Using libraries in Nigeria as tools for education and national development in the 21st century

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Introduction

Education is an instrument par excellence for national development. It involves the development of the whole person intellectually, psychologically, socially, vocationally, religiously or morally. This is the reason why education is seen as an integral part of national development. Education is a process through which people are formally and informally trained to acquire knowledge and skills. The formal training comes from established schools from the basic level to the tertiary level.

Through this process of education, people are expected to obtain knowledge and skills and hence specialize in specific fields of study. It is this knowledge that allows people to contribute meaningfully to national development (Umar, 2004). National development involves economic growth, modernization, equitable distribution of income and national resources and socio-economic transformation for improved living standards of people through the use of a country’s human, natural and institutional resources (Aboyade, 1984; Brooks, 1990; Mohammed, 1996).

The greatest resource for development is the human resource hence no nation can develop in isolation of her human resources. The level and quality of occupational participation and productivity of a populace are important contributory factors to the level of economic and overall development of any nation. It is therefore important that at all levels of education, high calibre people be graduated so that they can give quality contributions to national development in all spheres of life. The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources that empowers the educational institutions to produce highly resourceful people to impact positively on national development.

We are in the 21st century, an age that is powered by information in all its ramifications. It is the age of information explosion in which the internet and its associated technologies are being used to take advantage of the immense knowledge of man all over the globe for the benefit of the accelerated development of society. It is the information society. Consequently, it is only a nation which is conscious of the importance of libraries and information in the drive towards the accelerated development of a nation that can survive and thrive in the comity of nations of this age.

According to Opeke (2004), information has received a widespread acceptance as the essential feature of production, consumption and exchange in this modern era. The world has entered an era where the source of wealth and power is increasingly from information and human mental creativity as compared to physical resources. The concept of an information society implies awareness that there is a process of “intellectualism” in modern societies which requires increasing number of people to possess a stock of knowledge enabling them to make creative use of the enormous potential of information. (Eraut, 1991).
As a result of the information society, organizations are changing and so also are the skills needed to run them and the way they utilize human capital (Opeke, 2004). It is this human capital that must be developed in our educational institutions at all levels through the use of libraries well stocked with up-to-date and relevant books including electronic libraries through which they can acquire the skills needed to access, distil and utilize information for development processes. Such people would possess the know how to access knowledge quickly and from increasingly distant locations to positively influence accelerated national development from all walks of life.

Libraries are at the centre of the academic excellence of all educational institutions providing all the relevant information resources necessary for sustaining the teaching, learning and research functions of these institutions. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of these educational institutions in producing high quality graduates into the labour market depend largely on the quality of information resources available in their libraries to support the teaching, learning and research activities.

This paper will focus on the role of libraries in education and national development, the state of development of resources and facilities in most libraries in Nigeria and the types of libraries required for education and national development in Nigeria in the 21st century.

**Role Of Libraries In Education And National Development**

The realization of the enormous power of information has made libraries and information resource centres inevitably present in all sectors of a nation's economy. Hence today, libraries are found in all the three levels of our educational system including public libraries, research institutions and private organizations such as banks, insurance companies, etc. (Umar, 2004). Libraries have always served as tools for educational advancement at all levels of education (Akintunde, 2004). This is because libraries contain information which is a vital tool for the pursuit of academic excellence at all levels of education.

**School Libraries**

In Nigeria, libraries at the primary and secondary school levels have been found to be tools for all round development of the child, it is the intellectual centre of the school. Ibrahim, (1997), sees the school library as a place in the primary and secondary schools where a full range of materials and accompanying services are accessible to both teachers and students. It represents the unified programme involving the use of audio-visual, printed resources and tools necessary to satisfy the educational needs and recreational interests of pupils, students and their teachers. This include a variety of information resources such as textbooks, journals, reference books, multimedia, etc selected systematically, organized and disseminated to pupils, students and teachers with the sole aim of supporting and enriching the school curriculum (Umar, 2004).

