

Collaboration in School Libraries: Nigeria School Librarians' Perspectives

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The study reported the experiences of school librarians on the situation of collaboration in school libraries in Nigeria at the present, the challenges and the way forward. Based on the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) Model adopted in the study, the finding shows collaboration in school libraries in Nigeria on the lower levels of coordination and cooperation/partnership. Thus, indicating a need for more commitment and time for collaboration to move to a higher level. Owing to the various challenges found, the study recommends the provision of school libraries and library resources, reduced excessive workload, employment of school librarians to manage the school libraries and creation of a network of school librarians to encourage collaboration.

Introduction

School libraries worldwide are exploring collaboration as a means to enhance their effectiveness in meeting the needs of their patrons. By collaborating, libraries can overcome budgetary constraints and provide services and resources that would otherwise be difficult to obtain (Kammer & Moreland, 2020). In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, school library collaboration has been utilized to promote students' inquiry and independent learning (Merga et al., 2021). Additionally, collaboration has been recognized as an effective strategy for increasing access to resources (AASL, 2019).

When school librarians collaborate with other members of the school community, it could lead to the design and updating of the school curriculum, the identification and evaluation of resources for content-area teaching, and the provision of professional development for content-area teachers (Massey, 2023). However, the experiences of school librarians in Nigeria regarding collaboration have not been adequately documented. Thus, it becomes imperative to research the state of collaboration in Nigerian school libraries for informed decisions.

Review of Literature

Collaboration in libraries has been identified as a solution to some challenges in meeting user needs. It's crucial for integrating information skills into the curriculum, leading to improved student learning outcomes (Greef, 2021). Collaboration allows schools to provide resources and services that enhance learning without extra costs (Leung & Chiu, 2020). This cooperation benefits librarians, students, teachers, and the entire school community. Stewart and O'niel Deans (2020) highlighted some areas where collaboration could take place between school librarians and teachers including lesson planning, curriculum integration and students' lesson evaluation. While emphasizing the need to view school librarians' and teachers' collaboration beyond explicit instruction, Merga et al. (2021) stated that teachers and school librarians could collaborate in planning and promoting an author-speaking event to foster the enjoyment of reading in students.

Moreover, Kammer et al. (2021) suggested co-teaching or supplementing an existing content-area lesson with library instruction as another means school librarians and teachers could collaborate. Meanwhile, Stewart and O'niel Deans (2020) averred that the school management's involvement in collaboration is important in achieving success as it provides the required enabling environment. Moreover, the value placed on libraries as an educational institution and on collaboration by the management determines the frequency and success of collaboration in any school (Greef, 2021; Merga et al., 2021). More so, school policy and curriculum are determined by the school management, thus making their input in collaboration essential.

Collaboration could be required between the school librarians and the management in setting the school policy and curriculum to make provision for effective collaboration. Stewart and O'niel Deans (2020) citing a previous study averred that true collaboration between teachers and school librarians depends greatly on the position of the administrator as they play a key role in facilitating teacher-school librarians' collaboration through enabling frequent communication between the two, integration of library programmes into the curriculum and facilitation of team planning. The crucial role of management in the collaboration programme also involves funding. Lack of funding is a potential source of crisis in collaboration, especially as support received from the school management could be instrumental to the librarian's collaboration with other professional colleagues in school and public libraries (Centerwall, 2022).

Unlike collaboration between school librarians and content area teachers which is basically for instructional purposes, Kammer and Moreland (2020) explained that school librarians collaborate as community partners for regular communication, cooperative programmes and collaborative projects. These programmes and projects are to enhance students' learning experience. In a study on collaboration between a school and public library during the Covid-19 pandemic, Thompson et al. (2023) reported using innovative technologies and programmes to promote creativity and learning, training students as library ambassadors, providing access to digital resources and establishing makerspace. These activities could be difficult to achieve for a library without a cooperative effort.

Interlibrary loans formed the focus of collaboration between school and public libraries in Hong Kong as reported by Leung and Chiu (2020). This could have been to ease the burden of funds which usually limits library resource acquisition. Whatever form collaboration takes between people

within the school and those outside of it, the crux of the matter is that it will be to the advantage of the pupils as it will enrich students' learning experience (Stewart & O'niel Deans, 2020). However, despite these benefits, collaboration has not been fully utilized to the advantage of library patrons, and many challenges have been identified as inhibitors.

Literature shows that the challenges vary by context, for instance, in Singapore, a content-area teacher without training in librarianship often manages the library, leaving little time for collaboration due to teaching responsibilities; in Hong Kong, it is the lack of understanding of the librarian role by the administrator and in Japan, teachers' lack of understanding of librarians' skills and expertise is what poses a barrier (Merga et al., 2021). Other challenges include the lack of communication and time (Kammer & Moreland, 2020); lack of understanding of the librarians' role, teachers' heavy workloads and lack of collaborative culture (Stewart & O'niel Deans, 2020). In addition to the lack of understanding of the role of a school librarian and library skills, burdened teacher workload was also reported by McPherson (2020) as impediments to collaboration.

