



Proposed Pathway for Nigerian Libraries in The Face of Prevailing Educational and Societal Requirements

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Abstract

It is very clear that the library, regardless of the type, plays a fundamental role in the educational and societal development of any nation. The resources and services offered by these libraries create opportunities for learning, support literacy and education, and help shape the new ideas and perspectives that are central to a creative and innovative society. Sadly, most of these libraries Nigeria are highly faced with great challenges, hence, the need to device a pathway. This paper critically looked at the state of the Nigerian libraries in terms of its educational and societal requirements. However, before delving into the pathway for the Nigerians libraries in the face of prevailing educational and societal requirements, some of the challenges faced by these libraries were x-rayed. The paper concludes that much is expected of these Nigerian libraries which have strived from the periods of less competition to the period of high competition and expectation. in order to meet these numerous educational and societal requirements, there is need for a pathway, especially a joint role to be played by the librarians, educators, and government. One of which is the issue of a national policy and proper funding of these libraries.

Keywords: Libraries-Nigeria, Societal Requirement, Educational Quality, Information Resources

Introduction

Libraries are synonymous with education and offer countless learning opportunities that can fuel economic, social and cultural development. These libraries represent different things for different people and even though library usage has declined during the recent years as noted by Nwosu (2017), they are still a popular and important place. They are more than a center for stocking books and periodicals, and further serve as the society's nuclear point that connects social and cultural events, educational resources, and a foster spot for the marginalized. In the early 2000's Nnadozie (2007) predicted the future of librarians to be non-existent if adequate measures are not taken to inject modern practices. However, libraries have done a great job by adapting and leveraging their mission

of providing everyone with access to information and matching it with society's needs so as to continue in the face of wider competition.

Libraries are much more than a place to read books, journals and other information resources. They provide advanced electronic resources, including Internet, digital library collections, remote access to a wide range of technology and instruction. Onuoha and Chukwueke (2021) citing Islam, defined a library as a learned institution equipped with treasures of knowledge maintained, organized and managed by trained personnel to educate the children, men and women continuously and assist in their self-improvement through an effective and prompt dissemination of information embodied in the resources. The library is a facilitating factor to obtain

spiritual, inspirational, and recreational activities through reading and research. To this end, the library offers an opportunity of interacting with the society's wealth and accumulated knowledge.

According to Aina (2012), libraries are considered to be agents of educational, social and economic development. They are most important resource center of any academic institution. A library is a building in which collections of books, CDs and newspapers are kept for people to read, study and borrow (Hornby, 2015). Nnadozie (2007) holds that the concept of library originated from the Latin word *liber*, which is being interpreted as "book". Therefore, it is an institution that is specifically established for the acquisition, processing, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information stored in books and other contemporary (non-book) formats (Nnadozie, 2007). Ezeala and Yusuf (2011) defined a library as an institution that manages the intellectual products that individuals can gain access to, readily. It is a building, an instructional and self-development centre, which operate as an integral part of the entire school environment (Iyanda&Salawu, 2006). Furthermore, the library is one of those resources which are essential to support and strengthen the educational quality of any society. It remains the source of keeping and distributing information through books, journals, maps and other electronic resources utilized by the populace of different age and gender. It is a busy information centre, where information resources are packaged in various formats to the advantage of the users giving rise to growth and development from different angles. Consequently, information explosion and the human desire to solve his problem independently have brought about much emphasis on the libraries as the sole agency charged with the responsibilities of information creation, organization, dissemination, preservation and conservation, hence, the prevailing educational and societal requirements. This singular act has increased the demand for the library by different individuals. However, the ability to obtain the right information at the right time and from the right place is tantamount to these libraries surviving in such an era of high requirements.

Additionally, Nigerian library in the words of Aina (2012) is a place where print and non-print materials are collected, organized and made available for public access and use. These libraries, regardless of the type are important cornerstones of a healthy and informed society. Furthermore, the library serves as an instrument for an array of intellectual's national

development which manifests in different sector of the nation, including educational and societal advancement. It achieves these feat through creation of the right environment in the areas of provision of an array of information resources and services. The pathway further entails ways of ensuring a shift from analogue to digital, from librarians being passive to being active, from leaders' negative perception of the library as a less important place to positive perception of the library and ensuring proper library administration and management in the nation. All these play vital roles in offering greater support for scholars and their research works, preservation of national culture and heritage and assisting in the development of the educational and research skills of the populace. However, it is very clear that libraries do not only store books and journals but goes a long way in offering space for reading as well as systematically provides for digitized information. Chukwueke, Onuoha and Nnadozie (2018) boldly emphasized that the information resident in the library, when accessed and utilized, generates knowledge towards educational and societal development. Ayenigbara and Seidu (as cited in Chipana, 2018) made it clear that a library must be up-to-date and at the same time have older materials. It must be suitably supported financially, among other things. These and more issues are what this paper seeks to address in providing a path way for the Nigerian libraries in the prevailing educational and societal requirements.

