of adequate information in running inclusive education in Nigeria.

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