Role of Nigerian libraries for sustainable educational system, information literacy and national development

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There is a growing concern in the minds of people on the relevance of the library in the 21st century. This paper critically addresses some of the key functions of the library in supporting education and improving information literacy of the people for national development in Nigeria. It further reiterates the importance of the library in the Nigerian educational system, and concludes that a nation may not be developed without a sustainable educational system and well stocked libraries to support information literacy, learning, teaching and research activities of the people.

Introduction

The role of educational institutions in human capital development, research and technological innovation cannot be underestimated. Development and sustenance of education is non-negotiable[1]. A report from the National Higher Education Forum (NHEF) held at Abuja in 2014 confirmed that:

Before the turn of table, the Nigerian education sector was the envy of other nations, owing to its well-equipped institutions, well-trained and well-motivated teachers whose expertise in imparting the right knowledge ensured that Nigerian universities churned graduates who could compete with their contemporaries anywhere around the world without difficulties[2].

The report showed that there is a gap in the educational system of Nigeria. Education plays a critical role in the development of human capital. Its importance to economic growth and development is well recognized in development planning[1]. Educational institutions are the bedrock for human development since it produces the much required manpower to sustain a nation. The role of the library and educational institutions in support of literacy, national development and sustainable education is well recognized[1].

The library is a combination of both collection of information sources, resources, services and the structure in which it is housed[3]. Libraries have become a focal point in learning, teaching and research activities of a learning community. The library plays a major role in sustaining education through acquisition, provision and dissemination of information materials. The library is an integral part of the educational system, and one of the most vital components for national development. In a foreword message on the 2014 Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) Directory, the then Minister of Education Dr. Shekarau stated that the library and information science occupies a vantage position in the education sector and plays a strategic role in national growth and development[4]. Librarians are, therefore, one of the drivers of transformation in any nation.

In Nigeria, no university can be established without a functional and well stocked library. Also, no academic programme can be accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the only accrediting body with the mandate of supervising and accrediting higher institutions in Nigeria, unless there are adequate library materials in print and non-print available in the library.

Information literacy and educational development in Nigeria

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, learning environments, and all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning[5]. When people are literate in accessing information, they will be able to determine the nature and extent of information they need, evaluate, use and understand the content of the information accessed. Information literacy enables the people to understand more about their environment especially economic, legal and social issues surrounding the access and use of information ethically and legally. The library as an institution in sustaining the gains of education should support in promoting information literacy as well as independent learning, national development and sustainable educational system to a standard capable of instilling confidence in the people.

Educational system in Nigeria is going through some challenges, which is a great concern for all stakeholders. A forum on better education in Nigeria was held in Abuja on November 10 and 11, 2014 to identify and tackle some of the challenges. One of the challenges facing the Nigeria's educational system is inadequate funding since the Federal government's overall expenditure on education fall below 10% which is far less than 26% of the national budget as prescribed by UNESCO[6]. Some non-governmental agencies and private individuals are trying to improve the quality of education in Nigeria. One such effort is in the area of private-public partnership where the Federal Government of Nigeria magnanimously approved the handling and running of schools from nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary, by private individuals and organizations. The private schools are contributing tremendously in promoting quality education in Nigeria.

Quality educational system: library supporting and promoting information literacy

Aina[7] noted that core library and information services, such as literature search, information literacy programmes among others are rarely provided to clients by Nigerian libraries. Similarly, Omeluzor, Oyovwe-Tinuoye and Emeka-Ukwu[8] found that public libraries in Delta State, Nigeria did not organize programmes on reading and information literacy for its patrons. It should be noted that information literacy is crucial in making people know their entitlements to welfare benefits and sources of support to overcome social exclusion. Ebiwolate[9] stated that effective library and information services in rural areas can enhance development and improve quality of education in rural communities. The education for all (EFA) movement organized by UNESCO in 2015 provided the basis for educational system since it emphasizes basic education for all including children, youth and adult. The objectives of the movement include:

Supporting the achievement of education for all (EFA)

- Providing global and regional leadership in education

- Building effective education systems worldwide from early childhood to the adult years, and

- Responding to contemporary global challenges through education.

Through the EFA, UNESCO calls on every educational institution including the library to support information literacy by providing access to relevant information to the people.

