

**A REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTERS
ON NATION BUILDING: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

While different sectors have been incorporated in different activity of the nation building, libraries and information centers have been given little or no chance to participate in Nigeria. This paper highlighted the impact of library and information centers on complex activities of nation building, further explain the kind of services rendered by different types of libraries and information centers in the country. The paper confirms that Library and information centers plays a very vital role in national building in the country, and therefore, recommend the government to assist these centers to actively participate in the activity of nation building.

Keywords: *library, information centers, Nation building, Nigeria.*

1.0 Introduction

Libraries and information centers became indispensable commodities in the discus of Nation building in 21st century; the society is becoming more complex and more dynamic due to the proliferation of uncontrolled flow of information in every aspect. Developed and developing nations are in dire needs of valuable information/knowledge that is authenticated by a reputable information agency for them to actualize its potentials, as the amount of poisonous information in circulation will only downgrade the development of any given nation. Prime minister Tony Blair (2000) declared that “in this new environment the most important commodities of a nation are information and knowledge”. Libraries and information centers are undoubtedly the major carriers of pure and sterilize variety of information and knowledge.

Moreover, growth and development of every nation relies on the quality of education as well as research carried out by its citizens which largely depend on how functional their libraries and information centers are. Similarly, Ranganathan and Surrenda Babu's (2012) paper identifies that the information plays vital role in this digital environment.

This has become possible because of the technological advancement and changing of information needs of the users. Information is considered a vital resource, alongside land, labor, capital and skills. People need information for their day-to-day activities and for the development of their environment and themselves (Mtega, 2012).

It is therefore, unanimously agreed that in recent days, information has become more important than any other factors of development. The country that has information and technology regarding solution to the problem are considered wealthier than any other countries of the world. According to Kamba (2009) knowledge and information are very important for achieving meaningful development. The modern world of information technology where you cannot find even a single area that is untouched by its effect. Libraries and information centers is no exception to this. Information technology has shifted the library profession to library and information science field, this paradigm shift affected virtually everything in this profession, ranging from operations, services provided nature of collections, staffing etc.

Libraries and information centers in this challenging century need to gear up its activities such as provision of timely information to its patrons due to the variety of their information needs which hitherto were not like that. Interestingly on this regard, modern libraries and information centers are serving its purpose by providing the needful information in areas such as education, economic, socio-cultural and even political for nation building.

2.0 Library and information centers in Nigeria

Nigeria is geographically situated on the coast of western Africa. Covering an area of about 924,000 km², it is bordered on the north by Niger, on the east by Chad and Cameroon, on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, and on the west by the Republic of Benin. Nigeria's total population stands at about 200 million, with a population growth rate of 2.4 percent, making it the most populous country in Africa, and the largest black nation in the world. Similarly, it is one of the major oil-producing/exporting countries in the world. Indeed, the oil sector has greatly influenced the development contour of the nation since 1970. Nigeria is enormously and richly endowed with abundant human, natural, and agricultural resources spread across its 36 states, as well as its Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. But, sadly, despite being rich, the country belongs to the league of poorest income group of nations in the world. In other words, the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria is incredibly high, especially in rural communities (Abubakar, 2013).

The history of public libraries in Nigeria dates back to 1932, when the first public library was established in Lagos, which started as a subscription library. According to Aguolu (1989), the library was established with a US\$6,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. According to him, most of the users of the library were then Europeans resident in Lagos.

Diso (2005) noted that public library services are fairly and widely distributed in Nigeria, with each of the states of the federation having a constituted library board with a network of branches in several local government areas of each state. Public library services are an integral part of societal educational, social, informational, cultural, economic, and recreational processes. Abubakar (2013), states that the roles that public libraries could play in poverty alleviation and other national programs cannot be overemphasized. In other words, those programmes can only succeed when the people are duly informed. Therefore, libraries and information centers in Nigeria should develop innovative library-based programmes aimed at addressing, informing, and supporting the important national programmes in the country, particularly the current National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Npower program, tradermonie, conditional cash transfer etc. Such innovative programmes could play a vital role in ensuring that people in the community receive information not only about the anti-poverty programmes, but also other related programmes and also about the way and manner in which such programmes affect their lives. Libraries and information centers could do these using approaches such as:

