

Building Libraries for The Promotion of Environmental Education

Dr Mbalisi, Onyeka Festus¹ & Dr Juliet Alex-Nmecha²

¹Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt

²Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

The environment has been erroneously perceived as a god's-given resource to be explored and exploited for production of goods and services necessary for the satisfaction of human needs and comfort. This perception inspired man to engage in breath-taking explorations into the huge vaults of the heavens with ozone layer depletion, green house effect as consequences resulting to global warming, climate change, loss of biodiversity on one hand and pollution, deforestation, flooding, draught, famine, flood, extreme weather events on the other hand, as global catastrophic threats to human kind. These problems have become a major concern of the international community who has called for a new type of education for a better understanding of the complexity of the problems of the environment as well as for effective management of environmental resources. This type of education is referred to as environmental education. This paper explored the library as a medium for the dissemination of knowledge of the environment and its problems. It explored various ways through which knowledge of environmental problems and their prevention is promoted through the instrumentality of the library. It concludes that library as a reservoir of knowledge should be equipped with materials containing information on environmental problems and as well as be made accessible to all humans in every part of the globe.

Keywords: Environment, Environmental Education, Environment Problem, Library

Introduction

The environment as erroneously perceived as an object meant for humans to subdue to achieve maximum comfort led its mindless exploitation to produce goods and services to satisfy human needs, interests, aspirations, etc in every aspect of human life. There is no doubt that great feats have been achieved in various human endeavour to aid human growth and development as a result of conquering perceived barriers allegedly posed by the environment. For instance, in transportation, aeroplanes, ships, various types of vehicles have been manufactured to convey peoples, goods and services from one point to another even across countries and continents. Heavy duty equipment, tractors, chemical fertilizers and pesticides are produced to aid mass production of foods to feed ever-increasing global population. Domestic wares (air conditioners, televisions, gas cookers, furniture, etc), personal care products (cloths, perfumes, creams, hair relaxers, etc) chemicals (paints, pesticides, etc) and foods (especially processed) have been produced to satisfy different needs of humans. Fossil fuels (coal, crude oil and natural gas) and their by-products have been also discovered to be the fulcrum upon which every human activity revolve. Fossil fuels are used to power every mechanical and electrical/electronic equipment/ device required to achieve human comfort. Permit us to succinctly assert that global economy is powered by fossil fuels.

It would be interesting to note that all these feats were celebrated at various times in which they were achieved with a sigh of relief heaved believing that barriers limiting human growth, development, advancement and comfort have been conquered. But this is not the case as Akinpelu (2002) identifies a paradox associated with the conquering of natural environmental obstacles through the refinement and sharpening of human intelligence and skills. According to him, the paradox is that "as man solves one problem with his newly refined intelligence, new and more intricate problems arise from the acclaimed solution, calling for a greater need of intelligence". Unintended issues and problems which have arisen over

the years as a result of man's creativities, innovations, discoveries targeted toward bettering human being include global warming and climate change, pollution, biodiversity extinction, extreme weather events (such as hurricane, cyclone, drought, tornado, flooding, etc), deforestation, pestilence, to mention but a few. These issues and problems also have their deleterious multiplier effects which weigh heavily on humanity

Efforts toward solving these problems have occupy a front burner in many global discourses since 1972 owing to their lethal effects on humanity. The global efforts started with a series of conferences and workshops which started in Sweden in 1972 up to 2021 World Conference on Education for sustainable development which took place in Berlin, Germany. These meetings and others came up with recommendations and declarations containing principles, actions and practices required for a harmonious relationship, interdependence and interactions between humans and nature. Common in all the recommendations and declarations is the recognition of education as a fundamental tool for achieving this harmonious relationship.

It is expected that with this recognition, every citizen in every nation should have been expected to have acquired knowledge concerning the environment and its problems as well as on how to interact successfully and sustainably with the environment without degrading it. It is disheartening to observe that majority of the population of the world lacks the knowledge and awareness of the environment, its associated problems, and actions required to be taken toward safeguarding the environment. Many are not also aware of the existence of such recommendations and principles and action strategies embedded in them. These observations necessitate the need to build libraries at various locations that would be within the reach of the general public for effective dissemination of knowledge of the environment and the impending dangers unsustainable interactions of humans portend to both environmental quality and quality of human well-being.