The foundation for an effective and formalized information literacy programme was based on the NUC benchmark for minimum academic standards for undergraduate programmes[10]. The benchmark made provision for a two credit unit course for "Use of Library, Study Skill and Information Communication Technology (ICT)" under the General Studies (GST) programme. The course is taught by librarians and it covers areas such as the use of library information resources/ bibliographic instructions[11]. Through the course, librarians in Nigeria have expanded their role as advocates and teachers of information literacy. In America and Denmark, libraries have formulated information literacy standards for student learning; focusing on efficient and effective access to information, critical and competent evaluation of information, accurate and creative use of information, independent learning, and supporting new teaching methods to assist students in their learning process[12]. Dubicki[12] stated that the primary goal of librarians is to work in coordination with the faculty in order to produce information literate students as graduates who can

effectively utilize information literacy skills in the workplace.

The role of the library in national development

Increasing access to information and knowledge, underpinned by universal literacy, is an essential pillar of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The library is important towards achieving the SDG goals. Libraries in different countries are supporting in the development of their constituents, for example:

- In Botswana, public libraries have taken large strides toward supporting government objectives under its National Vision 2016 by introducing ICT access and improving the computer skills of library users among others[13].

- Zimbabwe Library Association is currently seeking to align libraries to participate in national development through the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim Asset)[14].

- The National Library of Uganda (NLU) developed a programme, supported by the Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), to train young people in basic computer literacy[15].

- In Romania, librarians trained by Biblionet helped 100,000 farmers to access US$187 million in subsidies via new internet and computer services in 2011-2012. The librarians who participated in the training brought the services to their libraries[16].

- In Indonesia, the National Library of Indonesia played an important role in increasing the level of education and literacy for a population that is spread across islands where education is harder to access. The initiative lead to massive education of citizens living around waters, which is not easily accessible by road[17].

- In Canada, an initiative of Library's Man in the Moon Literacy programme was instituted in 2001 in various locations around Vancouver to provide literacy education for men, women and children[18].

- In Moldova, libraries are contributing to Open Government Partnership (OGP) action plans. A platform between government, civil society and business to drive commitments to open government and accountability[19].

- In China, the launching of mobile library has enhanced the reading culture of the populace, cutting the bridge between distance and the library as users can access information resources while at the comfort of their homes[20].

- In Nigeria, library's participation in the area of education, agricultural activities, tourism, health and commercial activities are paramount contributory factors to the level of national development[21].

The importance of the library in achieving a sustainable educational system in Nigeria

Adewuyi and Olaojo[22] noted that Nigerian appreciation of librarianship as a profession is extremely poor when compared with other professions like medicine, law and engineering, etc. Librarianship in the 70s and 80s was seen as an idle profession meant for "low-grade candidates"[22]. Some have argued that librarians are no longer needed in the 21st century with advancement in ICT and use of the Internet[23]. Evidence-based studies revealed that the library is a hub of developmental activities since it engages its users in activities that turn them into critical thinkers, problem solvers, independent information seekers and lifelong learners[24]. The argument is further awash by the position of IFLA/UNESO[25] which upholds the library as a medium for accessing information, ideas and works of imagination. In addition, IFLA noted that communities with quality access to timely and relevant information are better positioned for quality education, health care, improved agriculture, poverty eradication and equality[26]. Invariably, an informed society will contribute to the development of a nation as the availability and access to information resources would promote peaceful coexistence among the people as well as inclusiveness for sustainable development[27,28].

In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has the mandate of denying accreditation of academic programme(s) in any university that is found deficient in library resources (book and non-book). Universities in Nigeria are also rated by the standard of their libraries[29]. This is because a university library is the single largest academic resource of last recourse. The role of the library towards sustaining quality academic excellence in Nigeria makes it a port of call for every accrediting

body to a university. The library is a platform where people meet to research and share ideas on critical issues affecting the society, thereby becoming a knowledge space that is both larger and more general than those shared by any single discipline or affinity group[23].

The impact of the library would be felt greatly in the rural communities of Nigeria where most of the communities are agrarian, whose livelihood is dependent on farming and the art of making crafts. The library will help in breaking the jinx of 'information poor' among the rural people. The United Nation's report according to Gill[30] empowers the public libraries to help in bringing everyone into a global conversation and to bridge what is often called 'the digital divide'. This can be achieved by providing information technology for public access and teaching basic computer skills[31]. According to Bertsch and Warner-Søderholm[31], the educational institutions and libraries can serve as a medium to extend cultural discourse, literacy and research. Effective library and information services in the rural communities of Nigeria can enhance development and improve quality of education of the rural people[9]. This is because the library handles virtually all the activities that enhance the development of the people, including:

1. Preservation of cultural heritage (artefacts, world book of records, etc.)

2. Preservation of knowledge and histories of the past.

3. Tourist centre.

4. Promotion, collaboration and scholarship thereby sustaining readership, research, and publishing of research output.

5. Promotion, creation and publishing of digital contents through electronic databases, digital commons, repositories, which enhances sustainability of education in any nation.