- Organizing cultural events, including the use of film shows, drama presentations, and discussions, mostly using the local languages.
- Organizing literacy days or weeks and reading programmes. This may require sending invitations to local writers. The public library is the best place to organize such activities. The librarian or information worker can assist the patrons by acting as a facilitator in such programmes. This includes providing useful information and making important texts available to encourage people to read, especially those in the rural communities (Hoq, 2012).
- Outreach programmes. This can be achieved through the creation of stands and art displays in public places (especially in the rural communities), conferences, seminars, and workshop and the use of mobile vans, etc. Such programmes can have a positive impact on rural economic and societal development. Stilwell (2011) reported an example from South Africa where the KwaZulu-Natal Public Library used a 'wheelie wagon' containing 500 books to provide services at different points. Nigerian public libraries can emulate such a project.

- Creating special collections for the poverty alleviation and other important programs to be displayed in the library. Readers coming into the library should be directed to the collections.
- Rural information centers/township cultural stations should be utilized in the current poverty alleviation programme by the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National social investment program (NSIP), since the rate of poverty is high in the rural areas. Such a program can lead to greater participation of the Nigerian public libraries in the anti-poverty programmes. Examples can be taken from China, where their existence was reported by Clarke et al. (2011). Also, according to Hoq (2012), a rural information center that is run by able information professional can educate the rural people on how to make the best use of their money and resources, as well as providing information on jobs and ways of getting them.
- Library and information entrepreneurship programmes and schemes. Libraries in the country should create innovative entrepreneurship programmes with the aim of educating and informing people, especially the rural dwellers, on the need of being entrepreneurial and productive. This could likely minimize the rate of poverty and too much dependence on the government. They should, in addition, serve as centers for entrepreneurship training.

The role of libraries, information centers and other agencies becomes vital in sustaining the information services for the development of rural communities in Africa. In this case, Libraries and information centers should develop their collections, facilities and services to meet the information needs of their patrons (Kamba, 2009). In a similar assertion, Zillur stressed that every person needs information for decision making (Mtega, 2012, in Zillur 2016).

2.1 Libraries Services

Academic libraries today are complex institutions with multiple roles and a host of related operations and services developed over the years, yet their fundamental purpose has remained the same, to provide access to trustworthy, authoritative knowledge. Consequently, academic libraries along with their private and governmental counterparts have long stood unchallenged throughout the world as the primary providers of recorded knowledge and historical record. Within the context of higher education especially, when users wanted dependable information, they turned to academic libraries (Campbell, 2006).

In another submission, Akporhonor (2005) defines academic libraries as those libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes. Furthermore, Academic libraries will undoubtedly assist citizens in making sound policies that will automatically enhance development in every sector of their Nation.

Academic Libraries provide numerous services to its patrons, in line with this Umoh EB (2017) stressed that 'the services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria are highlighted and explained below:

I. Circulation/Borrowing Services

Circulation / borrowing services are one of the most vital services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria to their clientele. These services are being provided for her teeming population of users which constitute students, staff and other potential patrons at large which are outside the academic environment such as the immediate communities' members where the library is situated. The academic library provides these services by way of providing information resources that can cater for their national endeavors.

I. Reference Service

Academic libraries in Nigeria also provide qualitative services to the users by means of answering questions over the telephone, answering via the web or by email, answering reference questions by means of meeting face-to-face. Reference services for library users often involve not only answering specific questions but also personalized instruction in the methods of identifying and locating research information resources (Umar, 2008). Databases, bibliographies, and other aids designed to introduce library users to the information resources the library provides and to guide them in finding the research information resources to further enrich the pool of available information resources. Reference services provided by academic library staff introduces the wide variety of information resources in the library system and beyond, connecting the users with branch or specialized libraries, and other campus supportive services including academic, financial, writing, and counseling services. Orientation activities may take many forms, but all acquaint library users with the facilities, information resources, and services of the library system for the first time. Orientation may also include public relations activities that introduce students to information resources available within the university community or on any information network. Academic libraries also play some important roles with regards to reference services to its users (Connell, 2009):

- (a) To assist users
- (b) To help readers make the best selections from the universe of recorded information
- (c) To justify the existence of the library by demonstrating its value to those who support it.

