THE RELEVANCE OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION COMMUNICATON TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

More than one billion people, the world over, entered the 21st century unable to read a book and write their names. Unfortunately, most of these illiterate people are found in sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria having the greatest number (UNO Report 2003). The illiteracy level of Nigeria today has no doubt resulted to ethnic, religious, political cum economic crisis, which are the most intractable problems ravaging the country today. The level of illiteracy in Nigeria has also led to a breakdown of law and order, loss of lives, properties and collapse of government authority in some states of the federation particularly in the north-east of the country where we now have the Boko Haram insurgency. This study is aimed at determining how Libraries and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) could be used to improve national development thus curbing these ills found in the Nigerian society. The study also examines the challenges of libraries and ICT in Nigeria. The researcher concludes that the Nigerian government should support and encourage coherent policy framework in education to achieve sustainable national development. The study recommended that government should establish libraries and ICT centers in local government councils and villages and give free access to education at all levels to entrench peace in the country. These will foster sustainable national development.

Keywords: Libraries, ICT, Education, National Development

Introduction

Nigeria is a West African country. With a population of 170,218,600, the country is the most populous nation in Africa and is more than twice the population of California, yet it is classed as a developing country (Adama 2012). Development in general in Nigeria has been impeded by low income rates. Over 70% of the population lives below poverty level of $1 per day (Musa, 2010). This is irrespective of the fact that Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producer. According to Adeloye (2007), more than 70% of the Nigerian population dwells in the rural community that contains more than 80% of natural economic resources and over 90% of the nation's Agro workers. Abdulwahab (2012) equally observed that the rural dwellers, engage in primary activities that form the foundation of Nigeria economic development. Yet, despite the importance attached to rural areas, they are made unattractive due to the absence of modern infrastructural, educational, social and health facilities. Among these factors, the educational system and facilities such as libraries, laboratories and ICT are the worst hit as both the rural schools are being operated without these facilities which are the engine source of every academic institution.

According to Musa (2010) quoting Aguolu (1989), libraries are social agencies designed to conserve knowledge, preserve the cultural heritage, provide information, undergird and underpin education and research and serve as fountains of recreation. Libraries have functioned as instrument of political and social change and as a guardian of intellectual freedom. The major obligation of traditional libraries, namely academic, public, special and school libraries are to provide books, multimedia reference and bibliographical resources that are necessary for the actualization of the academic mission of a nation. These objectives can only be realized if the libraries are made effective through efficient, management and utilization of the library and information resources necessary for academic enterprise.

However, at the dawn of the 21st century, the world witnessed exponential advance in science and technology. As a result of this, the traditional role functions of the library as an agency for preserving, organizing and disseminating information have changed considerably. This is because the concept of library as agency for retrieving, processing and disseminating information has changed in the past fifty years. Librarianship today is no longer about good stock management. More so, library is a non-profit making organization and greatly looked upon as rendering social service and the innovation brought by ICT. Information Communication Technology (ICT) has changed the global economy and had become a necessary component of business strategy.

Conceptualizing ICT, Dialoke (2013) said ICT is a generic term referring to the technologies that are used for gathering, accessing, presenting or communicating information. This definition is also in agreement with Ike (2013) who stated that ICT is the catch-all phrase that is concerned with gathering, storing, manipulating, retrieving, transmitting, or receiving digital data or information. In view of these, library and ICT are inter-related because they are powerful instruments for research, preservation, retrieval and dissemination of information in all kinds of format either through prints and electronic resources. ICT today is a strong catalyst for promoting economy, culture, education, agriculture, security, health and decision making (Labaran 2010). Equally, Ameh, (2010:154) noted that:

> *The print and the electronic media have become the fastest, easiest and cheapest means of information preservation. Books, journals, newspapers, magazines and other periodicals are appearing in millions of copies every day. Virtual libraries today are one hundred percent telecommunication driven. These innovations are radically redefining the age long concepts of library as an institution for collections, processing, storage and retrieval of paper based information materials.*

Education is an instrument par excellence for national development. Okiy (2012), noted that education involves the development of the whole person intellectually, psychologically, socially, vocationally, religiously or morally. This is why education is seen as an integral part of national development. Mensah (2011) noted that education is a process through which people are formally trained to acquire knowledge and skills. Formal education comes from the training received from established schools from basic levels to tertiary levels. Through this process of education, people are expected to acquire knowledge and skills and hence specialize on specific fields of study in various universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. It is this knowledge that allows people to contribute meaningfully to national development. This has made the national educational policy and the national development plan of almost all the African states to emphasize on the right to quantitative and qualitative education for the African children. The relevance of library can never be relegated to the

background in education and national development, because it is offering unprecedented access to information in all kinds of format.