Conceptual Clarification

Ranganathan, as quoted by Iyanda and Salawu (2006) described the library as a public institution or an establishment charged with the care of a collection of books, having the duty of making them accessible to those who require the use of them and the task of converting every person in its neighborhood into habitual library-goers and readers of books. Libraries are of various types, namely, public, national, school, special and academic libraries. This typology of libraries is mostly based on the parent institution, user community, materials housed, and services rendered

Libraries, regardless of type perform different services. According to Reitz (2004), services, as applied to libraries, include all assistance, whether personalized or group delivered by the library to its community of users. This kind of assistance in the words of Ibrahim (2016) is accessible to everyone. Consequently, library services have been a key element in human development since ancient times. These services

started during the period when libraries were regarded as storehouses, where books were more preserved than utilized and librarians acted like some form of custodians (Mayega, 2008). In the words of Nwosu (2017), library services go beyond just assistance to include resources, activities and programmes, which are provided by libraries to assist the users in meeting their information needs. Nwosu (2017, p. 237) went further to explain that library services could be provided directly or indirectly. However, such services are provided to the users of the library in person or through communication technologies.

Libraries are necessities in our societies because of the unique services they provide. IFLA Report (as cited in Chukwueke, et. al. 2018) maintained that library services provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium and regardless of frontiers. They serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture, offering essential support for independent decision making, cultural development, research and lifelong learning by both individuals and groups. Services of the library are key actors in providing unhindered access to essential information and information resources. In doing so, the library contributes to the effective development and maintenance of intellectual freedom, safeguarding moral values, cultural heritage and universal civil rights (Kuhn & Skuterund 2000). Having established a ground upon which the library is founded, one needs to understand how the African libraries have fared in the past period. Hence, the next section.

Challenges of the Nigerian Libraries towards Educational and Societal Requirement Attainment

David-West & Bassey opined that libraries are in a poor state due to lack of proper funding. There has been very little assistance received by libraries from the ancient times (that is, the pre-colonial and colonial eras); hence it was thought that the Nigerian library is backward when compared with some other libraries, especially in the developed nations. Furthermore, history and records revealed that immediately after independence, many near-to-standard libraries existed in the country. This was highly engineered by the establishment of many educational institutions, which were mandated to have a library. Today, some of these libraries are dilapidated or gradually dying

Since their inception or establishment, the Nigerian libraries have continued to experience many setbacks with few of them developing at a very

low pace. Sad enough, Namhila and Niskala (2013) noted that these libraries have never been perceived as agents of societal growth and development, which has resulted in their abandonment, notable of which include the countries construction of the National Library of Nigeria for decades without completion, as well as the non-existence or poor state of libraries in many communities and educational institutions, among other library's sad situations in the Nigerian state. The libraries in Nigeria remain invisible giving rise to high tension as to whether there are libraries in Nigeria. This results in the big question of whether the libraries in Nigeria are dead or gradually dying. Nonetheless, Lynch et al. (2020) noted that the highest observed tension between the potentials of the libraries and their lack of visibility is not new as these libraries have historically fought an uphill battle, wedged between external stakeholders, the Nigerian leaders (both present and past), and the communities they serve but not fully embraced by either.

The foundation of the failure of the Nigerian libraries got wrong considering the establishment of libraries by the colonial administrations, which emphasized text-based practices and were built to replicate a European ideal but without being relevant or accessible to the general population. This negative effect continued until today (Moahi, 2019). In support of Moahi (2019)'s assertion, Lynch et al. (2020) strongly believed that the narrative of the state of such libraries pigeonholes them and limits the understanding of their roles in supporting societal and educational development. Okojie and Okiy (2019) further observed that the perception of libraries as irrelevant and detached from the needs of their communities obscures their potential to act as intermediaries between their communities and their development. The inordinate perception of these libraries has real consequences for their effectiveness and efficiency in the Nigerian soil. Elbert, Fuegi and Lipeikaite (2012) citing cases of Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe opined that the libraries are perceived as mere lenders of books thereby restricting the libraries in terms of technology and deleting them as agents for national development and innovation. Corroboratively, Baada, et al. (2020) remained emphatic that the lack of recognition of the importance of the Nigerian libraries remains a significant barrier in attaining adequate resources for such libraries, as politicians may pay lip service to libraries while failing to allocate proper funds as well as diverting the funds meant for the development of these libraries.

