2019

REPOSITIONING LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

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December 16, 2019.

ABSTRACT

This paper gives national and international perspectives of librarianship and examined the repositioning of libraries in Nigeria's educational system to make them competitive in line with global best practices. Library leadership, training and curriculum content for professionalism and funding were looked at as devices for competitiveness vis-à-vis international university standards. Recommendations were made for leadership training and review of library school curriculums to reflect new trends in librarianship as well as promotion of reading culture, among others, for global competitiveness.

Keywords: Repositioning; Libraries; Nigeria; Educational System; Global Competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a vital position in the life of the individual and in the development of every society. It is therefore a necessary instrument for the transformation of society. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2015) education is, "The action or process of teaching someone especially in a school, college or university; the knowledge, skill, and understanding that you get from attending a school, college or university." The Oxford Dictionary on the other hand, defines education as "The process of receiving or giving a systematic instruction especially at school or university." There is no gainsaying the fact that education is the fulcrum of development. Education plays an important role in our lives that it is seen as the springboard of development and progress.

Thus, it is described as an "Instrument par excellence for effecting national development."(National Policy on Education, 2007:358). Therefore, the educational system must have all the necessary infrastructure, facilities, policy and legal frameworks, that makes for efficiency and effectiveness of the entire system. Facilities like classrooms, laboratories, libraries, sporting equipment and conveniences among others are requirements for a standard school or institution. Thus, the library is being focused on for repositioning in Nigeria's educational system for the attainment of global competitiveness.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

The aim of this paper is to examine the library in the educational system, against the backdrop of global standards with the objective of repositioning it for global competitiveness. In other words, how can the library be strategically placed in the educational system in Nigeria to meet global best practices?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To understand this discourse fully, we must underscore the following concepts: Repositioning, Library, educational system and global competitiveness.

REPOSITIONING

Two things come to mind when we talk of repositioning. One, it means that something is not in the right or proper position. Two, it could also mean that the position of something needs to change completely (that is, moving something from a current position to a new position). According to Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (2003), to reposition means:

1) To put in a new or different position; shift.
2) To change the image, marketing strategy of a product so as to appeal to a wider or different audience.

Therefore, repositioning libraries in Nigeria's Educational System, means putting libraries in a new position in education, to make them more strategic and appealing for global competitiveness.

LIBRARY

The library has been defined severally by both professionals and nonprofessionals, however, the most universal is that which says the library is a repository of knowledge. Libraries have been identified as key elements for open access to information, which is crucial to the development of democratic information society (Ryynanen, 1999:1). The library today is so many things rolled into one, it is a collection of books, an information resource centre; it provides a springboard for all researches and an Information Communication Technology (ICT) centre for storage, preservation, processing and dissemination of information for societal development. The library has also become the digital warehouse of information on the Net.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Educational system is a reference to the entire process of education from the foundation level (Nursery/primary) to the tertiary level (university or equivalent) as enshrined in the constitution and education policy. Edem (1982:24) says, "An educational system can be seen as an open social system, the society in which it operates constitutes its suprasystem, and the pre-primary and primary schools, secondary schools, vocational and technical schools, teacher-training institutions and so on as subsystems." The educational system is the pivot that moves education and by extension development. Hummel (1977:131) posited "…that there is a relationship between a country's level of general development and the level of development of its education system." The health of the educational system is vital to the overall development of a country.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

Global competitiveness stems from the fact that the world has become a global village where competition to excel thrives. The power of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has made development in all sectors universal including standards and approaches to education. Therefore, no country can afford to be left out hence global competitiveness. In talking about the pursuit of internationalization which is synonymous to global competitiveness, Obanya (2010:577) has this to say:

> *Strategic development plans at the institutional level would need to consider appropriate strategies of expanding each institution's universe - considering how to internationalize facilities, programmes and university management to meet international standards.*

From the above, Obanya has succinctly captured the concept of global competitiveness in education which is the quest for meeting international standards.

POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

It is a fact that libraries have positive impact on the educational system. Hence the library is at the heart of the educational enterprise, there is also a correlation between provision of quality library and excellence in teaching and research (Okebukola, 2006:570). It is because the library is central to education that the National Policy on Education (2007), section 3, C (i) requires that school libraries be provided in primary schools. Similarly, section 9, under the following subsections provides thus:

(e) As libraries are one of the most important educational services, proprietors of schools shall provide functional libraries in all their institutions in accordance with established standards. They shall also provide for training of librarians and the encouragement of indigenous authorship.

(f) State and local government shall establish public libraries and actively promote readership in the use of authority.

It is also instructive to note that even though the 1999 Constitution under operation did not provide for library services outright, section 18, subsection (1) of Educational objectives states that, " Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels." To the extent that libraries are at the centre of the educational system, providing equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels means also providing for those who may not have the opportunity to be in the four walls of a school or even have access to Internet on their own. The library presents great opportunity for self - education and cost-effective service for those who cannot afford formal education at any particular time. And it is an avenue for life-long learning.

This is why the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2015) says:

> *This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living Force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for Fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and Women ([www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries /manifestos/libraman.html](www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html)).*

The policy and legal frameworks as shown above clearly holds government and other providers of education responsible for library provision in our educational system, be it formal or informal. UNESCO further affirms that freedom, prosperity and the development of society and individuals are fundamental human values that can only be attained through well-informed citizens exercising their democratic rights and playing active roles in society. We cannot therefore shy away from making library infrastructure available as the centre point of education in our quest for academic excellence.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The professional role of the librarian must be put in perspective here. The Nigerian librarian of the 21st Century must make every effort to take the library to the front-burner of government at all levels. At the heart of repositioning is this statement by Benge (1979:199):

> *It is possible to claim that the need for information exists in any Type of community but the point is that it is not a felt need. This is a development problem and something which librarians and information Officers have to understand, since part of their job is to identify needs and translate them into a conscious system.*

The above scenario painted by Benge is now further complicated by the advent of the Internet which is why Mabawonku (2001:54), observed thus:

The coming of the Internet has brought about some fundamental changes in reference activity of the librarian. For information that was once provided at the reference desk has been transferred to an Internet home page.

Mabawonku further explained that users including policy and decision-makers can now make direct connections to information sources via the new media thereby taking away the traditional role of librarians as sole-providers of information, which renders them somewhat irrelevant. Therefore, taking the need for information provision by the library to the very level of a "felt need" in the educational system becomes even more herculean and must be addressed as a priority to ensure global competitiveness. As long as libraries in the educational system are not given their pride of place and we have a situation where, "Poor quality library resources have depressed the quality of teaching and research" (Okebukola, 2006: 570), then global competitiveness in education will be a mirage. Benge (1979) pointed out that there is poor recognition of the library because "…there is something inherent in library and information work which renders it less urgent or vital than the activities of doctors or lawyers, or even priests." He maintains that the significance of a librarian is not that he is usually suddenly required in time of crisis but that he is there all the time like the weather and part of the foundations of civilized life. And because of this inherent low level of urgency in the services of the librarian, it follows that he has to struggle for recognition and support (Benge, 1979: 210). Lamorde (1992:4) also affirmed this when he said, "librarians are hardly given the deserved recognition since their services are not classified as basic and important particularly as they are not profit-oriented." The onus now lies with librarians to make themselves relevant with indispensible competencies.