In the survey of large academic libraries in Nigeria, Aguolu (2002) found out that apart from the primary functions of answering queries, the responsibilities carried out by most reference departments includes the following:

- (a) Inter-library loan service
- (b) Public document service
- (c) Current periodical
- (d) Micro text and newspapers
- (e) Library tour
- (f) Library instructions
- (g) Book selection for the general library collection
- (h) Processing of theses dissertation, etc.

II. Bibliographic Verification Services

this service involves provision of facts about publications rather than people, events or organizations. In providing this service, reference librarian searches his bibliographic tools such as indexes, bibliographies, catalogues, etc., to verify that users' information about a document (i.e. bibliographic publication) is correct and complete. This service is very important because it is evident that students, scholars, publishers, authors and the general public sometimes miss some bibliographic information about some items they cited. Information about data of publications, correct names of authors etc. is sometimes wrongly cited. This service is therefore provided to assist users to verify any of such information. This will eventually boost the capacity and knowledge of the nation's intellectuals.

III. Current Awareness Services (CAS)

Many information services are provided by academic libraries in Nigeria specially to alert their users about the existence of some current publications or information. e.g. Information about NSIP, NAPEP and other important national programs. According to Madu (2009) that CAS take the form of periodic (Daily, Weekly, annually etc) listing of publications, monographs and periodical articles within a given subject area.

These publications are circulated among some categories of users or general users of academic libraries in Nigeria in order to notify them about the existence of such information resources contained on the list. For example, a user may find something relevant to his/her area of specialization or needs and therefore request for the resources or a specific part of it. Elizabeth (2004) described the concept (CAS) as “The service which includes review of publications immediately upon receipt, selecting information resources pertinent to the programs of the organization served and note individual information resources to be brought to the attention by one means or the other of those persons to whom work they are related”. Information according to him can be reviewed through the following:

- (a) Using circulars
- (b) Using telephone
- (c) Using library bulletin
- (d) Using notification forms to be sent to the users
- (e) Routing of periodicals where relevant articles are marked to draw attention of the users
- (f) Circulation of table of content, etc.

IV. Reprographic Services.

The photocopying is the most frequently requested element of user services in academic libraries in Nigeria. Information resources such as reference works, rare books, theses, periodicals or heavily used items which are not normally loaned may be photocopied. Adhering strictly to copyright laws and supplied to students, some even permit the photocopying of personal document or private note. In addition, certain libraries especially academic libraries are responsible for giving binding services to the users provided that the binding unit is not overburdened with the library official work.

V. Technical

S e r v i c e s

Under the technical services the academic libraries in Nigeria are seen as providing some technical services to their users. Gbaji (2007) highlights some of those services as follow:

- (a) **Acquisition / collection management:** The academic libraries in Nigeria acquire, collect and manage the information resources (books and media) as well as making these information resources available for their users in order to meet up with their information needs.
- (b) **Systems Department:** The users of academic libraries in Nigeria gain free access into the systems department of the library such as computers or automation department so as to be able to search the information needs online.

(c) **Cataloguing and classification:** The academic libraries in Nigeria provide both manual and electronic cataloguing systems for their users that facilitate easy access to the information resources of their choice in the library. Academic librarians make impact in this area by suggesting a suitable classification system to be used in the library. The section also advises the cataloguers to include some information while cataloguing in order to provide useful information about information resources on the catalogue cards so as to assist users in locating information resources easily.

(d) **Digital Initiatives:** The digital initiatives programme oversees the selective digitization of the universities manuscript collection and other records.

(e) **Indexing and abstracting services:** Abstracting and indexing journals as well as subject bibliographies help to provide access to information resources. The international indexing and abstracting services are very selective in respect to the journals they cover. Academic librarians provide these services.

VI. Extension / community services

Apart from the aforementioned services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria, they also extend their services to their immediate communities in which the academic libraries are situated. This is done by ways of providing the community users with adequate information resources that would go a long way to cater for their immediate needs and aspirations. The academic libraries provide services such as computer programmes designed to inculcate to the users on how to use the systems for their personal and immediate needs. They also provide books that could serve as a yardstick for education and cultural development of their society. Academic libraries in Nigeria also assist the community members to actualize their dreams and aspirations by providing them with information resources that would improve the quality of their lives particularly low-income individuals.