Further narrating the setbacks of the Nigerian libraries, Benson, Anyanwu, Co and Nwauwa (2016), Moahi (2019) and Lynch et al. (2020) noted that the lack of a defined role of these libraries in the country's developmental plans aggravates the poor state of these libraries by leading many of them to be reliant on inconsistent and short-term funding. Although some efforts have been made, these efforts have yielded less positive results. The earlier these libraries, across all states and sectors are given a new pathway, the quick and possible for the actualization of high educational and societal development. However, the big question begging for an answer remains how these libraries in Nigeria can survive in the face of prevailing educational and societal requirements, hence, the need to design a pathway.

Solutions to the Challenges of Nigerian Libraries towards Educational and Societal Requirement Attainment

Libraries are built in the hope that they will assist in the mass education of the Nigerian population. This led some development organizations, such as the Carnegie Corporation to initially give maximum and direct support to public libraries on the Nigerian soil. Today, it could be that minimum and indirect supports are given to the libraries in Nigeria. In such places where the supports are given, such as the case of the TET Fund for academic libraries, a large percentage of this support is diverted for other purposes aside from the development of the libraries. However, the pathway for the library in Nigeria calls for new and more robust ways of managing and administering library services. This stems from a critical look at the parent institutions and the managerial structure of these libraries, regardless of the type, down to administration and services delivery in these libraries. Hence, the following are suggested:

Redesigning of the library policies

The nation need to come to the understanding that libraries have a pride of place in the educational and societal development. It is quite unfortunate that matters concerning the library in Nigeria oftentimes receive less attention from our political leaders today. Most of the political leaders and policymakers are yet to consider the library as a priority and the need to have a national library. Several times, funds meant for library development are diverted to other places because these political leaders feel that the library is not a place to invest in. While we still copy from our

colonial taskmasters, no Nigerian political leader has considered copying their libraries. To this end, our libraries continue to be jeopardized. The library associations in Nigeria on their path are trying. However, enabling laws should be enacted across the nation to secure a place for the library. The earlier our policymakers begin to consider the library as a vital component, the more libraries in the Nigerian soil will survive. The Nigerian constitution and act establishing institutions should make provision for the establishment of libraries as well as its proper management across all states and the institutions.

Provision of adequate manpower/ personnel:

There will be ineffective management of libraries in the case of inadequate library personnel. A typical library should boast of adequate staff cutting across the professional, para-professionals and support/non-professional staff cadres. This may not be obtainable in most Nigerian libraries as recruitment of library personnel is done half-hazard. Such cannot happen in professions such as Medicine. Today, especially the school and special libraries, anyone can occupy the seat of a librarian. This clearly results in little manpower driving the operations and functions of the library. This situation, if not handled, will continue to affect the quality of services delivered in these libraries. Consequently, it is not a matter of recruiting; these staff should have adequate educational preparation, certification and hands-on experience. Provision for their training and development should also be made.

Provision of adequate/ proper funding

In every matter of discussion where the challenges facing Nigerian libraries are discussed, the answer one gets will always be the issue of inadequate funding. This is not far from the truth as these libraries have suffered from this malady for a long period. Inadequate funding has been a major challenge ravaging the management of the library in Nigerian. It is no longer news that libraries, especially in Nigeria are poorly funded. The case of Nigeria building a National Library for decades will stir the realities on our faces. Contributing to this situation is the duo of a poor economic state of thenation, the sporadic and insufficient financial assistance from the library's parent institutions (either academic institution, federal or state governments). As at the moment, the funding of the Nigerian libraries is not improving rather it is worsening and has affected almost all areas of library functions and services. To overcome this challenge, the

need for additional means of generating income by the library should be devised. This could be through the introduction of fee-based services, advocacy and any other means. Except this is done, the Nigerian libraries will remain in the ancient path and a mirage.

Provision of adequate library infrastructure

The negligence and negative perception of the libraries in Nigeria have oftentimes resulted in the shortage or total absence of library infrastructure. These libraries have always been thrown into a state of fashioning their ways in terms of infrastructure. Not too bad. However, before such should be done, the library should have been granted autonomy in the national and public view, made a faculty in the academic view and a department in the special organization's view. Consequently, when these libraries are poorly funded, it affects the tools available in the library for the services delivery. Most of these libraries cannot boast of sufficient reading carrels, bookshelves, display racks, catalogue cabinet, selection tools, stamps, accession register, ICT gadgets, classification schemes, subject headings lists, etc. In an attempt to create a pathway for the Nigerian libraries, this scenario should not be allowed to continue. The library need not only be equipped with infrastructures but with basic infrastructure.