REPOSITIONING THE NIGERIAN LIBRARY FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

The libraries in Nigeria are not in isolation from the rest of the world, they are part and parcel of the global system. Hence, library services in Nigeria must conform to world best practices. Setting standards for the library is imperative because the library provides suitable environment and materials for learning and research in the academic system. Here in lies the importance of the library in the educational system and the university in particular. No university or research institution can thrive without the library. The concept of world-class standard or global standards of education is geared towards the production of high quality graduates at the highest point of learning, which is the university. That is why a world-class university is defined as "an institution with teaching, learning and research delivery systems meeting global standards" (Okebukola, 2010a). Universities whose processes and products were able to compete favourably in the world market were referred to as "world class." According to Okebukola (2010:537), there are basic features or characteristics a world-class university should have thus:

* Highly qualified staff

* Excellence in Research

* Quality teaching

*High levels of government and nongovernment sources of funding

*International and highly talented students

*Academic freedom

*Well defined autonomous governance structures

* Well-equipped facilities for teaching, research, administration and student life.

Therefore, bench-marking Nigerian Universities in the educational system becomes very vital. University education is the crowning glory and the highest point of education, the attainment of which is crucial to the life of the individual and the society at large. The journey to the university begins from the primary to the secondary school level. Candidates from secondary schools are the first level feeders of universities for undergraduate programmes, and university graduates are feeders of university postgraduate studies as obtains all over the world under normal circumstances. There are other circumstances where people who did not go through formal primary or secondary education can attain university education via informal avenues.

Given the high premium placed on university education, public funds are invested in university education to produce tangible results in research outcomes, innovations, inventions and professionals that will ensure economic prosperity of a society or nation (Report of Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities, 2012:12). For example, we see such breakthroughs and benefits in ICT concepts like "Silicon Valley" from Stanford University, "Google" from Stanford University, and "Face book" from Harvard University (Needs Assessment Report, 2012:12). In view of the above, "…it is believed that national economies can only remain competitive as far as their university education remains very productive (Needs Assessment, 2012:12). To benchmark Nigerian universities, the Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities applied International Best Practice (IBP) and Nigeria's National Minimum Standard (NNMS) in its assignment to measure the level of attainment by Nigerian public universities. The general areas covered by IBP are:

*Physical facilities & laboratory equipment
*Human Resource Management
*Provision of Infrastructure
*Strategic Planning

*Academic Process Improvement
*Administrative Process Improvement
*Leadership, Professional Development & Performance
*Communication, Engagement & Collaborations
*Business Practice
*Tracking & Showcasing
*Research & Innovation
*Internationalization
*Budgeting & Control
*Sports & Recreation
*Environment
*Code of ethics, etc.

Among the International Best Practices in the universities, the first item mentioned by the Committee on Needs Assessment was "Physical facilities." This refers to physical facilities for teaching and learning in the universities which include:

-Faculty/Departmental Buildings/ Complexes (Lecture rooms, lecture theatres, auditoria, staff offices, seminar /conference/boardrooms, laboratories, workshops, studies, moot courts, farms, gymnasia etc).

-Libraries (Central libraries, specialized/professional libraries, faculty libraries, departmental libraries etc).

-Institutes/Centres (Specialized facilities e.g. ICT Infrastructure, special laboratories, conference facilities etc).

For the library which is our main concern here, the best practices in the provision of library as facility for teaching and learning in competitive universities is as shown below:

Table 1.

Facility	Quantity	Quality
Libraries	1 Central/Main library 1 Faculty library each 1Department library each	Meet Engineering standards

Similarly, the library as teaching and learning resource in competitive universities is as reflected below:

Table 2.

Learning Resource	International Best Practice	Benefits
Library services	Ensure the continuous availability of relevant collections (books and periodicals) in all disciplines, subscribe and make available to users, all relevant and major database gateways, helpdesks, automation.	Ease learning process, promote innovation & discovery, save cost, foster research, culture.