There is a paucity of literature on school library collaboration in Nigeria, making it hard to track progress and plan for the future of school librarianship. African literature on library collaboration mainly focuses on public and institutional libraries. For instance, Dlamini et al. (2021) assessed collaboration in the development of curriculum for students of library studies between academic librarians working in a library and the lecturers; Nyoka (2019) examined collaboration in public libraries in Johannesburg; Ukaegbu and Okwu (2023) focused on universities in Nigeria. Although the study on collaboration in Nigerian libraries by Olaniyi and Olajo (2017) did not exclude school libraries, out of 144 participants of the study, only 3 are from school libraries, and this may not present enough information on collaboration in Nigerian school libraries. Similarly, the study by Rexwhite, Collence, and Tella (2020) also had universities as their focus.

While the challenges of collaboration in libraries vary across regions, as noted by Kammer and Moreland (2020), Merga et al. (2021), and Stewart and O'niel Deans (2020), addressing these issues requires collective effort. Merga et al. (2021) pointed out that although collaboration in school libraries has been well studied in the United States, Canada, and Australia, it is crucial to understand the situation in other regions to advocate for improvements effectively. One major challenge that could be responsible for the paucity of literature on collaboration in school libraries in Nigeria is the non-existence of functional school libraries in many schools. Uzuegbu and Ibiyemi (2013) in a case study of a school library in Nigeria reported that the school library was shut down for more than one year due to inadequate relevant resources and unemployment of trained personnel to manage the library.

The study reflects what is obtainable in many public schools in Nigeria as another study by Osuchukwu and Edewor (2016) reported that out of twelve government-owned primary and secondary schools in a community, only two have a space designated as a library. The studies show the inadequate attention given to basic education by the government, especially in the provision of school libraries. Despite the National Policy on Education clearly showing that every school should have a school library (Esan, 2022), many government-owned schools do not have one, indicating a failure on the part of the government to implement the policy. The failure makes it difficult to enforce the implementation of the policy on privately owned schools. Moreover, previous studies on school libraries in Nigeria have continually reported their poor state. One such study is Olajide

and Zinn (2020), citing previous studies itemized the problems militating against libraries' progress to include non-implementation of the National Policy on Education which stipulates that every school should have a functional school library.

Other problems mentioned include irrelevant library collection, poor staffing, and inadequate funding. Poor staffing as identified by Olajide and Zinn (2020) is a major problem that is common to all the existing school libraries in Nigeria. The authors reported that out of the 27 library personnel included in a study, only 3 have a Diploma in Librarianship, the largest number (25) has no training in librarianship. The absence of trained manpower in school libraries in Nigeria points to a major inadequacy as a qualified trained librarian is an important element that makes a school library what it should be (Adigun & Aramide, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Montiel-Overall's Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) Model (Montiel-Overall, 2017, as cited in Tikkinen & Korkeamäki, 2023). According to this model, collaboration is defined as "a trusting, working relationship between two or more participants engaged in shared thinking, planning, and creation of innovative integrated instruction. By establishing a shared vision and objectives, educators can create learning opportunities that combine subject content with library curriculum through co-planning, co-implementing, and co-evaluating students' progress throughout the instructional process, thereby enhancing student learning across all areas of the curriculum" (Montiel-Overall, 2017, as cited in Tikkinen & Korkeamäki, 2023, p. 733).

The model outlines four levels of collaboration: coordination, cooperation/partnership, integrated instruction, and integrated curriculum (Kammer et al., 2021). At the coordination level, participants exchange information and share time and resources. The cooperation/partnership level demands a higher level of commitment, where participants collaborate on gathering resources or engage in joint instruction. Integrated instructions involve teachers and school librarians working together to plan and create meaningful learning experiences, while integrated curriculum requires the full implementation of collaboratively developed instruction (Greef, 2021). The first two levels—coordination and cooperation/partnership—are considered lower levels of collaboration due to their lesser demands on time and commitment (D'Agata, 2016; Kammer et al., 2021).

Methodology

A survey design using the qualitative approach was employed in the study. The study was limited in scope to Ibadan as a metropolitan city with the highest number of local government areas in the country. The participants of the study include 15 school library personnel purposively selected from private and public schools with personnel designated as Library Officers (although many of them are content area teachers given the additional role of managing the library) in six (50%) out of the existing 11 local government areas of Ibadan, a metropolitan city in Southwestern Nigeria. The limitation in scope was also informed by the use of qualitative approach for data collection. Participants were selected from both public and private schools as preliminary study shows that the schools have similar characteristics in terms of library services provision and they are both regulated

by the government. Data was extracted from the participants through In-depth interview. Thematic analysis of data collected was done using Atlas ti 8.