National development has been seen from different perspectives by eminent scholars and development theorists. Muhammed (1996) quoting Brooks (1990) asserted that, national development involves economic growth, modernization, equitable distribution of income and natural resources and socio-economic transformation for improved living standards of the people through the use of a country's natural, human and institutional resources. In the same vein Gojeh (1999), stated that national development involves transformation of all aspects of the life of society which encompasses the human, cultural, social, political, intellectual and material well-being of the people as well as the eradication of mass poverty and it's co-relates such as illiteracy, disease and short life expectancy. National development is also seen as a process of nation building which brings about unity and enhances the quality of life of the people. Ameh (2010) averred that it was the quest for national development that triggered and energized the founding fathers of modern Nigeria such as the great Zik of Africa, ObafemiAwolowo, Sir AbubakarTafawaBalewaetc to pursue vigorously and struggle for political independence which was subsequently granted in 1960. This they could not achieve without benefiting from sound and efficient education system.

Relevance of Libraries and ICT in Education and National Development
The relevance of libraries and ICT in education and national development, the world over, especially in today's information driven society cannot be over emphasized. Libraries and ICTs are at the center of education business. Education is an integral part of a nation's general progress because it is the greatest tool for human efficiency and development. Any nation that does not develop its educational system cannot develop. The major reason why most of the developing nations of the world are seen continually underdeveloped is because their educational system has been neglected. Added to this is the challenge of insufficient schools and teachers, with no or outdated libraries and ICT resources, there is also improper funding of most of the developing nations educational system especially Nigeria, where the government do think they are being economically prudent, but on the contrary, they are actually sowing the seed of continued underdevelopment. According to Fatemeh, Farhard and Akran (2009), information is a crucial factor in national development and the ability to use information tools is considered a source of power. No one uses what he has not, and the only available instrument for developing information in people is the education system.

In line with the above view on the importance of libraries to the society, Nyangoni (2012), opined, that in this country, we have reached a point where books in quantity are necessary for our cultural, social, educational and political development. We are at a stage where concerted effort is needed to revamp our educational system having passed the stage where progress is dependent on the work of an educated minority. Judgment and knowledge will be needed more and more by the masses and for that, the spread of literacy must be accompanied by the greater availability of reading materials. Nyangoni advocated that mass literacy empowered is the only tool for sustained national development. Thus; people in the rural and urban communities in Nigeria are in urgent need for relevant, efficient and current information resources, because it is a catalyst for overall development. Camble (1994) observed that successful rural information programme rests squarely on the availability and use of quality information by rural development workers and rural people noting that such a programme has failed in the past because the knowledge of their information needs was not so well considered.

There is no doubt that libraries and ICTs can play an indispensable role in the development of rural and urban Nigeria and also enhance various aspects of national

development plans. Libraries and ICT can be used to energize the role of governance pillars in rural areas. They could aid poverty alleviation and enhance speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective interaction between the public, business and other agencies. The goal of using ICT with the marginalized groups, such as the poor, is not only about overcoming the digital divide and also enforcing further the process of social inclusion, required for transformation of the environment and system that reproduces poverty (Warschauer, 2002).

Libraries and ICT can be used to provide market information and lowering cost of transaction for the poor rural farmers and traders. Majority of the rural poor are often unaware of their rights, entitlement and the availability of various government schemes and extension services. Libraries and information centers like mobile library, info, kiosks, also the mobile phones can enhance their access to information. Through this medium, rural farmers can also be informed about the appropriate time to sell their produce. The teeming unemployed youth in the rural communities can also get information on available vacancies in the metropolis. Abduwahab (2012) citing Abisseth (2008), noted that Ghana, like Malaysia, Singapore and other more technology minded countries are today gradually and steadily taking ICTs to rural communities so as to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural dwellers.

The establishment of Community Information Centers (CICs) in districts throughout the country is also another means by which libraries and ICT would enhance national development. It will also provide cheap and efficient tools for access to information and exchange of ideas and knowledge. Libraries and information centers can become an enabling tool for wider socio-economic development when properly used. It can greatly increase the ability of the people to benefit from the development programmes meant to help them, thus foster economic development. Supporting this view, Abdulwahab (2015:15) maintained that;

> *a key component of improving the socio-economic state of the people in the village is to ensure that their products find the right kind of markets, reach them in minimum time without the middle men involvement. IT, in rural areas will provide unique opportunities to producers of rural products, agriculture/agro processing products and rural handicrafts to have direct access to market. Internet will enable advertising of rural products produced even in the remotest villages to global markets.*

The agricultural extension workers can also access latest information on farm technology and products and disseminate same to the villagers who are mainly subsistence farmers. The health care system is another area where IT can play a major role in national development. Doctors and paramedic staff at the local health centers or their subsidiary can access latest information about health schemes and seek advice from specialists about disease or ailments they cannot diagnose or treat.