VII. Inter-Library Co-operation

Inter-Library co-operation is another vital service rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria. This type of service is usually seen to be practiced between two or more libraries with mutual benefits in which the libraries involved come together with an agreement to share and exchange information resources. The IFLA Pre-Conference in Athens (Dickson and Robert, 2010), a research was conducted highlighting six libraries services in an attempt to determine their acceptance in the service context of academic libraries. These services are: RSS, instant messaging, streaming media, weblogs, tags and social networks. The findings included (but are not limited to) a rather low usage of those services, and evidence that Really Simple Syndication (RSS) was the only widely used web service among the six, and tags was the least used.

The integration of a specific set of services is re-examined after two years, a period of time that can provide some clues as to the state of affairs in the field of academic libraries and the incorporation of web services. Libraries and information centers in Nigeria could contribute to poverty alleviation and other national development in general; Abubakar (2013) suggests the following ways to achieve that:

VIII. Instruments for revitalization

First and foremost, libraries and information centers can serve as instruments for revitalizing the already existing national programmes of the country, because they are instruments for steering change in a society. Public libraries, for instance, can contribute immensely through the provision of information and reference resources, especially, those resources that relate to local interest and prevailing trade of the people, as well as on the various poverty alleviation and other national programmes of the nation. Information resources like magazines, newspapers and the likes that present or provide information on the dangers of poverty, unemployment, information on various opportunities for jobs, and economic empowerment can change the mindset of the inhabitants, and can go a long way in reducing the shackles of poverty in those communities. Similarly, in the rural areas where the literacy rate is very low, the public libraries can be utilized by the government through giving them the necessary support so that the programmes can be disseminated through film shows and drama presentations. Mobile public libraries can be utilized to reach every nook and cranny of the Nigerian rural communities. This may require resuscitation of the mobile library services.

IX. Motivating people

The libraries and information centers in Nigeria can play an important role, not only in providing the necessary information about the various schemes and programmes for the poor people, but also in motivating people to benefit from the programmes. Access to micro-credit and markets and finance information, education and health care are essential roles of the libraries. Regular provision of information on micro-credit, market prices and finance (i.e. selling and buying) can play a significant role in minimizing the rate of poverty and other social problems, because they could assist the poor people to know the ways and means of receiving various sources of financial support and assistance available to them, which can increase their incomes as well as empowering and strengthening their financial base for the betterment of the nation.

X. Educating farmers/ agricultural information

Since the rate of poverty in the country is very high in the rural areas, where the majority of the populace is actively engaged in farming, the significance of libraries in the agricultural sector cannot be overstressed. Agriculture employs more than 60 percent of Nigeria's population and contributes 45 percent to the nation's GDP (Isiah, 2012). Libraries and information centers can assist the farmers with information about soil fertility, new crops available, pests and insecticides etc., in order to improve both the quality and quantity of their production.

XI. Organizing of public lectures and talks

Lectures and talks could be jointly organized by the government in collaboration with the libraries, where experts could be invited and given a chance to discuss issues like the current national problems and their solutions, issues such as unemployment, income generation or raising as well as self-reliance. Others may include skills acquisition, youth empowerment and soft loans as well as the techniques of establishing small scale cottage industries.

XII. Serving as training centers

In addition to the above, the libraries of the 21st century can serve as centers for training the unemployed youths, thereby contributing to one of the schemes of the current poverty eradication programme of the nation, the NAPEP (Youth Empowerment Scheme), as well as the Vocational Skills Development Programme (VSD) of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), NSIP (Npower, tradamoni, conditional cash transfer etc). Libraries had clear roles to play in the earlier Better Life Programme (BLP), because they were supposed to serve as centers for educating women on simple hygiene, childcare, and increasing the literacy rate of the rural women, which were some of the major objectives of the scheme.

XIII. Public access to ICTs and Internet facilities

Libraries are the best places to offer citizens' access to ICTs, and to Internet facilities in particular, to assist job seekers, especially university graduates, to have access to the information 'expressway.' This could go a long way in enabling them to have wider access to job advertisements, both within and outside the country, and will surely reduce the rate of unemployment in the country.