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. In what areas do school librarians in Nigeria collaborate with teachers, school management and other school librarians?
2. What challenges do school librarians in Nigeria face in establishing and maintaining collaboration with teachers, school management and among school librarians?
3. How can collaboration be fostered between school librarians and teachers, school management and among school librarians in Nigeria?

Findings

Table 1. Demographic Information

S/N	Respondents	School type	Qualifications	State of the Libraries
1.	A	Public School	-----	Dilapidated
2.	B	Public School	-----	Dilapidated
3.	C	Public School	-----	Dilapidated
4.	D	Public School	-----	Dilapidated
5.	E	Public School	B.Ed./ no training in librarianship	In use
6.	F	Public School	NCE/no training in librarianship	In use
7.	I	Public School	Master in Library and Information Studies (MLIS)	Functional
8.	G	Private School	B.Sc. Library and Information Science	Functional
9.	H	Private School	NCE/no training in librarianship	In use
10.	J	Private School	Bachelor of Library and Information Studies (BLIS)	Functional
11.	K	Private School	NCE/ no training in librarianship	In use
12.	L	Private School	Master in Library and Information Studies (MLIS)	Functional
13.	M	Private School	Higher National Diploma (HND)	In use
14.	N	Private School	Master in School Media (MSM)	Functional

15	O	Private School	Postgraduate Diploma in English Language	In use
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Information in Table 1 shows that 7 (46.7%) respondents work in public schools (government-owned and managed) while 8 (53.3%) work in private schools. The information also indicates that 6 (85.7%) of the respondents from public schools and 4 (50%) from private schools have no training in librarianship. The information revealed that 4 (57.1%) of the school libraries in public schools are dilapidated and out of use, 2 (28.6%) are in use (not always open due to the absence of a trained librarian) and 1 (14.3) is functional (always opened and managed by a trained librarian). The information implies that librarians are not employed in many school libraries and that private schools employ more trained librarians than public schools.

School librarians' collaboration with teachers, school management and other school librarians