Disaster preparedness

Is the issue of natural disaster a challenge to the survival of the Nigerian libraries? Yes. Considering the incessant fire outbreak and other disasters, it is appropriate for the library to devise means of disaster preparedness. Consequently, the issue of security in the library should be enhanced. It has been revealed that most libraries in the Nigerian soil security challenges ranges from the negative user attitude to vandalism of library information resources, to library equipment, facilities and assault on library staff. The management of these libraries cannot be maintained if the few information materials acquired continue to deplete due to the activities of users or natural disasters and the absence of security gadgets on the side of the library. Looking at the scenario of the COVID-19 and how the library in Nigeria responded shows the need for more attention in the area of disaster preparedness. Services of the library need to go beyond the four walls of the library to the library on the space.

Library automation

The importance of ICT in the management

of libraries in this present century cannot be overemphasized. However, the absence of this technology, inadequacy or non-functionality, is a major challenge to the Nigerian libraries. Reports over time have shown that most libraries in Nigeria have been experiencing low utilization of ICT in the management of the library, mainly due to a dearth of ICT infrastructure and facilities. Other impeding factors include poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities, ignorance of policymakers of the power of information network in the economic and industrial development of a nation. Some libraries have indeed acquired personal computers and other necessary software packages for their library operations; however, there is irregular or non-maintenance and upgrade of both hardware and software. All these constitute challenges to the efficiency of the library. This need to be handled. Although some libraries have upgraded their services by including digital tools and devices to be more appealing to potential visitors and satisfy the returning visitors, examples of which include the availability of e-books, e-readers, computers, tablets, and Wi-fi. This effort need to be complemented by other libraries.

Library campaign and advocacy

This point should have been the first point to talk about going by what it means. The issue of advocacy greatly affects the management of any type of library. The library in Nigeria needs to sensitize its user communities on their roles, services delivered and resources provided. Library campaign and advocacy will go a long way in changing the negative perception of the people about the library as well as attracting patronage. Advocacy is public support for a particular cause or policy. It is any action or activity that can help decision-makers to support the library. It is an ongoing process that should be a regular part of every library in Nigeria. It has to do with speaking up, drawing attention to important issues and directing decision-makers towards finding a solution. The Nigerian libraries advocacy could be talked up through special appeals to the community as well as its leaders. It could also take the form of making suggestions, recommendations, demands and even threats. It could further be done by calling radio/television talkback shows, arranging interviews, sending a press release, writing letters to organizations and members of the legislators, journal articles, and books. This must be done.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Analysis of literature on the libraries in Nigeria suggests the perceptions of these libraries as an important component of societal and educational development, remain low and limited, associated with poor visibility of these libraries and low funding. However, there is evidence that these perceptions can change over time if the political leaders, library administrators and managers are willing to see the potentials of the library as a player in the development of the nation. Combining current perceptions of the Nigerian libraries with what is expected of them, many possible roles exist for the libraries to play. To position themselves in these roles, it would be strategic for these libraries to provide relevant and essential services with a special and strong focus on remaining visible and relevant in the Nigerian soil. While the above assertion is largely optimistic about the ability of Nigerian libraries to shift perceptions through the provision of relevant resources and services, it is necessary to qualify this optimism by underscoring the nature of funding of these libraries. The challenge remains for libraries to navigate their way through the fractured, ever-shifting sea of international development agendas and players as well as devising means for additional income generation.

In the end, Nigerian libraries may have the enthusiasm and passion, but without well-connected advocacy and the ability to support their programmes effectively, their potential as development partners may stall and they may not survive in the face of the prevailing educational and societal requirements. This underscores the need for national policy into what capacity Nigerian libraries should have for information generation and dissemination. In addition, there is a need for additional, in-depth research on libraries in the developed nations that have been successful in attaining quality library standard so that one can learn from them and share practical strategies with libraries on the Nigerian ground. For Nigerian library systems to improve, the paper strongly recommends that the librarians need not fold their hands but should intensify efforts in attracting development organizations, continuing to advocate and network with development organizations, international audiences and other libraries at the local level, consider promoting library strengths as Nigerian-embedded institutions and hubs for national development and making judicious use of the funds allotted for the development of the library.

It is indeed very true that the libraries in Nigeria have always experienced the challenge of inadequate

attention on the side of the political leaders and policymakers. However, we need not allow this narration to continue if we must design a pathway. There is a need for Nigerian leaders to begin to see the library as a potential national building venture. Nigerians need a better understanding of the recent efforts by libraries in information provision and cultural heritage preservation.

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