In his position to justify the paramount need of information and knowledge and by extension libraries and information centers in national development. Diso (2010) asserts that the fact that the world of today is knowledge based and all meaningful participation in its activities presupposes this status. He examines the following excerpts and their import:

a. The world bank (1999 in ECA, 2005:4) stated that a poor countries and poor people are left behind by rich ones not only because they have less capital but because they have knowledge'

b. In his presentation at the final session of the NTWGS meeting for vision 20:2020 the minister of national planning stated that information and knowledge will be the currency of power" (accounting for the rise of china and India in the global scenarios)

c. The WSIS declaration of principles in recognition of the necessity of information and knowledge in global development. Its premised on" "a common desire and commitment to build a people oriented information society where "Everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge and where individuals, communities and people are enabled to achieve their full potentials in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life (ECA, ARAPKE, 3)

d. UN Secretary general Kofi Anan warned that "unless African countries become full actors in the global information revolution, the gaps between the haves and haves-not will widen, opening the possibility of increased marginalization of the continent. "ECA/WSIS 2/2, 2005:4)

e. Olowu (2004:81) observes that "information plays the most critical role in any policy process and by extension in governance

f. Opuku-Mensah (2007:25) believes that "information is a major driver of economic change, restructuring business affecting skills and employment, contributing to growth and facilitating the opening of market through the wider and faster flow of information and knowledge".

Although the above excerpts were gathered by the author mainly for the analysis of vision 20:2020; hence they are still applicable and relevant to our topic of discussion as they strengthen the indispensability of information/knowledge and by extension libraries and information centers in national development.

The above and other related services is what makes libraries and information centers functional and able to discharge its role of providing needful information to the citizens which by extension will shape the citizens in making decision and policies that will help in nation building.

Despite all this importance attached to libraries and information centers; they are still faced with a number of challenges in Nigeria. As reported by some literatures. Abubakar (2013) stressed that many libraries in Nigeria are in deplorable condition.

A perusal of the literature, particularly in recent years, has indicated that the library and information environment is less than comfortable, because large numbers of libraries are in stagnant and woeful situations, suffering from chronic underfunding, long years of neglect, and lack of good information resources, services and facilities, as well as inadequate staffing. In fact, the sponsoring authorities of such libraries have turned a blind eye to the development and maintenance of the various libraries in the country. In the area of library and information resources and facilities (i.e. in terms of quantity and quality), the majority of libraries in Nigeria simply do not have them. Most libraries have on their shelves outdated and old-fashioned information resources, and in some instances, even non-existing. This regrettable scenario still persists till today. Udeze (2009) reported the disappointing situation in the Lagos State Library Board, which is the second largest state in the country in terms of population. In that report, he noted that despite the fact that the state government continued to show interest in the running and maintenance of the library, a stark reality there was that a majority of the books on the shelves were outdated and almost moribund. This situation is the same in other libraries across the country. Similarly, a study of library development in Lagos State conducted by John Okeke and Owoeye (2011) further revealed that public libraries in the state were poorly funded and had inadequate staff. Additionally, they had poor collections as well as insufficient numbers of computers and Internet connectivity. Also, mobile library services and extension services were no longer functioning.

3.0 Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has tried to discuss the roles of libraries and information centers in national development in Nigeria. It also highlighted various services rendered by these libraries to its clientele. However, the rate of poverty, unemployment, diseases and other social problems in the country is very high, despite the fact that Nigeria has over the years launched a number of developmental programs aimed at improving the condition of the citizens. Sadly, these efforts have not yielded satisfying results. It has also been realized that the roles of libraries and information centers have not been recognized by the said programs. The libraries and information centers of the 21st century in Nigeria have a critical role to play in designing, implementing and preserving policies that are required in national development.

Based on what has been presented in this article, the following recommendations are therefore put forward for immediate considerations.

- The country's libraries and information centers (particularly public libraries) should be properly funded by their sponsoring bodies, and also there should be a clear-cut funding policy for the nation's public libraries

- The modern ICT facilities should be incorporated in our libraries and information centers especially public libraries and also staff training in the use of ICT's should be further enhanced. This would help in enabling them to provide adequate services related to nation building.
- After that, government should fully involve the nation's libraries and information centers in national development-oriented programs. Also ,more libraries and information centers should be established and properly maintained, especially in the rural areas.
- Non state actors like NGO's, industries, financial institutions and wealthy individuals should also participate in improving the condition of the nation's libraries and information centers for efficient service delivery.

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