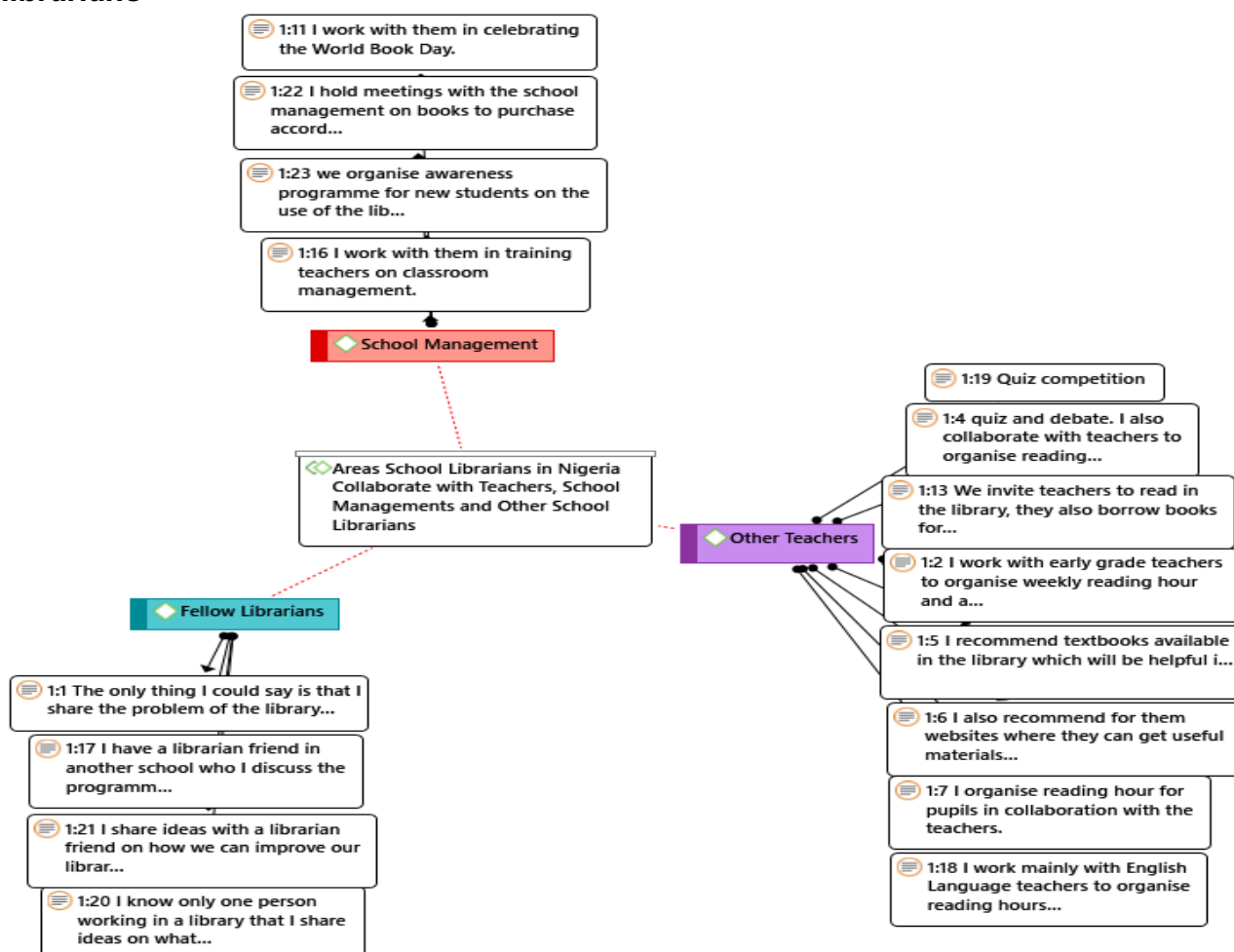


Figure 1: School librarians' collaboration with teachers, school management and other school librarians

Teachers: One of the most critical partnerships for Nigerian school librarians is with classroom teachers. A respondent stated that,

"I collaborate with teachers to organise reading hours for the pupils" (Interviewee 8).

"Quiz competition" (Interviewee 9) The interviewee acknowledged that he collaborates with teachers in organising quiz competitions for students. *"Quiz and debate"* (Interviewee 6) another interviewee responded that she collaborates with teachers in organising quizzes and debates for students.

Not many of the interviewee collaborates with teachers in planning and delivering the school curriculum, especially in getting appropriate resources that could be useful in aiding teaching and learning.

School Management: In addressing the areas librarians collaborate with school management, one of the respondents stated that

"I hold meetings with the school management on books to purchase according to the curriculum" (Interviewee 12).

Another respondent with a confused face stated,

"I work with them in celebrating the World Book Day" (Interviewee 3).

Elevating librarians' role could be difficult to achieve without adequate funding, the interviewee seems to neglect this aspect as none of them mention collaborating with management in the area of funding of their school libraries.

Fellow Librarians: librarians must forge strong partnerships with their peers in other schools. For instance, a respondent mentioned that,

"I know only one person working in a library that I share ideas on what I do in the library with and the person also shares her ideas with me" (Interviewee 5).

Another respondent said

"The only thing I could say is that I share the problem of the library with another person in charge of a library in another place" (Interviewee 6).

Additionally, another respondent was excited to say he shares a lot of ideas with his friend.

"I share ideas with a librarian friend on how we can improve our library programmes and activities" (Interviewee 3).

By sharing ideas, librarians can learn from one another and develop more robust, evidence-based programs through coordinating collection development and resource-sharing initiatives which helps to expand the breadth of materials available to students.

Challenges of school librarians in establishing and maintaining collaboration with teachers, school management and among school librarians

School librarians in Nigeria play a crucial role in supporting students' learning and academic achievement. However, they often face significant challenges in effectively collaborating with key stakeholders within the school system. Below is a graphical presentation of responses from respondents on the challenges school librarians in Nigeria face in collaborating with teachers, school management and other school librarians.