The federal government of Nigeria knows the importance of libraries to educational development, hence as far back as 1981, it stressed the need for school libraries in the Nigerian educational system in the national policy of Education and reiterated this further in the revised National Policy of Education, (1998) as follows:
“As libraries are one of the most important educational services, proprietors of schools shall provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions in accordance with the established standards. They shall also provide for training librarians and library assistants for this service.”

**Academic and Research Libraries**

In tertiary institutions of learning which include colleges of education, polytechnics, universities, research institutes, libraries have been the centre of intellectual activities, a convergence for both staff and students. According to Akintunde (2004), the libraries in many tertiary institutions have either earned the institutions accreditation or failed them because libraries are regarded as tools for academic excellence. The libraries in the tertiary institutions assist them in the discharge of their functions by acquiring all the varied and relevant indepth information resources necessary for pursuing the teaching, learning research and public services functions of these institutions which enable them to produce high caliber graduates into the labour market to further national development. Thus the academic institutions play a major role in the manpower development of any nation providing the high as well as middle level manpower for the acceleration of social, economic and political advancement of a nation. According to Edoka (2000), the general functions of academic libraries are as follows:

- To provide information materials required for the academic programmes of the parent institution.
- To provide research information resources in consonance with the needs of faculty and research students.
- To provide information resources for recreation and for personal self-development of users.
- To provide study accommodation in a useful variety of locations.
- To provide protection and security for these materials.
- To co-operate with other libraries at appropriate levels for improved information services
- To provide specialized information service to appropriate segments of the wider community.

**National and Public Libraries**

The public library is an organization established, supported and funded by the community either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of imagination through a wide range of resources and services, making it available equally to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. (IFLA Publications, 1997). Specifically, Wheeler and Goldhor (1962) shed more light on the primary purposes of the public library as follows:

- Enable informal education opportunities for the citizens in the community.
- Enrich the knowledge of individuals in various subject disciplines where they undertake formal education;
• Provide avenues to meet the information needs of people;
• Support the educational, civic and cultural activities of groups and organizations;
• Provide recreational opportunities and encourage constructive use of leisure time.

National and public libraries are regarded as the people’s university being the local gateway to knowledge, providing opportunities for life long learning, independent decision making and cultural development of individual and social groups (Oyegade, Nasarawa and Mokogwu, 2003). The public library is a world wide phenomenon. It attempts to meet a wide variety of readers needs, providing varied information resources such as text books, journals, literary books, etc. The collections also contain information on social sciences, reference work; recreational information and extension services. In this way, the public library functions as a ready source of information on all activities in all walks of life for people to take advantage of in decision making for development activities and for educational advancement.

Special Libraries
Special libraries are libraries established in governmental and private institutions to help manage information resources for the benefit of workers and the institution so that the goals of these special libraries can be attained. Special libraries can be grouped into the following categories: private educational institutions, inter-national organizations, foreign governments, in the governmental and professional associations, etc. (Ajibero, 2001). Special libraries contribute to national development by providing in depth and relevant information resources for scientists, researchers, government officials, business executives, lawyers, etc, so that they can have the necessary information at the right time to effectively and efficiently carry out their research and the duties that would impact positively on the development of the nation. This category of people is in constant need of quick and relevant information to resolve issues and take decision.

In this regard, special libraries house information resources such as books, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, documents, manuscripts, pictures, maps, musical scores, non-print media such as transparencies, slides, records, audio-cassettes, microfiches, microfilms, filmstrips, motion pictures, video cassettes and in recent times, computers and the associated peripherals.

The foregoing review of the role of various types of libraries in education and national development present the invaluable contributions of libraries to national development. However, it is necessary for us to take a look at the true position of libraries of all types in Nigeria so as to assess how resourceful they are in providing the necessary information resources for building the right caliber of man power to engineer the wheels of national development.

The State of Development of Resources and Facilities in Most Libraries in Nigeria.
The state of development of library facilities and resources in most libraries in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. While lamenting the generally poor state of provision of library facilities and resources in most primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, Fadero, (2001) states as follows:
“Though the importance of school libraries enjoys a consensus view of experts, yet it is generally denied the attention it deserves in major educational plans. This has culminated in the acute shortage of funds to prosecute library programmes at both national and state levels. Recognition of its importance is therefore nothing short of lip service.”