According to Mensah (2011), some of the oppressive forces of human nature are illiteracy, disease, unemployment, hunger and poverty. A good educational policy can be used to suppress and subdue human problems. This is made possible through the inculcation of proper reading skills, attitude and knowledge which will increase the capacity of the individual to challenges posed by his environment. Since libraries and ICT are at the centre of education business, this can be used to address the aforesaid challenges in Nigeria.

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and compute at certain levels, Davidson (2010), noted that functionally, literacy involves skills needed to cope with everyday

situations, such as reading newspapers or writing an application for job. Okiy (2012), observed that the enormous power of libraries as tools for literacy education has made libraries and information resources centers in all the sectors of Nigeria's economy. Hence, today, libraries are found in all the tiers of our educational system including government agencies, research institutions and private organizations, such as print and electronic media, government agencies, bank, insurance companies, judiciaries etc. In Nigeria, libraries at the primary and secondary levels have been found to be instruments for all round educational development of the Nigerian child. Libraries are the nerve center of the school. Musa (2009) sees the school library as a place where a full range of information resources and accompanying services are accessible to both teachers and students. It represents a unified programme involving the use of audio-visual, printed sources and tools necessary to satisfy the educational needs and recreational interest of pupils, students and their teachers. This includes a variety of information resources such as textbooks, journals, reference books, multimedia resources etc, selected systematically, organized and disseminated to pupils, students and teachers with the sole aim of supporting and enriching the school curriculum (Umar,2004).

In the same vein, Ozioko (2008) also maintained that library plays a crucial part in encouraging reading at the early stage by making available pictures, books, stories, novels, magazines and topic books, so as to ensure that early quality childhood care and education is achieved. He stated that the primary level requires that such materials like text books, reference works, topic books and audio-visual resources should be sufficiently available in the library to support curricular programme thereby expanding learning resources. He went further to mention that at secondary school level, the school library, through the guidance of teachers, helps students to develop independent study.

It is my thought that libraries and information centers are the pivot of academic excellence and also a tool for literacy education. This is because they provide all the relevant information resources necessary for sustaining teaching, learning and front line research for all the tiers of learning. Adama (2012), noted that the academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of educational institutions in producing high quality graduates into the labour market depend largely on the quality of information resources available in their libraries to support teaching and research functions.

In his view, Bello (2010), opined that access to free information has always played an important role in human life and as a basic human resource, its need was never a subject of controversy. The free and equal access to information by every member of the society irrespective of racial, religion, geo-political, social, economic status is a fundamental human right. Accurate information should be provided to the people at the right place. Users of today's libraries are looking for development information that is crucial for individuals and national development. Alluded to this, information is a vital resource for problem solving and decision making. Everybody, state and society requires it. In fact Karki (2006), stated that it is more important than other resources.

On the other hand, Ezimwanyi (2011:76) citing Ogunsola (2008), posited that, today the role of libraries and professional liberians is changing world wide. They are no longer passive keepers and preservers of books rather they have evolved to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with emphasis on identifying users' sources, needs and communicating solutions. Modern libraries, she further noted, are unfolding the community learning potentials by providing information on community issues, such as health, employment, continuing education and local history. Thus equitable access to information through the modern information technology is essential to enable educated and informed citizens participate in a democratic global community.

Access to modern information technology is currently one of the most attractive library services, thus Ezimwanyi (2011:76) citing IFLA (2006) stressed the active role of Libraries Information Society. He states that they build capacity by effective use of information literacy and providing support and training for effective use of information resources including information communication technologies. This is specifically critical in promoting development agenda, because human resources are central to economic progress. In these ways libraries contribute significantly to addressing the digital divide and the information that exist from it. They help to make the Millennium Development Goals a reality including the reduction of poverty.

In summary, libraries and information centers are expected to provide information, current affairs, reference services, educational guidance, simple classification and explanation of such things as cause of diseases, use and invention of medicines or drugs and world situations. They are also expected to conserve and preserve local artifacts including oral literature which in many developing countries like Nigeria, are believed to be essential for scholarship and knowledge of the society.