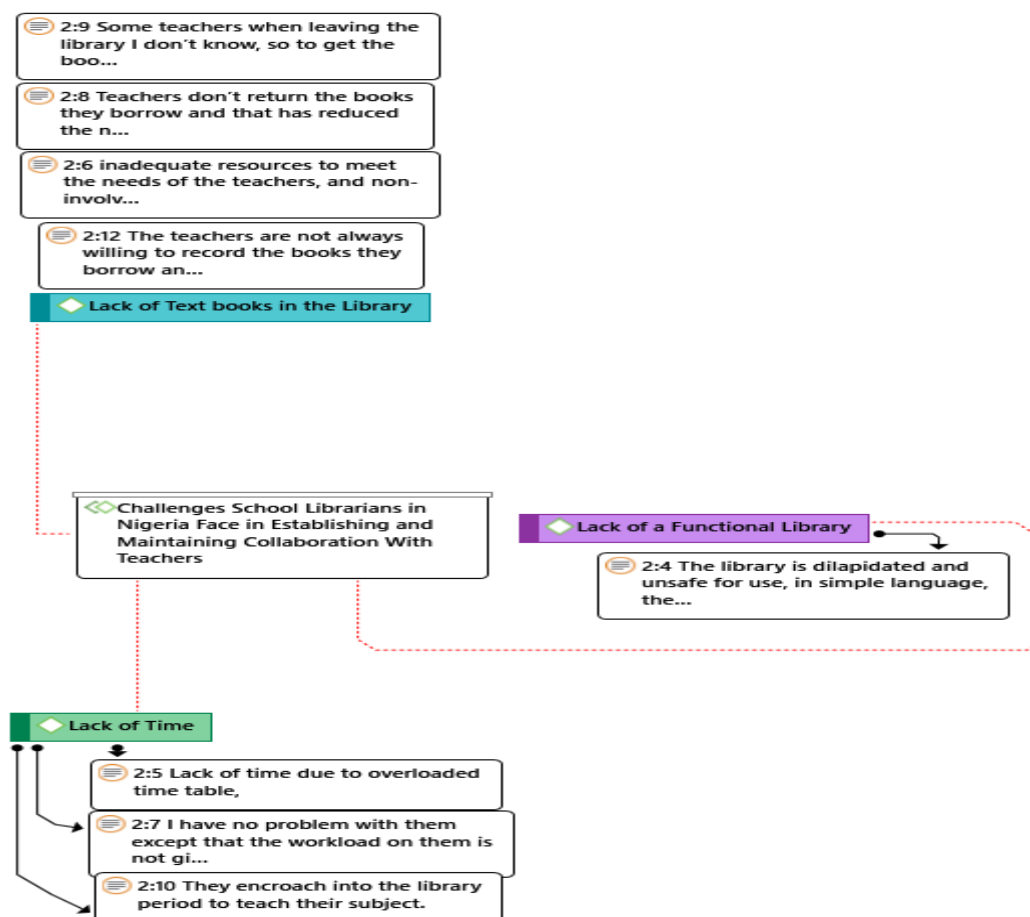


Figure 2: Challenges of school librarians in establishing and maintaining collaboration with teachers

Lack of Textbooks in the Library: A respondent was of the view that his major challenge with teachers is the lack of enough textbooks.

"There are not enough books in the library" (Interviewee 2).

Another respondent said,

"Teachers don't return the books they borrow, and that has reduced the number of books in the library" (Interviewee 5).

Lack of a Functional Library: Many schools do not have a well-stocked or functional library.

Lack of Time: Many teachers view librarians as competitors rather than collaborators in supporting student learning. This and the limited time for joint planning create significant barriers. A respondent complained bitterly of this fact.

“Lack of time due to overloaded timetable, inadequate resources to meet the needs of the teachers, and non-involvement of all the students in library hour on the timetable” (Interviewee 6).

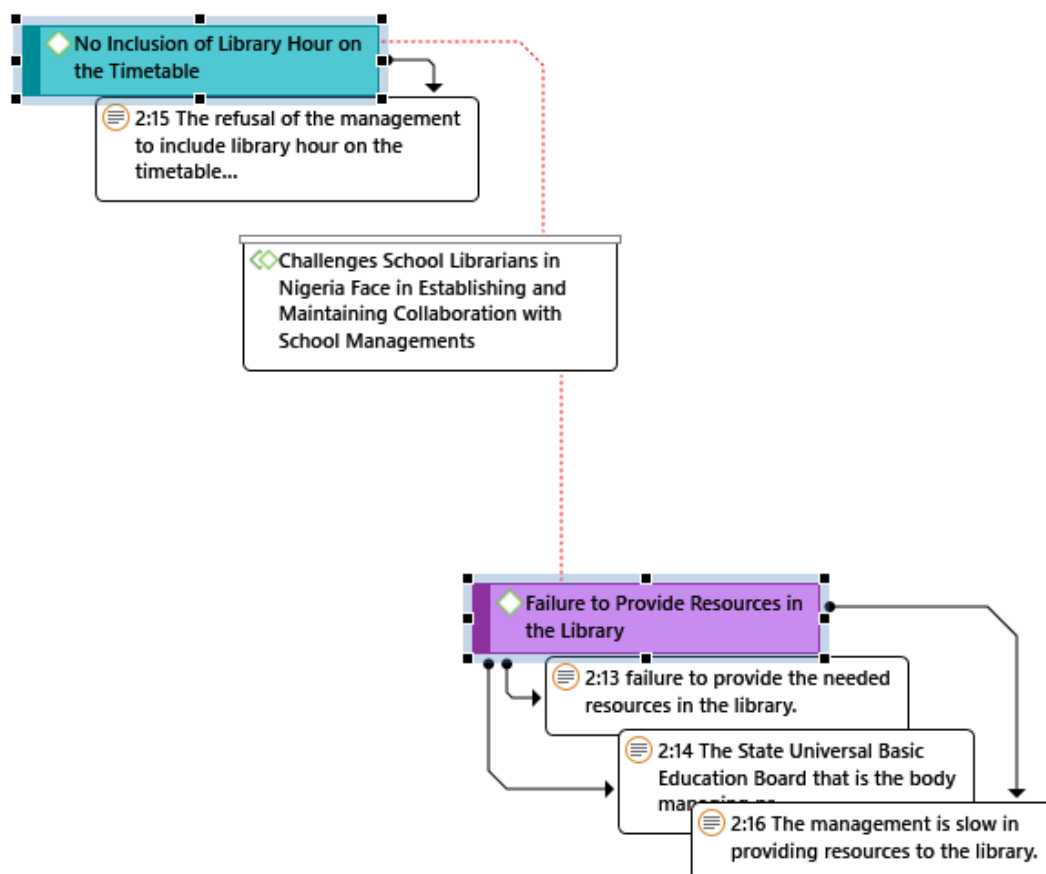


Figure 3: Challenges of school librarians in establishing and maintaining collaboration with school management

Failure to Provide Resources in The Library: One of the responses of the respondents as stated,

“They do not always respond to letters I write to them to request for library materials” (Interviewee 11).