6. Enhancing access to information and sharing of ideas, contents through online systems like digital library, online public access catalogue, portals, wikis, etc.

In the *Lyon[26] declaration on access to information and development*, it was noted that library services contribute toward improving the outcome across the SDGs as follows:

1. Promoting universal literacy, including media and information literacy.

2. Closing gaps in access to information and helping government, civil society, and business to better understand local information needs.

3. Providing a network of delivery sites for government programmes and services.

4. Advancing digital inclusion through access to Information & Communications Technologies (ICT), and dedicated staff to help people develop new digital skills.

5. Serving as the heart of the research and academic community.

6. Preserving and providing access to the world's culture and heritage.

7. More specifically, libraries have supported the implementation of the SDGs by providing access to information, support for literacy and ICT skills, and access to community space[32].

Furthermore, the library can improve the literacy level of its users, sustain the educational system and support national development through the following:

Collection of relevant information materials

The library has a duty to search for relevant and up-to-date information materials published within and outside a country, and to collect and store the materials for the benefit of its users. Such information may be in any format, for example, CD-ROMs, book, visual, audio, audio-visual, etc. Collection of such information materials for the benefit of the library users can be done through outright acquisition such as subscription and purchase. Other sources of acquisition are interlibrary loan, donation, gift and exchange. The library also subscribes to e-books, e-journals and e-databases to increase access to external information resources and enhance literacy level of its users. To enhance the standard of education, most libraries in Nigeria subscribes to databases such as EBSCO, Ebrary, Lexis Nexis, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, HINARI and AJOL among others to augment the print materials. This would help users to access current research that will impact their research and learning experiences and thereby improve their skill and knowledge.

Supporting the library users

In order to sustain education and increase the literacy level of library users, libraries in Nigeria should create awareness of available information resources in the library (both on the shelves within the library and on databases), and serve as an advocate of information literacy. It should support its users to access information easily. Supporting users and providing opportunities for disabled people to have independent access to information has remained pivotal for the library. The library should provide relevant information materials and disseminate them to its users. Quality access to information sources and services by the library users would engender acquisition of relevant skill and knowledge for national development. The guidelines for development by IFLA/UNESCO acknowledge that the library managers must ensure that the community is aware of the importance of the library services[24].

Promotion of literacy programme

Educating the people in the rural areas should be a major objective of the rural libraries in Nigeria. Harande[32] noted that the library in the rural areas can be utilized to distribute literacy materials to the rural communities that will help the people to be more functional in their occupations. In addition, there is need for cooperation between the library, information professionals and educators as a requirement for establishing integrated information literacy programmes[26]. Furthermore, the library should use information and communication technology (ICT) in providing information in Nigeria thereby creating awareness for the people to become ICT literate. Training the library users in the use of ICT tools would improve their skill in using ICT facilities. Such training will enhance effective utilization of the Internet and electronic information resources.

Access to information

According to Agbo and Onyekweodiri[33] information is a vital tool in all forms of human endeavour. The library is a focal point for accessing relevant information that can enhance the development of a nation. Provision of equitable access to information materials is a major role of the library. In this era where the use of ICT tools is crucial in learning, libraries in Nigeria should play a role in ICT literacy and function as a medium where ICT skills can be acquired. IFLA[27] confirmed that

technology is gradually transforming the lives of library users who have been largely excluded from using traditional library materials, for example the visually impaired.

Conclusion

Education has remained the bedrock for development and a tool for the eradication of illiteracy. To this end, libraries in Nigeria should ensure to sustain the educational system, literacy level of the people and enhance national development. The library as avenue by which information is acquired and disseminated to the people should strengthen research and development. Identifying the library's role in achieving a sustainable educational system and infusing literacy among the people will ensure vibrancy of a nation's human capital development. A nation cannot be well developed without a stable educational system and the library at the centre to support learning, teaching and research. The library's active role in the Nigerian educational system will bring about a turnaround in the literacy level of the citizens.

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