Challenges of Library and Information Communication Technology in Nigeria
Library and information communication technology, in developing countries like Nigeria, is fraught with challenges. Many libraries and information centers in Nigeria have entered a frustrating period in organization development. According to Ameh (2010), because of paucity of funds, library infrastructure cannot be expanded, absolute information resources cannot be replaced, and existing service and structure cannot be maintained. Professional libraries cannot be easily employed by the relevant authorities. In fact, most libraries and information centers are so poor that they impede rather than promote learning and acquisition of knowledge. In the same vain, Ezinwanyi (2011:77) and Krolak (2005) listed the following as problems militating against the development and growth of libraries and information centers in Nigeria:

- Lack of funds.
- Lack of professionals.
- Irrelevant materials.
- Colonial model librarianship.
- Lack of needs analysis.
- ICT challenges.
- Inappropriate buildings.
- Lack of cooperation and national information policy.
- Demoralized management.
- Dusty shelves with old irrelevant books.
- Inadequate or no physical development.

These sordid states of library and information communication technology development in Nigeria are possible because of absence of library activism and advocacy in Nigeria.

Strategies for Improving Libraries and ICT
Having discussed succinctly some of the relevances and challenges of libraries and ICT in education and national development in Nigeria, it is pertinent at this juncture to suggest strategies that could be applied for improvement to meet the exigencies of the 21st century, an information driven age. The suggested strategies include:

1.   **Improved funding** Funding occupies a pride of place amongst all the problems confronting libraries and ICT development in Nigeria. Therefore, Nigeria government has to improve its funding of the education sector by adequate budgetary allocation to the three tiers of education, namely: primary, secondary and tertiary education. Funds should be made available for establishing, equipping and maintaining libraries. Whether public, academic, research or school libraries, adequate funds should be provided to acquire up –to-date information resources (both print and electronic) to support teaching, learning and frontline research at all levels of education.

2.   **Employment of skilled staff** Every organization requires different categories of staff based on different kinds of specialization, knowledge and skills. There is the need for professional and non-professional Liberians to work in the libraries and information centers. Competent staff should be employed to work in various libraries and information centers in Nigeria, because the success of any library in fulfilling its service roles and objectives depends on the quality and moral standing of her staff. There is also the need for retraining and retooling of librarians so as to meet the new challenges imposed on them by the exponential growth in information communication technology and to enhance their professional competence. This can be done through continuing education, or in-service training, attendance to workshops, seminars and conferences.

3.   **Updating library resources and infrastructure** To enhance efficient and effective utilization of libraries and ICT resources, government should provide up-to-date information resources. Libraries and information centers should have buildings that are large enough, functional and physically attractive to library users, simple to use and efficient in its operation. The government should liberalize the importation of learning materials, through removal of heavy duty on paper and other printing materials and equipment. There should be a drastic expansion of the various paper mills across the country so as to meet the paper needs of the nation.

In a nutshell, it is imperative that all the libraries and information centers in Nigeria should be reorganized in line with the electronic libraries of the contemporary era. The problems militating against the development of ICT in Nigeria should also be addressed by the government. They include:
•   Inadequate telecommunication facilities
•   Poor level of computer literacy
•   Absence of computer facilities
•   Poor level of awareness of internet facilities
•   Ignorance of policy makers of the power of information network on the economic and industrial development of the nation.

Conclusion
We are in the 21st century, an age that is powered by information in its ramification. It is the century of epoch exponential growth in the ICTs in which the internet and its associated technologies are being used to take advantage of immense knowledge of man all over the world for accelerated development of the society. As a result of this, there is the need for the Nigerian government to adopt what Ghana, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and other more technologically minded developing countries are doing by gradually and steadily taking

libraries and ICTs to the rural areas and suburbs, as to bridge the digital divide between developing and developed countries.

The federal government of Nigeria should support and encourage coherent policy framework on comprehensive and encompassing education. This is necessary because education, as we have seen, is the only process through which people can be formally and informally trained and transformed to acquire knowledge and skills which facilitate national development.

Recommendations

From the forgoing the following recommendation are made.

1. For education and national development to thrive in Nigeria, there is need to foster peace and unity among the citizens who should work cooperatively and harmoniously to achieve progress. In the absence of peace in a nation, no meaningful development can be achieved.

2. The federal government of Nigeria should establish Community Information Centers (CICs) in local government councils and villages throughout the country as it is done in other more technological minded countries, like Ghana, China, South Africa and Singapore etc.

3. Government should as a matter of urgent necessity, provide reading resources, space for teaching and research activities. This can be done by establishing libraries, cyber café, info Kiosks, internet and other online resource centers in the rural and urban communities in Nigeria.

4. There is need for free access to education at all levels of our educational system. This is because education is a process through which people are formally trained to acquire knowledge and skills technologically and otherwise. The current romance of Nigeria's democracy will be sustained if there is enlightened leadership and followership.

5. There is the need for the government and other stakeholders to raise the awareness of the impact of ICT in Nigeria for her to develop her full potential.

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