Another respondent added that

“The State Universal Basic Education Board that is the body managing primary school has not done anything about the state of the library despite several reports made to them” (Interviewee 8).

Another respondent was of the view that the management is slow in providing resources to most libraries.

“The management is slow in providing resources to the library” (Interviewee 12).

Without the backing of school leadership, librarians struggle to obtain approval for new initiatives and integrate the library more deeply into the overall academic experience.

Non-inclusion of Library Hours on the Timetable: another respondent complained that:

“The refusal of the management to include library hour on the timetable” (Interviewee 3).

Overcoming these challenges with school management is a critical hurdle for Nigerian school librarians to clear.

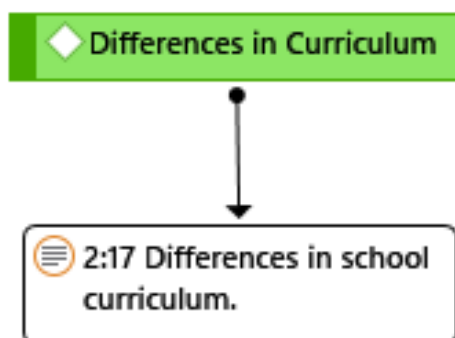


Figure 4: Challenges of school librarians in establishing and maintaining collaboration with fellow librarians

A respondent was of the view that his major challenge is with the difference in school curriculum which has made it difficult for a uniform approach in the way and manner the library should be coordinated.

“Differences in the school curriculum” (Interviewee 4).

This results in a lack of professional community, which further compounds the difficulties school librarians face.

Fostering or enhancing collaboration between school librarians and teachers, school management and school librarians

Below are some of the ways collaboration among teachers, school management and school librarians can be enhanced as suggested by the respondents.

