

ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper examines the importance of academic library services on the development of education in Nigeria in particular in the 21st century information explosion age. It further examines the concepts of education, academic library services in relation to the acquisition, storage, dissemination and utilization of information in all fields of study. The paper sees the impact of Information Communication Technology (ICT) which permeates all facets of learning as the platform to source for knowledge as facilities which must be provided in tertiary institutions and other levels of education in Niger State in the 21st century to reposition the State to cope effectively with the invading challenges of ICT. The paper concludes that all academic libraries in the States of the Federation should be well staffed and adequately stocked with up-to-date books and information materials as well as ICT equipment.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an instrument par excellence for national development in all countries under the sun, as well as in its constituent regions, communities or states in general. It involves the development of the whole human being intellectually, physically, psychologically, socially, professionally, religiously and morally. This is the reason why education is seen as an integral part of national or state development. Education is a process through which people are formally and informally trained to acquire knowledge, understanding and skills. The formal training comes from established schools in any given community, region, state or country from the basic level to the tertiary level.

Through this process of education, people acquire necessary training, knowledge and skills which equip and empower them to specialize in specific fields of study or profession. It is this knowledge that allows people to contribute meaningfully to the development of their immediate community in general and ultimately to state or national development. Umar, (2004) states that National and State development involves economic growth, advancement, modernization, equitable distribution of income and natural resources and general socio-economic transformation for improved living standards of the people through the use of a country's human, natural and institutional resources (Aboyade, 1984; Brooks, 1990; Mohammed, 1996).

Therefore, the greatest resource for development is the human resource hence no nation can develop without her trained and educated human resources capacity. The level and quality of occupational participation and productivity of the populace are important contributory factors to the level of economic and overall development of any nation or state. It is therefore important that at all levels of education, high caliber and qualified citizens are graduated so that they can give qualitative contributions to the state and national development in all spheres of life.

The 21st century, is the century of information driven age in all its ramifications. It is the age of information explosion in which the internet and its associated technological invasions are currently used to take advantage of the immense knowledge of human's endeavor, civilization or discovery all over the globe which could be tapped for an accelerated development of society in diverse fields. It is an age of information society! Consequently, it is only a nation and state which is conscious and ready to embrace the importance of libraries and information in the drive towards the accelerated development of a nation or state that can survive and thrive among the comity of nations of this age.

As a result of the information society impact, organizations are fast changing and so also are the skills necessary to operate them and the way they utilize human capital (Opeke, 2004). It is this human capacity that must be provided, nurtured and 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 skill and know how to access knowledge quickly within and from increasingly distant locations to positively influence accelerated state and national development from all walks of life.

The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources which empowers the educational institutions to produce highly qualified citizens/personnel who can mount diverse platforms for effective development. The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources which empowers the educational institutions to produce highly qualified citizens/personnel who can mount diverse platforms for effective development. The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources which empowers the educational institutions to produce highly qualified citizens/personnel who can mount diverse platforms for effective development. The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources which empowers the educational institutions to produce highly qualified citizens/personnel who can mount diverse platforms for effective development. The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources which empowers the educational institutions to produce highly qualified citizens/personnel who can mount diverse platforms for effective development. Irrevocably, libraries and internet resources of today are at the centre of the academic excellence in all educational and research institutions, providing all the relevant information resources necessary for sustenance of teaching, learning, knowledge acquisition 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 depends largely on the quality of information resources available in their libraries to support the teaching, learning and research activities.

The Problem

The last millennium witnessed unprecedented technological developments with various implications for the library, and parent institutions. This unprecedented technological revolution has shrunk the world into a single "global village" is no longer news today! Perhaps, what is less properly imagined is the extent to which this revolution will go in the on going new millennium. It takes a genius to accurately predict the impact of this emergence revolution on libraries in the unforeseeable future.

Through this technological revolution, the way has been opened for a new communication system by which individual or organizations may establish contact with anyone, anywhere, at anytime, by voice, sight or document separately or by combination. Called "cyberspace", this new communication environment provides opportunities for millions of people to "meet" on daily basis to exchange ideas, sell goods, buy products, and obtain up-to-date news, (information) from every corner of the globe. Indeed, man's

capacity to communicate has, therefore, transcended every barrier of time and distance.

One observable trend in this information environment is that "more and more academic resources are moving to the internet and in some cases being made available only on the internet". Also on the internet are millions of documents and hundreds of new journals that will never be published in any other form (Missen, 1988). In the face of the avalanche of information being generated daily and the speed at which it is being generated, a redefinition of the *raison d'être* of the librarian as well as the library is imperative; a redefinition of the basic substance of the librarian's work in the accessible networks such as the internet is a must (Ochai, 2000) argued.