Still on this issue, Fadero (2001) stressed that inadequate provision of libraries in schools is a general disease that is plaguing education in Nigeria. From north to south and from east to west of the country schools are generally without libraries to support teaching, learning and the curriculum. There is no clear cut policy on funding school libraries and so these libraries are generally few and ill equipped, lacking proper accommodation, qualified staff, relevant information resources such as books and other educational materials. Odusanya and Amusa (2002) conducted a survey on the use of school libraries in Nigeria and revealed that:

“Some primary and secondary schools were visited to see physically the condition of the libraries in such schools. The findings showed that libraries are almost non-existent in primary schools while few secondary schools have what could be referred to as reading rooms. This is because information resources in such libraries are not properly organized, scanty and old.”

While evaluating school library services since the inception of the library profession in Nigeria, Elaturoti (2003) revealed that there were more inspections of the school libraries than the actual supply and processing of library materials. In the case of public library services in Nigeria, Oyegade, Nassarawa and Mokogwu (2003), opined that there is no doubt that public library service today in Nigeria is still at its rudiments like in most African countries. According to Katunmoya (1992):

“Public libraries in most countries in tropical Africa rarely provide relevant materials and hence they are ineffective. They are stocked mainly with foreign literature that is both out of date and irrelevant to the information needs and interests of the people that are expected to read them.”

The general poor attitude of the Nigerian government towards development of libraries has also adversely affected the development of public library services in Nigeria. Enough funding is not made available to the public libraries to be stocked with the necessary information materials or provide adequate services to their clientele. Ehigiator (1997) revealed that there was the general practice by governments of releasing to the public library boards an amount far less than what was approved for a given year. The statutory annual approvals do not always reflect the actual needs of the boards. The effect being that the quality and quantity of materials acquired and the levels of services rendered are adversely affected. For instance, the poor state of funding compelled the Edo State library board to abandon their mobile library services. The general poor state of funding public libraries has forced many head librarians to reduce library services being rendered to their clientele in areas such as staff reduction (rationalization), redeployment, reduction in book budgets, reduction in the number of programmes and services rendered.

The poor state of provision of library services is also being experienced in the special libraries in Nigeria. Fatuyi, Yesufu and Ibrahim (1997), lamented the poor
financial state of research libraries in Nigeria, noting that the federal Government whose duty it is to fund research institutes is yet to see libraries or the information they provide as an essential and important commodity for commerce and industry which is essential for national development.

It is only in university libraries that there is a definite funding policy from government. They are being allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their respective universities. That is as a result of the federal government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) agreement of 2nd September, 1992. This agreement is not being fully implemented especially in the state universities in Nigeria. This has resulted in inadequate provision of library resources and services in most libraries in Nigeria especially in this 21st century characterized by electronic library services. A recent report by Odusanya and Osinulu (2004) on a state university library in Nigeria lamented about gross under funding and its adverse effects on growth of library collection and services with the entire library system suffering from large-scale decadence and neglect.

The general poor state of funding libraries in Nigeria and the subsequent inadequate provision of library resources and services is a great handicap towards using libraries as effective tools for education and national development in Nigeria. This brings into focus the need to examine the types of libraries required for education and national development in Nigeria in this 21st Century.

**Types of Libraries Required For Education and National Development in Nigeria in the 21st Century.**

The types of libraries required in Nigeria in this 21st century which is an information driven age are libraries which will provide up-to-date information resources in both print and electronic media to support teaching and learning at all levels of education so that the right caliber of people with the right stock of knowledge that would transform the nation can be produced. The electronic libraries will also place at the disposal of pupils and students at all levels of education the relevant information in both remote and immediate data bases all over the world, that would enable them undertake in depth and effective teaching and learning.