Concept of Library

Libraries all over the world are knowledge hubs. The knowledge that the library disseminates is not limited to a subject rather it represents vast area of knowledge. Tiwari (2013) is of the view that the library is a repository of knowledge and as such is seen as a place, a palace where the lofty spirits of all nations and generations meet. They do not meet for the fun of it rather to research, learn and relearn in order to solve problems not only on academics also on societal disturbances (Niger, n.d). The library according to Sukula (2016) is an information and learning center since the ancient times and it has played unique roles such as making use of library services in building green collections, information services based personal contact. Interaction through, digital interfaces, innovative informative programmes, library education and orientation services. To, Omeluzor and Omeluzor (2017), library is a place for knowledge creation and sharing. They further added that library is a store house for knowledge in different format either in print or non-print, the last recourse for information accessibility, use and dissemination.

In terms of a drive for the betterment of the society, the library is an information provider towards achieving a course by the collections housed in it and the advocate for a sustainable environment free from endangered vices. It is not farfetched the role the libraries have played in environmental education to better the life of the people and the society where they live in. Libraries have been concerned about the environment and the happenings around it, its education, waste, and various emissions from the appliances people use at home, offices, and in business areas like the industries. Information materials on both prints and non-prints are acquired, catalogued, and classified in the libraries for easy retrieval by the users. These materials which includes information resources on environmental education are of no small measures owing to the fact that many daily activities such as using electricity, driving a car that smokes, or disposing of waste cause greenhouse gas emissions unknowingly to quite a number of people.

The Environment as a Concept

The environment is conceived by different stakeholders (scientists, scholars, activists, social commentators, politicians, industrialists, philosophers, common man) to mean different things. To some, the environment is a resource with instrumental value to be harnessed to satisfy human needs and achieve comfort, while some view the environment as a being with life and moral/intrinsic value that should be given moral consideration/attention for its own sake. Environment as a concept is derived from the French word “*environer*,” which means encircle or surrounding. As a result, environment can be seen to mean a complex of many variables, which surrounds man as well as the living organisms (Saminathan, 2016). To Nigeria (2016), environment is a complex and interactive system consisting of the atmosphere, land surface and bodies of water, as well as living things. Bharucha (2004) sees the environment as everything around us upon which our life depends including water, air, biosphere (community of living plants, animals and human beings) and resources. Mbalisi (2010) sees it “as a broad and comprehensive term denoting all that surrounds human – air, water, soil, light, plants, animals and human beings themselves”. According to Oduro-Mensah (1992), the environment is made up of all external forces and circumstances that a person interacts with from conception until death. He claims that this comprises the individual’s physical, chemical, biological, psychological, sociocultural, and other aspects as well as the environment in which they live. Sharma (2009:6) defines environment as the “sum of all external factors (forces, substance or condition) which surround and affect the life of organisms in any way”. The environment in the view of Passmore (2007) is anything which affects the capacity of organisms to survive, to reproduce and to flourish while Kelly and Kelly (2007) see the environment as constituting anything we eat, put into our bodies and anything we put into the very things that make our lives possible. Kerry and Kerry (2007:21) went further to argue about the environment as follows:

The environment is not just the context in which people exist, or a passive backdrop to our lives, the environment, as the term has value to our survival, is the conditioner of life itself – our skin that is neatly woven into every facet of our lives. The environment is our homes, our bodies and ultimately, our health and choices we make. The decisions we make throughout the day are all part of this, from the cars we drive, to the food we eat, to the products we use. In other words, the environment is not something outside of ourselves.

According to UNESCO (1990), the environment is the culmination of all circumstances and factors (physical, biological, social, and cultural) that have an impact on the growth and survival of creatures on this planet. It is a dynamic system in which the many subsystems are always interacting with one another and changing.