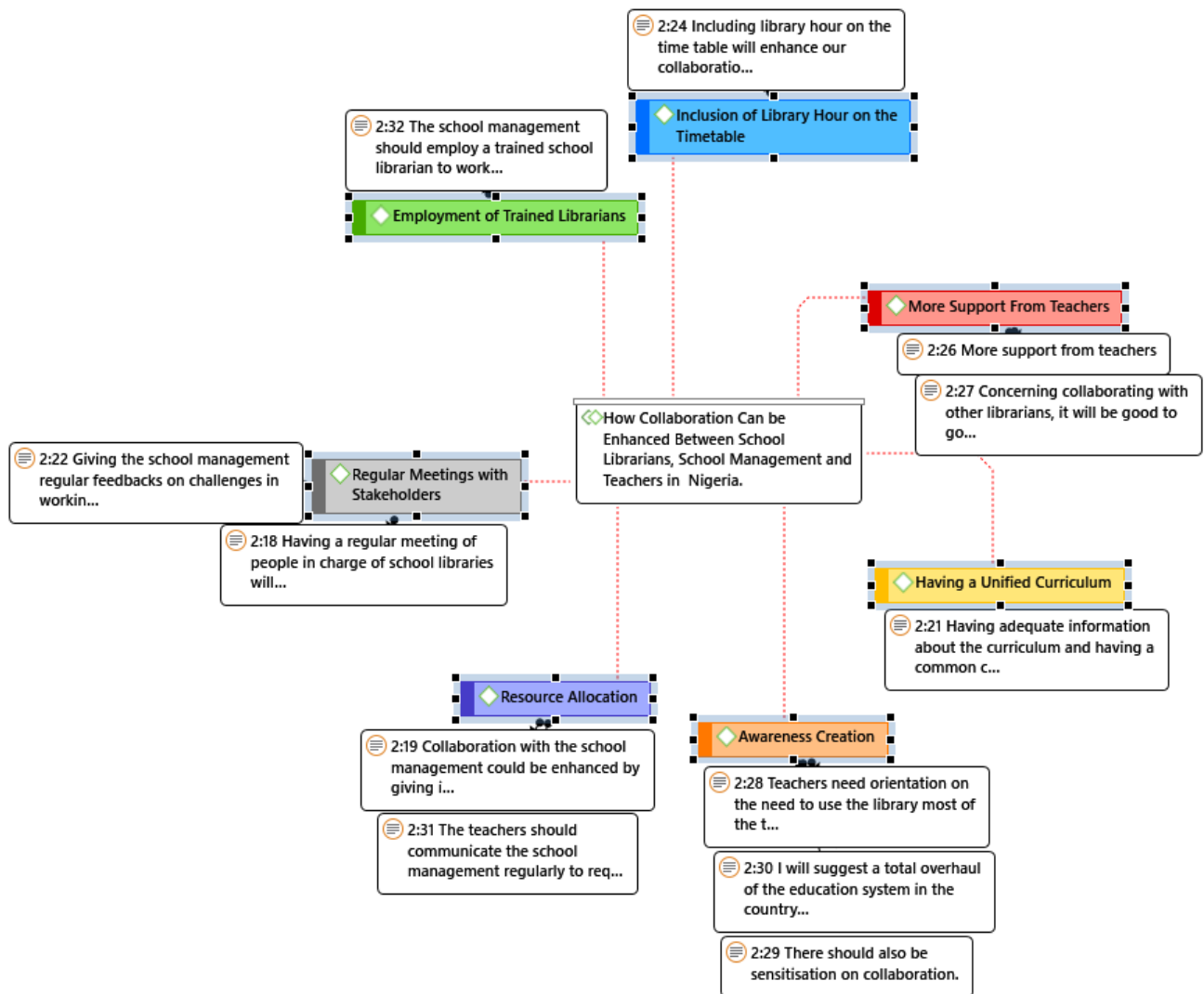


Figure 5: Enhancing collaboration between school librarians, school management and teachers

Inclusion of Library Hour on the Timetable: A respondent commented:

“Including library hours on the timetable will enhance our collaboration” (Interviewee 10).

More support from teachers: An interviewee said:

“More support from teachers” (Interviewee 11).

Having a Unified Curriculum:

“Having adequate information about the curriculum and having a common curriculum will enhance collaboration with other school librarians” (Interviewee 12).

Awareness Creation: Regular communication and advocacy efforts to inform teachers, administrators, and the broader school community about the library's resources and services can generate buy-in and support for collaborative initiatives.

"Teachers need orientation on the need to use the library most of the teachers don't use the library"
(Interviewee 13).

Resource availability: according to one of the respondents ensuring the availability of adequate resources for the library is crucial to enable effective collaboration

"The teachers should communicate with the school management regularly to request for the needed resources that will help them in curriculum delivery" (Interviewee 15).

Providing the library with sufficient funding, materials, and technology can empower the librarian to offer high-quality resources and services that meet the needs of teachers and students.

Regular meetings with Stakeholders: Scheduled meetings will allow for the exchange of ideas, the identification of shared goals, and the development of collaborative action plans to integrate the library into the school's educational ecosystem.

"Giving the school management regular feedback on challenges in working with teachers could be useful" (Interviewee 9).

Employment of Trained Librarians: as suggested by a respondent, employment of trained librarians can enhance the library's capacity to collaborate effectively

"The school management should employ a trained school librarian to work in the library"
(Interviewee 15).

Results and Discussion

Background Information

The study found that many school libraries in Nigeria, especially in public schools, are in poor condition, dilapidated and unsafe. Additionally, existing school libraries lack trained librarians; thus, students can only access the library when the staffs in charge, usually overburdened content area teachers, are available. These teachers' lack of training in school librarianship further hinders collaboration, as they lack the requisite knowledge and experience.

Collaboration with teachers

Based on the findings, librarians' collaboration with teachers excluded to a great extent planning and implementing the curriculum. Indicating that the school librarians collaborate in reading-related activities excluding areas such as co-teaching or supplementing an existing content-area lesson with library instruction (Kammer et al., 2021); co-planning, co-implementing, and co-evaluating students' progress throughout the instructional process to improve student learning in all areas of the curriculum (Greef, 2021); planning and promoting author speaking events as well as collaborating to enhance students' use of library resources (Merga et al., 2021) were not fully explored by the school librarians. As revealed, collaboration in the libraries is on the lower levels of coordination and cooperation/partnership based on the Montiel-Overall's Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) Model (Montiel-Overall, 2017, as cited in Tikkinen & Korkeamaki, 2023)

adopted for the study. This implies that the students are not deriving the benefits derivable from school librarians-teacher collaboration.

Collaboration with school management

The findings of the study depict a low commitment to collaboration on the part of the management as revealed in the poor state of many of the libraries, especially the public-owned. Another evidence of the poor commitment of the management is the failure of many of the school managements to employ trained librarians to manage the school libraries. Collaboration is hampered because many of the personnel lack the requisite knowledge.

The study established collaboration in determining library acquisition and marking special days to encourage reading; the creation of awareness on the use of the library and training of teachers on classroom management. However, one important area where the school librarians did not explore collaboration with the management is in providing an enabling environment that encourages collaboration. The enabling environment could imply a less burdensome curriculum workload and friendly school policy identified by Kammer et al., (2021). The findings also indicate that the school librarians do not collaborate with the management on funding, an area identified by Centerwall (2022) to constitute a problem for collaboration among librarians.

