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Gilbert Paul Igboechesi

University of Jos, Nigeria, gigboechesi@gmail.com

Thomas A. Adigun

University of Jos, Atadigun@hotmail.com

Anita Ann Amando

University of Jos, amandoa@unijos.edu.ng

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**ADVANCING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION LITERACY (LIL)
IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

BY:

GILBERT PAUL IGBOECHESI¹

*Assistant Librarian, University of Jos, Nigeria
igboechesig@unijos.edu.ng*

THOMAS A. ADIGUN (PhD)²

*University Librarian, University of Jos, Nigeria
atadigun@hotmail.com*

ANITA ANN AMANDO¹

*Assistant Librarian, University of Jos, Nigeria
amandoa@unijos.edu.ng*

ABSTRACT

Information literacy is a pertinent aspect of any developing or developed society, hence the need to make it an integral part of the education system of any aspiring great society. This article x-rays the library and information literacy in the Nigerian educational system and how it can be advanced. Common approach to libraries in Nigerian educational system, which cuts across the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, is seen as the reason for the laxity in library and information real time advancement. The article also looked at the discrepancies between the theory and practice in library literacy in accessing necessary information and the difficulties experienced in the process in the Nigerian educational system. The position of the National Education Policy (NPE), according to this article, should go beyond its theoretical placements and make the needed changes so as to practically accommodate the Library and Information Centres. This paper is based on the longitudinal (observatory) studies of the author aided with secondary data to buttress the positions made. It posits that the seeming laxity (common approach) of students' literacy on library and information centres is primarily because of the lacuna at their early levels of education. Such gaps presented pertinent suggestions for improving library and information literacy. This prompted a useful yard stick for the paper to present workable recommendations that in its opinion will be of immense help to solving it.

Keywords: Library and Information Literacy (LIL), Library and Information Centres (LICs), Nigerian Student, National Policy on Education (NPE).

INTRODUCTION:

Traditionally in Nigeria, the library has a common conception when people are asked to define or give their perception about it. While this is strongly beyond a single conception, it has always been seen as a place where books are stored and also a quiet place for reading. Microsoft Encarta (2009) defines it as a “place where books are kept: a room, building, or institution where a collection of books or other research materials is kept”. However, according to Williams (2015), “the library is not just about ‘research’ or information literacy. Williams state that the library must be seen as a place where all aspects of the approaches to Learning are inspired in new ways.” He gave examples like the library being a place for “Reflection, Information, literacy, skills, Critical thinking, Creative-thinking, Transfer skills, affective skills, organization skills, collaboration and Communication”. This means that the nomenclature ‘library’ is insufficient for what it really stands for, rather it should be ‘library and information centre’. Hence, Salarzahi, et al. (2010), states that:

Library service establish a basic and vital role to achieve sustainable development in the higher educational institution and it's also play a major role by providing required information to improve in the Research and Development (R&D) sector. pp 169

For Libraries in Nigeria, they mostly offer the traditional service of lending of books (mostly present in tertiary institutions) and offering a good environment for studying i.e. where students can complete different home works, assignment and other classroom related reading, such as reading for examinations. Ashaver and Bem-Bura (2013) placed that most of these libraries have limited space and resources. They also lack the needed technology related facilities and in some cases relevant books to meet the needs of users. Users share information about their library experiences a lot; they perceive the library as a place offering more of academic related information and therefore an extension of academic study centre. Doyle (1995), posits that “a good library service enhances the quality of education at higher level of institution”. She also mentioned that “a good library is the heart of a good university which brings academic excellence”. To this extent, it is justifiable to also add that Salarzahi, et al. (2010) goes on to say that “it has gone beyond just academic excellence but for development in all spheres”. Hence, Igboechesi and Diyemang (2019), opines that “the primary objective of any library is to run an efficient system that will bring about prudent dissemination of information resources intended for reading and learning in all spheres, so as to provide rich platforms for teaching, learning and research.”

Ashaver and Bem-Bura (2013) noted that the Nigerian students, especially in primary and secondary schools, have limited or no their exposure to libraries and Information centres. The idea of a student, not up to the age of going to the university, visiting a library or using it is highly limited. Most parents don't even give such a taught. The student is mostly on the terrain of normal school life, lesson in schools and at home. In a rapidly changing knowledge-based

environment, the place of the Nigerian student is questioned on their attitude towards the libraries and information centres, especially at colleges and universities. In the light of the above, the purpose of this paper is to establish the perceived gap and laxity among the Nigerian students and posit ways of advancing the literacy level of library and information centres for the good of the present and next generation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Library and Information Centres:

Information resources are always available in libraries anywhere there is one. The only issue is to ascertain if such library has adequate required or needed resources and services to satisfy its class of users or patrons. This is the part that is usually crucial and also essential for the growth of any library from the users' perspective. Because a fully functional library should be able to meet the entire user community's information needs. This implies that libraries are expected to be updated in effective feedback mechanism and information resource acquisition, both print and non-print versions of information resources for all types of library users. Thus, the primary purpose of libraries is to provide access to knowledge and the necessary information resources for different categories of users. Based on this, it is instructive to define library and information centers (LICs) as integral elements established in any society, organization or institution to serve as centers of information acquisition and services, translating to knowledge acquired. Library and information centers are beyond the literal sense or aspects of books, journals and other resources alone. LICs are the connection or relationship between the past, present and the future; they shape and keep shaping the world.