According to Singh(2004), the concept of ownership has been left behind with emphasis shifting from building strong local collections for long term use to accessing for current use of electronic materials made available by providers anywhere in the world. Further more, libraries in many parts of the world now maintain ‘hybrid libraries’ in order to make provision for both traditional (book) and digital collections to meet the information needs of library users in this era where Information and Communication Technology facilities have forced changes in access to information. Be that as it may, in the midst of the necessity for electronic libraries at all levels of education in Nigeria, Ajibero (2000), paints a gloomy picture of the availability of information technology facilities in most libraries in Nigeria, noting that:

“The libraries have minimum automation mostly bibliographic database on personal computer application software with only very few notable exceptions,... there is a slow pace in automation, individual libraries are autonomous in many respect each tailoring its collections and services to a local clientele … Nigerian libraries are
oriented towards collections than access. There is no single on-line shared cataloguing system in Nigeria not even between federal universities."

This observation by Ajibero (2000) goes to confirm the assertion by Afullo (2000), that the present day Nigeria is a country which has been ranked among the lowest in the world in information and communication technology infrastructure. The emphasis worldwide is shifting from book collections to the provision of electronic information services. Therefore, libraries of all types in Nigeria should conform to this trend so that all library users can have access to information in their local libraries as well as collections located in other remote libraries and databases to facilitate well-grounded education.

It is in this respect that Alasa and Kelechukwu (1999), articulated the benefits that can be derived from electronic libraries which are hooked to the internet as follows:

- Quick and convenient information exchange.
- Access to experienced and expert individuals in thousands of fields.
- Access to regular updates on topics of interest;
- Enhancement of team work, access to geographical distances;
- Access to archives information;
- Transfer of data between machines and provide a great platform to have fun and entertainment;
- As a reference tool, the internet provides a wealth of up to date resources unavailable in bound volumes;
- The internet gives personal access to specialization and experts in hundreds of disciplines;
- It enables you to reach your fellow librarians with messages and documents independent of the constraints of mails, telegraphs or even fax.
- One can collect news and facts which can be stored in one’s computer for later use in reference;
- Resources in the internet allows libraries to provide better services to their patrons by giving on-line access to information that would be difficult to locate in any other manners
- The internet provides access to on-line catalogues for libraries very close to or on another continent and it gives access to bibliographic records of millions of books and the details of the holdings of academic and research libraries around the world;
- Electronic journals and newsletters are made available on a regular basis;
- Libraries can make the selection of books required in their institutions and order them without going from one bookshop or publisher to another;
- The Computer Read Only Memory (CD ROM) is another versatile facility made available in academic libraries through the presence of information technology.

This wide range of benefits from information technology facilities discussed above are the hallmarks of the electronic libraries of this age. These are the types of libraries required to transform our educational system in their teaching and learning processes at all levels. The use of such libraries will help to produce qualitative manpower at all educational levels. Students will have at their disposal relevant
information in their immediate libraries and elsewhere to acquire in depth knowledge of their various subjects and disciplines. This wide range of information resources will make them well grounded in their various disciplines far more than students who do not have such facilities. The facilities in the electronic libraries desired in Nigeria will therefore include a wide range of books in all the disciplines in addition to computers and their associated peripherals connected to the internet.

The Way Forward.
In the light of the above, it is necessary that libraries at all levels of education in Nigeria be reorganized drastically in line with the electronic libraries of the modern era. In doing this, the problems identified by Alasa and Kelechukwu (1999), as militating against the use of information technology facilities in libraries in Nigeria should be addressed. They include;

- Poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities
- Poor level of computer literacy even within the academic community.
- Poor computer facilities
- Poor level of awareness of internet facilities in the academic community.
- Minimum involvement of academic institutions in network building and diffusion in Africa;
- Ignorance of decision or policy makers of the power of information network on the economic and industrial development of a nation.

Zakari (1997), Ifidon(1998) and Kiondo(2004),have also identified gross under funding of libraries as a major obstacle in the acquisition and application of information technology in their services. This is a major problem that should be addressed since adequate funding is at the core of the provision of the facilities required to equip the electronic libraries of the 21st century being advocated for education and national development in Nigeria.