Environmental Education

Environmental education has been viewed by different stakeholders from different perspectives as a product, philosophy and approach for educating the public about the world we live in, about what we are doing to harm the world and about what we can do to save it (Berry, 1978). Viewing the concept as a science about the earth and its daily activities, Saminathan (2016) posits that environmental education describes the interrelationships among organisms, the food chains, the water cycle, etc. According to this view, environmental education is seen by Stapp, Harvick, Wall, Swan, Nowak, MacGregor, Fulton Bryan, and Benneth (1969) as an educational strategy that successfully teaches man about his relationship to the entire environment. They claim it is an educational strategy intended to create a global citizen who is informed about the environment and the issues it raises, aware of how to contribute to the solution of these issues, and motivated to do so. The process of environmental education involves identifying values and delineating ideas in order to foster the attitudes and skills needed to comprehend and value the interdependence of man, his culture, and his biophysical surroundings. Additionally, environmental

education involves developing one's own code of conduct regarding environmental quality issues and practising making decisions (IUCN in Palmer & Neal, 1994).

Palmer and Neal (1994) went further to define environmental education as education about, for and from the environment thus:

1. Education about the environment (basic knowledge and understanding) has the purpose of developing knowledge and understanding about values and attitudes concerning the environment).
2. Education for the environment (concerned with values, attitudes and positive action for the environment) encourages pupils to explore their personal response to and relationship with the environment and environmental issues. This is linked to the development of attitudes and values, including elements of human understanding and behaviour necessary for the development of sustainable and caring use of the environment.
3. Education from or in or through the environment uses the environment as a resource for learning. It is a resource which enables the development of a great deal of knowledge and understanding as well as skills of investigation and communication.

Environmental education is defined by Smyth (2006) as concerted attempts to spread knowledge about how natural environments work, particularly how people may control their behaviour and ecosystems to lead sustainably. All initiatives to inform the public and other audiences about the environment are considered environmental education, and include print materials, websites, public relations campaigns, etc (Sesen, 2015). Environmental education is the process of educating people about environmental issues with the goal of fostering the information, attitude, skills, dedication, and motivations necessary to address the issues.

Objectives of Environmental Education

The goal of environmental education as enshrined in the Belgrade Charter of 1975 according to UNESCO (1975:3), is:

To develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solution of current problems and the prevention of new ones.

This goal was later modified in the Tbilisi Declaration of 1977 according to UNESCO (1994:1) as:

To aid citizens in becoming environmentally knowledgeable and above all, skilled and dedicated human beings, willing to work individually and collectively toward achieving and maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between quality of life and quality of the environment.

The objectives of environmental education according to Stapp et al (1969) are to develop:

1. a clear understanding that man is an inseparable part of a system, consisting of man, culture, and the biophysical environment, and that man has the ability to alter the interrelationships of this system;
2. a broad understanding of the biophysical environment, both natural and man-made and its role in the contemporary society;
3. a fundamental understanding of the biophysical environmental problems confronting man, how these problems can be solved, and the responsibility of citizens and government to work toward their solution; and
4. attitudes of concern for the quality of the biophysical environment which will motivate citizens to participate in biophysical environmental problem-solving.

The Belgrade Charter of 1975 and Tbilisi Declaration of 1977, according to UNESCO (1986) identified the

objectives of EE to include:

1. to help individuals and social groups acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems;
2. to help individuals and social groups acquire basic understanding of the environment, its associated problems and humanity's critically responsible presence and role in it;
3. to help individuals and social groups acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in its protection and improvement;
4. to help individuals and social groups acquire the skills for solving environmental problems;
5. to help individuals and social groups evaluate environmental measures and education programmes in terms of ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and educational factors; and
6. to help individuals and social groups develop a sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental problems so as to ensure appropriate action to solve these problems.

The objectives as specified above ascertain the achievement of targets which environmental education is set to achieve which include among others:

1. provision of factual information which will lead to understanding of the total environment;
2. development of a concern for environmental quality which will motivate citizens to work toward solutions to environmental problems; and
3. informing citizens as to how they can play an effective role in achieving the ultimate goal of environmental education which is development and maintenance of a high-quality system in which man interacts with the environment to advance human welfare.

Needs for Environmental Education

The need for environmental education arises from the following three reasons:

1. the need for information that clarifies modern environmental concepts such as the need to conserve biodiversity, the need to lead more sustainable lifestyles and the need to use resources more equitably.
2. the need to change the way in which we view our own environment by a practical approach based on observation and self-learning.
3. the need to create a concern for our environment that will trigger pro-environmental action, including activities we can do in our daily life to protect it.

The achievement of the goal, objectives and targets of environmental education could be facilitated through the use of the library.