Source: *Report of Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities, 2012.*

It is interesting to note that between 1960 and 1975 the quality of Nigerian University education was comparable to top-rate universities all over the world (Okebukola, 536). But by the mid 80s quality began to depreciate at alarming rate because of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the government and the devaluation of the Naira. This made salaries of expatriate lecturers unattractive and non-competitive making them to flee back to their home countries. As for local lecturers a lot of them were swept off by brain-drain to other countries where they had better packages and conditions of service. The devaluation of the Naira also led to poor purchasing power. This resulted into the situation where Okebukola observed that:

> *Laboratory equipment and library books typically purchased with foreign exchange became increasingly out of reach on account of the devalued Naira. Gradually, old equipment could not be replaced, latest books and journals could not be purchased. The decay set in earnest and quality nose dived.*

This is the real situation that brought depreciation into the standard of education in Nigeria among other factors. We cannot help but agree with Okebukola, who is one of the experts on Nigerian educational standards that this is the genesis of the loss of competitiveness in our system. Also according to Ojerinde (2015:9), "Inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment as well as poor library facilities remain the major challenge in Nigerian universities." Another proof of the falling standard of education is the outflow of Nigerian candidates into foreign universities, including neighbouring countries. It was for this reason that Babalakin was quoted in Ukwuegbu(2013:16) observing that:

> *...there is high cash flight of about N160 billion from Nigeria to Ghana annually as the cost of university education for about 75,000 Nigerian students schooling in Ghana. Nigerians also spend huge amounts for the education of their children or wards in other countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Malaysia.*

Ukwuegbu (2013:18), also observed that many primary and secondary schools in the country, especially those privately owned are not schools in the proper sense. They are run for profit motives by the proprietors and not for quality, hence, "These schools lack libraries, science and technological equipment and sports fields." In a similar vein, Esu (2004:338) noted that, "If statistics is taken, it will reveal that more than 90% of our primary schools are without library facilities and yet the library is the nerve wire of any learning institution." The above

statements may sound exaggerated but that is the true situation, the concluding seminar paper of NIPSS SEC 37(2015:xxvii) confirms this, it stated that, "In many of the basic and post-basic schools across the country, the state of infrastructure is deplorable". Most of the primary and secondary schools visited had no library facilities, nor furniture. If at the foundation level these educational facilities are lacking and at the university level they are poorly funded, then there is no wonder at the resultant effect on quality. We are thus faced with a twin problem, the libraries are not there at the primary and secondary level, and where they exist at the tertiary level they are not well funded to meet global standards. Therefore, we will look at some devices to put the library on a global footing for competitiveness.

Leadership and library school curriculums

Training and retraining of library professionals is of paramount importance for the attainment of global standards. If we are to remain relevant and attain international competitiveness, then the librarian must be equipped with modern competencies like computer literacy and management skills. There must also be a radical change of attitude towards library theory and practice being imparted to students via library school curriculums. As Benge (1979:216) observed, an imaginary international standard should not be adopted as an educational approach, rather the relevance to national development is more important. He also believes and we agree with him, that "a general ideological foundation is more important than the acquisition of professional knowledge or the mastery of techniques." He argues that this ideological education which he refers to as "decolonization of the mind or cultural liberation" must be pursued to awaken political consciousness or else there can be no real leadership. For practical

purposes, in addition to the theoretical and ICT contents, we should introduce new courses to the traditional ones to suit our peculiar situations.

Courses like "Obsolescence of hardware and software", which can be taught to students to enable them sift items that are imported and to shift to home-grown versions and adaptations to suit our local needs. We cannot quantify the amount of wastage, and irrelevant materials being brought into the system only to be abandoned or discarded midway. There are so many computer softwares dotting the library landscape in Nigeria, e.g. Alice for Windows, X-Lib, Tin-Lib, Koha, Liberty III among others – whose application have either crashed totally or left the institutions that adopted them mid-stream. Software is set of instructions or programmes through which computers systems operate. We can therefore create our own but with international standards of quick access and storage capacity in mind.