For a start, libraries at all levels of education in Nigeria should be well stocked with books and other information materials as a stepping stone to the provision of computers and their associated technological facilities for our libraries. Government will need to put in place suitable policies to enable Nigerian children to possess the skills to effectively use libraries and the present day information and communication facilities to apply information to their daily endeavours and hence be able to function effectively and compete favourably with their counter parts in other advanced countries of the world.

At the moment, the Nigerian educational system is not geared towards giving children a good understanding of the functioning and significance of libraries and other information media and their uses. Knowledge of the importance of libraries will enable children to learn to use, react to, select, reject, classify, check, interpret and search for information (Opeke, 2004)

Pupils and students should be taught how to navigate their way through libraries and the world of information and obtain knowledge from them. They should be taught not simply to reproduce knowledge from information sources but to construct knowledge in new and creative ways (Oberg, 1995). They also need digital literacy. This is the ability of an individual to identify any information required to satisfy a need, know
how to use computers and digital systems to source the information as well as know how to use the information collected to solve a felt need. These are the skills that would empower the products of our educational system to fit well into the modern industrial system to which highly skilled manpower has become indispensable.

The present world now depends to a large extent on intensive information transfer by means of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). Therefore Nigerian pupils / students must be given the kind of training that would impart sufficient understanding of the technology that powers the information society. An information literacy programme should be incorporated into the curriculum of schools to provide students with a wider range of information handling skills which encompass accessing, processing and retrieving relevant, timely, accurate information for identified need. (Opeke, 2004). Such skills will empower students to be conscious of the power of information in all spheres of life and hence be able to apply the same in decision making and the construction of structures that make for enduring political, social and economic development of a nation.

The Nigerian Universities Commission, the Nigerian Library Association, the Librarians’ Registration Council of Nigeria, etc, should be properly sensitized and coordinated to carry out this exercise. Government should put policies in place to promote the provision of adequate library facilities and resources at all levels of the educational system in Nigeria. This being the primary place where the pupils and students are given the opportunities to experience well stocked libraries that would develop the spirit of independent inquiry and the manipulation of information to obtain knowledge. Information consciousness coupled with skills in handling ICT facilities to obtain quick and relevant information for decision making are the hallmarks of the highly skilled manpower required for national development in this highly information dependent global world of the 21st century.

The Nigerian government should rise to the challenge and provide all the essential resources to put the educational system in proper perspective by providing the right type of libraries which will enable the products of the educational system to serve as effective agents for accelerated economic, political and social development of the nation.

In the light of the foregoing, it is also imperative that librarians in all types of libraries should possess literacy among other competencies so that they can adequately guide library users. According to Quinn(1992), such competencies include:

- Expertise in the concepts of the organization of knowledge
- Skills in information transfer theories
- Skills in synthesis of information
- Sensitivity to information transfer issues
- Appreciation of the use of information to gain competitive advantage
- Training in worldwide information resources
- Experience in the techniques and skills of information retrieval
- Training in information dissemination techniques.
Conclusion
The role of libraries in the educational system is examined and the importance of education as a central feature in national development process discussed. The present state of various types of libraries in Nigeria is highlighted. Most types of libraries in Nigeria including libraries in educational institutions are not adequately stocked with appropriate resources and facilities thereby making them unable to effectively serve as tools for education and national development in Nigeria.

The types of libraries required for education and national development in Nigeria in this 21st century are libraries that are well stocked with up-to-date books and other library resources in addition to libraries equipped with present day ICT facilities typical of the electronic libraries of the 21st century. These are the type of libraries that would empower the educational system in Nigeria to provide manpower skilled in information handling and utilization capabilities necessary for decision making in this information driven 21st century.

There is the need for Nigerians in all walks of life to be conscious of the importance of information and hence take steps to utilize libraries effectively in obtaining information regularly for use. The Nigerian government is enjoined to take up the challenge and make adequate provision of funds and other resources to equip all types of libraries in line with the present day type of electronic libraries. It is only through this way that our educational system in Nigeria can serve as effective tools for education and national development.

References