Collaboration with fellow librarians

The findings of the study indicate the absence of a network of librarians that could collaborate; the only semblance of collaboration found is between friends who are school librarians. Consequently, regular communication, cooperative programmes and collaborative projects that collaboration should entail as reported by Kammer and Moreland (2020) are not taking place. The study also indicates that collaboration with other librarians excluded technology integration or collaborative project which is an aspect of collaboration considered by Thompson et al. (2023) as instrumental to the promotion of creativity and learning among students. One of the focuses of inter-library collaboration is interlibrary loan according to Leung and Chiu (2020) however, none of the interviewees reported any form of collaboration in this regard.

Challenges in establishing and maintaining collaboration

In addition to the dilapidated and non-existence of school libraries in many schools, as revealed in the background information, another major challenge found in the study to inhibit collaboration in Nigeria is inadequate library resources, the non-functional state of many existing libraries and the absence of professional librarian in many of the schools thus substantiates the study by Merga et al. (2021). Lack of time occasioned by an overburdened timetable was also found in the study as a major challenge to collaboration, thus substantiating an earlier study by Kammer et al. (2021) and Stewart and O'niel Deans (2020).

The study further found the non-responsiveness of school administrators in providing the needed resources to the library as another impediment. This could have been borne out of the lack of collaborative culture as earlier submitted by Stewart and O'niel Deans (2020). Based on the findings of the study, differences in school curriculum pose a challenge to collaboration among

school librarians. This is usually peculiar to private schools as many of them design their curriculum to suit the policy of the school which in many instances differs from one school to another.

How collaboration could be enhanced

To enhance collaboration in school libraries, the findings of the study suggested the inclusion of library hours on the timetable to allow the school librarian to design programmes and activities in collaboration with teachers. The study also found that receiving more support from teachers in resource use and integrating library resources into curriculum delivery will further strengthen teachers' and school librarians' collaboration thus supporting the report of the study by McPherson (2020) that unsupportive staff inhibits the successful functioning of the school librarian.

Meanwhile, having cooperative teachers could be the starting point for establishing the much-required collaboration culture in schools especially as the study by Kammer and Moreland (2020) has earlier indicated that successful collaboration depends on the attitude of the people involved. Moreover, as differences in curriculum was found as a major impediment to collaboration, the finding of the study shows that having a unified curriculum could close the existing gap between school librarians in different schools to achieve success in collaboration.

The finding revealed that the availability of resources would increase teachers' consultation of resources in the library thus improving collaboration. This affirms the study by McPherson (2020) which emphasized the essential role library resources play in the collaborative process. The study found that meeting regularly with teachers, school administrators and fellow librarians has the potential to further strengthen collaboration. The meeting will allow all involved to brainstorm and come up with strategies that could be useful in breaking the barriers to collaboration.

Conclusion

This study reported the perspective of school librarians in Nigeria on collaboration in school libraries and concluded that there are inadequate professional librarians to engage in collaboration in school libraries in Nigeria. It also established the non-existence of school libraries as a major impediment to establishing collaborative activities and programmes. Based on the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model (Montiel-Overall, 2017, as cited in Tikkinen & Korkeamaki, 2023) adopted in the study, the finding shows collaboration in school libraries in Nigeria on the lower levels of coordination and cooperation/partnership. Thus, indicating a need for more commitment and time for collaboration to move to a higher level. In summary, owing to the various challenges found, it is concluded that school librarians in Nigeria are yet to fully engage in collaborative activities, thus widening the existing gap of progress in school librarianship in Nigeria and other developed countries.

Implications

The research has added to the body of knowledge on collaboration in school librarianship. The research could stir further discussion on collaboration in school libraries in Africa as many of the previous researchers from the continent focused on collaboration in institutions and public libraries.

In addition, the research has also revealed that progress has not been made in the provision of quality education in Nigeria due to the non-existence of school libraries. Consequently, this could attract the United Nations to engage the government on the need to establish school libraries. The reason is that the continual non-existence of school libraries could be detrimental to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, n.d.) which is the goal of quality education for all by 2030.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, there should be a deliberate effort by the government to rebuild the dilapidated school libraries and construct new ones in schools where none exists. As the regulator of education, the government should ensure that all private schools provide well-equipped libraries. Going further, there should be a deliberate employment of trained library professionals to oversee the activities and programmes of school libraries in all basic and post-basic schools in Nigeria. To further encourage collaboration, school administrators should create an enabling environment by showing a positive attitude to and supporting the process. Since teachers' workload is a major constraint, the school administrators should review the timetable to reduce the burden of workload on teachers and also include library periods on the timetable. It is further recommended that teachers should engage the school librarians in other curricular activities beyond reading-related activities.

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