The question to ask is whether our State Government is ready and willing to support our libraries to brace-up for these unavoidable changes, and whether indeed pose any challenges to them. Undoubtedly, the information revolution is already here with us. Librarians and libraries in Niger State and indeed in Nigeria have been caught in the 21st century web, even if it be argued to be prematurely. But then how can we fully exploit and be part of this global information network given all the problems of infrastructural, financial implication, government readiness and commitment and the lack of already existing mastery?

As part of this "global village" of this 21st century, our libraries are expected to exploit the available resources of the "internet" maximally to our individual and collective goodness. Our citizens' nay our readers' in all institutions of higher learnings' needs for information for their studies in diverse disciplines are not different from those of researchers in the developed countries. What will our Government (our major parent body) do to position our libraries in all academic institutions namely: Federal University of Technology, Minna, Ibrahim Badamosi University, Minna, College of Education, Minna, School of Midwifery, Minna, Federal Polytechnic, Bida, State Polytechnic, Bida, School of Nursing, Bida, and the College of Education, Kontogora, to mention a few, who will be inescapable of the internet impact of 21st century?

Irrevocably, increase in knowledge will be continuous and extensive, and will in the immediate future mean that academic and research libraries in our institutions of learning would necessarily need to plan, as an integral part of their work, a sustained and systematic review of the library environment to be able to remain in the mainstream of this information flow.

In view of these happenings, what should be the direction of our librarianship in this new millennium, given the situation of most academic libraries and which librarianship have found themselves? What government policy and budgetary provision made to deal with the current development? O'connor (1998) succinctly captures the scenario when he questioned what librarians really do and the need to continue to do consistently in the face of the invading technological revolution. Librarians can no longer lay claim to be knowledgeable or well disposed than to have the monopoly of the answers to all academic queries. The librarians' value to library users have been, not having knowledge ourselves but rather in

possessing the skill to search for information". But with ability of library users, to access other library collections especially, the internet resources of the 21st century at some distant locations, the monopoly has been broken; libraries are no more the sole access point for knowledge acquisition in our contemporary communities.

Academic Roles in Education and National Development in the 21st Century

Libraries have made a lot of outstanding contributions to the growth of mankind and advancement of countless civilization. Once regarded primarily as storehouses for books and periodicals; libraries have changed dramatically since the middle of the 20th century. From their historical beginnings as places to keep the business, legal, historical and religious records of civilization, they have emerged as a far-reaching body of information resources and services (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2007). From its concept, it has been aptly described as the "heart-beat" at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education processes of man around which school and institutional programmes irrevocably revolve (Fafunwa, 1992). Library institutions are therefore solely designed, established, equipped and managed for effective dissemination of recorded knowledge to users and citizens whenever required libraries primarily serve as veritable medium for the attainment of the broad objectives of learning, education, consultation, study, research and reference purposes in all its ramification.

The realization of the enormous power of information in the 21st century has made libraries and information resource centres inevitably present in all sectors of a nations 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.

Academic libraries are those libraries established in tertiary institutions to support and strengthen the academic programmes of such higher institutions of learning. These include libraries of the Universities, Colleges of Education/Technology, the Polytechnics and other Post-Secondary educational institutions.

The major objectives of the academic libraries are to assist its parent institution to achieve the aims of teaching, learning, research and extension work. As supported by the view of Abdulkadir cited by Anafulu (1996:9-33) which stressed that: "The central focus of any educational institution is its library. It is the hub of the system to which both students and staff resort for academic nourishment. Thus an up-to-date library contributes in no small measure to paving way for academic excellence". Without the library, the aims/objectives in tertiary institutions of higher learning cannot be met nor could academic programmes of such institutions adjudged appropriately.

Based on the objectives of academic libraries the actual provision of library material (information needs) go along with the service provision and this is why Awojobi (2004:36) stated that the need for good libraries (functional and effective) in higher institutions of learning cannot be over-emphasized, since the quality of any education depends on the library, not only as a magnificent building but the use of it. It must be noted that the use of the library is what exposes the students, teachers, lecturers and researchers to the whole field of knowledge acquisition and to what is practical in life of the past, present and the future. Generally, according to Agu (2006:93) library services are described as the professional guidance to users. These however, could vary in accordance with the type or category of both the library and the users. For instance, the services needed by users of academic libraries for effective execution of learning demands as well as implementing all enormous academic pursuits and learning tasks must be rendered by the staff of academic libraries, which threaten their role and survival. These authors further continued to say that pressure will still be mounted on academic libraries in providing services to their users even though with evolving technological innovations there are varieties and abundance of information available to information users”.

Edoka (2000:120) pointed out that “academic libraries usually have copious hours of access to meet the demands of users”. This implies that it is obligatory for them to open for longer period of hours; weekend and vacations day's inclusive more than any other library. It would be apt, however, to refer to Syed Saad and Simonds (1987:156) who stated that: Today's academic libraries face a lot of challenges”.