Library and Environmental Education

According to the Stockholm Declaration of 1972 and the Belgrade Charter of 1975, the "general public" was the target audience for environmental education. Environmental education should take place in formal, non-formal, and informal settings, according to the two Declarations. The "general public" (audience) was divided into two categories in the Belgrade Charter as follows:

1. people who are enrolled in formal education, which includes students in early childhood, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions as well as teachers and environmental professionals undergoing training or retraining; and

2. individuals who operate in the non-formal education sector, which includes children and adults from all social groups such as families, employees, managers, and decision-makers in non-formal as well as environmental domains.

Since man (members of the public) is at the centre of the interaction with the environment through the use technology, which has been held accountable for numerous environmental crises experienced in the world today, there is need to educate the general public on the impact of their activities on the environment. Every category of the audience can be easily reached through the use of the library as information concerning the environment is deposited in various forms are stacked in the libraries. The library assists in the dissemination of information and knowledge about the environment developed through scientific researches to the general public. It would be worthy of note that such knowledge would not be of any use if it does not get to the reach of the people who would utilize it for the preservation of environmental quality.

This is the reason every global gathering on environmental education calls for the establishment of resource centres through which information about the environment and its associated problems could be disseminated to the people with the intention of inculcating in them appropriate knowledge and attitudes that could lead to change in their behaviour toward the environment. Nigeria, in its National Policy on Environment (2016) proposes the establishment of environmental education resource centre as one of its policy strategies for educating her citizens on environmental issues and problems as well as probable solutions to the problems as an attempt toward safeguarding the environment and its resources, hence the need for library as one of the environmental education resource centres. The building of collections of environmental materials in the libraries is for the assistance and studies covering the environment ranging from our offices, markets, which includes shops and our homes where materials such as bringing clean energy home, household waste disposal, 'how a focus on nature is changing', climate solutions at work, nature is medicine but what is the right dose? Should you exercise outside in air pollution (soot darkening daily?), threats from the toxics from the industries etc. are developed and deposited.

A special section in the library can be created where materials such as books and magazines dealing with focus on the environment can be kept. In order to reach a wide audience that can no longer be reached solely by printed materials, the modern library houses a variety of information, both printed and audio-visual. A book may not have the same lasting impact because it is more abstract, especially for those who do not enjoy reading.

Audio-visual materials such as films teach about environmental awareness and action not just by sharing topic films, but by reducing waste and recycling, offsetting carbon emissions, etc. They also encourage environmental documentaries on contemporary environmental issues. In the western world, film industries act these environmental films during festivals and make sure they are recorded, kept, and preserved in the libraries. The Environmental Film Festival (EFF), the largest exhibition of environmental film in the United States, is a prime example. Through the medium of cinema, the Environmental Film Festival (EFF) aims to increase public awareness of environmental issues. The library did not just stop in the preservation and collection of these important materials, they also compile and keep ready a list of environmental film festivals for producers and as a great resource for who may be interested to read about the happenings in the environment acted through films (Hazelwood, n.d).

Visual aids are also highly powerful teaching aids for environmental values. Although the saying "one image is worth a thousand words" may be overstated, Armstrong (1971) contends that there is no better way for an audience to understand the difference between a beautiful natural setting and one that is crowded or polluted. Visual materials can be pasted or fixed in roll-up stands as well as projected with in-focus at strategic places to draw the attention of the library users on environmental issues plaguing the world today. Visual materials such as posters and placards can have inscriptions like: Stop purchasing chemicals that

contain carcinogens. These are chemicals that are dangerous to human health and an agent with the capacity to cause cancer in humans. Other inscriptions could be – use recycled products where feasible, do not drop poly bags anyhow because they do not decompose for many years.

Conclusion

The library is the fulcrum from which the whole wheel turns as well as the catalyst which gets educators and learners focused on the environment (Armstrong, 1971). Therefore, libraries have to be built within the reach of people in every state, local government areas, communities or electoral wards and equipped with relevant materials that would enable it achieve its purpose. As information and knowledge managers, libraries are committed to environmental education and the development of a global population that is aware of, concerned about, and equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and commitment necessary to work both individually and collectively towards the resolution of current issues and the avertance of future ones.

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Appendix One