We also advocate new courses like "Lobbying and Library Budget Defense" for effective Library Services, hence simply submitting budgets never translates   to handsome budget approval nor place the library on priority list. New approach to library budgeting will give impetus to library services. Library schools are the breeding grounds of professionals, therefore if we are to maintain international standards then there must be hybridization of the products of library schools to give the required leadership and professionalism. The library professional requires high level training and retraining to be able to provide world class service. Obanya quoted Houghton and Shebeen (2000) as saying that "whereas machines replaced labour in the industrial era, information technology has become the source of codified knowledge in the knowledge economy, demanding uniquely human skills such as conceptual, interpersonal and communication

skills." This means that the librarian needs to acquire and imbibe new competencies as a necessity to remain relevant in the educational system.

Adequate funding of Libraries

As we saw in the legal and policy frameworks, libraries are central to provision of information in any academic setting. However, libraries are always at the receiving end of poor funding globally. It is either that budgets are reduced, cut ridiculously, put in limbo or hijacked for other purposes after approval by supervising authorities. Library Journal (2012) quoted Californian Public Librarian's response to a budget survey thus:

> *Budget cuts began in 2008 and have remained constant since then. The worst impacts have been the reduction of services and open hours as well as staff cuts. At times it feels as if we are not a full-service public library any longer.*

This lamentation is a clear indication of what is happening to the library budget globally. In Ohio 35% of public libraries now rely on local levies for the majority of their funding (Library Journal, 2012). Library budget cuts lead to low level library materials, loss of positions, poor or non-recruitment of professionals, reduction in opening hours and services to communities. Now library staff are doing more, and getting less pay. According to Saliu (2014:273), "There should be a separate funding heads for research and library services," to put our research and library qualities at par with international standards. Can a product of a Nigerian university be rated with a product of an American, British, South African, Ghanaian or Malaysian university   today? The answer is a resounding "NO!" This is because in global ranking, Nigeria is far below the ladder in all ramifications. Going by NUC guidelines, Federal Universities are expected to allocate 10% of

their income to library   development (Toyo, 2004:378). But in reality hardly does any university in Nigeria today,   spend 10% of its income on library services.

*Promotion of Reading Culture

There is need for a conscious effort by librarians to promote reading culture in their communities. For the Nigerian Library to be made globally competitive, we must endeavour to promote reading culture through book exhibitions and reading competition among the youths on a regular basis. This will help to engender reading habit in our young ones. A former National Librarian, Habib Jato(2015) stressed that, "For Nigerians to compete favourably in this competitive world, we must become an intelligent society, and to achieve this, we must take reading seriously."(The Guardian, Feb.18, 2015:xi) When reading culture is promoted, there will be more awareness in the citizenry to agitate for the provision of more libraries. This will enhance access to information materials for the purpose of both leisure and achievement reading thereby promoting intellectual growth, culture and national development.

*Equipping the Library for Efficiency

For Nigerian Libraries to become globally competitive, they must be equipped properly through automation and digitization of their services using appropriate softwares. In addition, there should be regular power supply and dedicated servers and active websites to ensure steady Internet and online services. A library with uninterrupted online services has guaranteed access to unlimited information and resource sharing across the globe. The library environment should be cozy and inviting to all shades of users and make them feel at home irrespective of age, gender or status.

Conclusion

The Library occupies a central point in the educational system. Therefore, repositioning Nigerian libraries using the above strategies will put them at par with their international counterparts. No university or research institution can thrive without a library that is not run by professional librarians, adequately funded, well equipped and engendering reading culture to enhance the intellectual capacity of the citizenry.

Recommendations

As outcome of the above discussion the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be proper leadership training and review of library school curriculums to reflect new trends and innovation in librarianship for global competitiveness

2. There should be adequate funding of libraries as priority to take care of information materials, personnel and ICT infrastructure to move the library forward.

3. Reading Culture should be promoted in libraries to enhance the intellectual capacity of the citizenry.

4. Libraries should be sufficiently equipped with modern computers, Internet services, regular power supply as well as cozy environment to be competitive.

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