In tertiary institutions of higher learning (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 in-depth 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 manpower development of any State or 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 could thus be summarizing 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.

The types of libraries required in Niger 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, learning and research at all levels of education (pre-primary/early child, secondary, colleges of education/technology, polytechnics and universities) so that the right quality and capacity of the state's citizenry could benefit from the provision of the right stock of knowledge that would transform the state rapidly. 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. This assessment holds true for the states of the federation including Niger state. The emphasis world wide is shifting from book collections to the provision of electronic information services. Therefore, libraries of all types in Niger 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 data bases to facilitate well grounded education.

It is in this respect that Alasa and Kelechukwu (1999), submitted that the following benefits are derivable from electronic libraries which are hooked-up to the internet as:

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.

These wide ranges of benefits from information technology facilities discussed above constitute the hallmark of the electronic libraries of the 21st century. Similarly, the types of libraries needed to transform our educational system in their teaching and learning processes at all levels. The use of such libraries will certainly speed up the training of qualitative manpower at all educational institutions. Students will have at their disposal relevant information in their immediate libraries and elsewhere to explore and acquire in depth knowledge of their various subjects and disciplines. The provision of wide range of information resources will make students well grounded in their various disciplines much better than those without such facilities.

Suggestions for the Way Forward

In the light of the above, it is necessary that libraries in general as well as academic institution at all levels of education in Nigeria should be reorganized drastically in line with the electronic libraries of the 21st century. In doing this, the problems identified by Alasa and Kelechukwu (1999), as militating against the use of information technology facilities in libraries in Nigeria including should be effectively 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 in the 21st century.

For a start, libraries at all levels of education in Nigeria should be well stocked with books and other information materials as a prerequisite to the provision of computers and their associated technological facilities for all effective functioning in the 21st century. The Federal Government should make and enforce good and suitable policies to give every Nigerian child opportunity and the privilege to possess the information acquisition skills for effective library utilization and exploration of the internet which the present century demands since information and communication technology permeates all human activities today.

It is regrettable that at the moment, the Nigerian educational system is not given its proper treatment nor ensuring the hope to every Nigerian child through her educational system and provision well stocked libraries and other information media. Knowledge and skill of use of libraries will enable children to learn to use, react to, select, reject, classify, check, interpret and search for information (Opeke, 2004). Nigerians children in general and students in particular 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 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 and qualified manpower is indispensable.

The present world now depends to a large extent on intensive information transfer by means of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). Therefore Nigerian students must be given the kind of training that would equip and impart sufficient understanding of the technology that powers the information society. An information literacy programme should be incorporated into schools' curriculum 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 forth comprehensive policies back up a consistent good budgetary allocation to promote the provision of adequate library facilities and resources at all level our educational system in State. Our educational institutions are the bedrock platforms the pupils and students should be given the opportunities to experience and explore well stocked libraries that would spark and develop the spirit of independent inquiry and the manipulation of information to acquire 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 must rise up to the challenges of the 21st century information driven age and provide all the essential resources to uplift our educational system placing same in proper perspective by providing the right type of libraries which will enable the products of the educational system to contribute their quota as agents of effective accelerated socio-economic, industrial, educational, political, etc. transformation and development of this great Nation if is to compete with other countries in the information driven age.

In the light of the foregoing, it is also imperative that librarians in all types of libraries **should** possess the needed literacy among other competencies to make them vanguards of **specialized** 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 has been examined and the importance of education been the central feature in national or state development process discussed. The present deplorable state of various types of libraries in Nigeria and have been examined. In the same way all academic libraries and indeed all types of libraries in Niger State educational institutions of learning should be adequately stocked with up-to-date appropriate resources and facilities thus equip them to serve effectively as tools for education and state development.

The quality of libraries required for education and development in Nigeria/Niger State in this 21st century must be libraries 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 in Europe, USA, United Kingdom or elsewhere worthy of emulation of the 21st century. This quality and type of libraries established, staffed and well funded across the State in the various educational institutions will certainly and positively empower the Nigerian educational system in all States of the Federation would provide the best platform to develop the needed manpower that will aggressively transform the country in the 21st century to catch up with its other nations which has already leading in this information driven century.

There is the compelling need for Nigerians in all walks of life to be conscious of the importance of information and hence take steps to utilize libraries effectively to update and widen knowledge regularly. The Nigerian Government/all Tiers of Government are enjoined to take up the challenge and make adequate provision of funds and other resources to equip all types of libraries in all educational system along with the emerging ICT phenomenon. Through this radical approach our educational system in Nigeria will improve the present state and serve learners, students, lecturers and researchers better.

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