Information Literacy:

According to Rath (2022), conceptualizations of information literacy are an incredibly individualized thing, despite much literature being published on the nature of information literacy and existing definitions from professional organizations. Hicks and Lloyd (2021) observed that this issue continues to exist and that there are competing discourses in the professional literature for information literacy. To Rath, it seems that we all have our own ways of defining and explaining what information literacy is. Hicks and Lloyd presented two major discourses on the conceptualization of information literacy. They are the skills-based and the practice-based. The skills-based definition of information literacy sees information literacy as a set of contextual competencies to be met. That is, once a skill is learned, it can be applied in other contexts without much trouble. While the practice-based definition buttresses the importance of context where the valued ways of performing an action are defined by the community to which the practice belongs and may change based on the context in which the action is occurring (Schatzki, 2012 as cited by Rath, 2022). Lloyd (2017) defined information literacy as "a way of knowing."

Therefore, the ability of a user to know or have the skills to retrieve needed information to adequately satisfy his/her information needs is information literacy.

METHODOLOGY:

Longitudinal (observatory) studies and secondary data to buttress the positions made.

SIGNIFICANCE:

This study is beneficial to Librarians (Para professionals and professionals), students from different at all levels of education, teachers at all levels of education and different levels of education institution managements. The paper has shown the need for all of the aforementioned stakeholders in education to redefine the ideal place of the library in teaching and learning. The paper is also significant to the Nigerian federal and State governments since the constitutional provision for education is on the concurrent list. This implies that both the federal and state authorities can exercise legislative authority on education, making it necessary for them too so as to guide them in realigning the present system in the Nigerian education towards library and information centers (LIC) and library and information literacy (LIL). It is also apt for researchers that will develop numerous gaps the study might have exposed.

THE NIGERIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES (LICs)

LICs have helped to increase and improve access to the relevance and the quality of education everywhere in the world. It continuously aid and facilitate the acquisition and absorption of information resources for knowledge. Offering developing countries like Nigeria, unprecedented opportunities to enhance their educational systems, improve policy formulation and execution on education and widen the range of opportunities for information users and prospective users as well. When talking about library and information centres in the Nigerian educational system, one will easily think of the public libraries (academic and general) that are provided by the government, either at state or federal level. The knowledge of the library in Nigeria is an issue with different phases. Its place in the Nigerian educational system and the Nigerian student is the way it is because of so many anomalies in the educational structure of the country; factors militating against its full implementation are numerous. The mode of delivery of knowledge and curriculum are not yet library enhanced, even with the development of a National Policy on Education. Nigeria is predictably a step in the right direction toward improvement for the sector (Atureta, 2011).

Ideally, a student is supposed to be knowledgeable of what the library is all about from the elementary and primary schools proper, to inculcate the culture and leave an impression in them, meaning that schools at these stages are supposed to have a functional library and information centres where students can have access to print and non-print materials (books) at that stage to read. It is largely not so in the Nigerian system because of the kind of educational structure we have in place, even with the 2004 review of the National Policy on Education (NPE), first published in 1977, made possible by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) for the Federal Government of Nigeria. The document posited philosophical

basis and objectives for all levels of education in Nigeria. However, this article is of the view that concerted and practical efforts were hardly placed in giving the library and information centres their true place. The theoretical aspects are good, but lacking in practice. For instance, the NPE (2004) document, Section 11; Educational Services (e) (f) and (g) stated the following:

- E. The library is at the heart of the education enterprise. The virtual library as a platform for sharing knowledge is aimed at rejuvenating Nigerian schools through the provision of current books, journals and other information resources using digital technology.
The objective of the national Virtual library project include the:
 - (i) Improvement of the quality of teaching and research at all levels of education in Nigeria through the provision of current books, journals and other library services;
 - (ii) Enhancement of access of academic libraries serving the education community in Nigeria to global library and information resources; and
 - (iii) Enhancement of scholarship, research and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collections.To achieve the policy objectives, government shall provide appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities to ensure that the benefits of the virtual library permeate all levels of education in Nigeria
- F. **Since libraries constitute one of the most important educational services**, proprietors of schools shall also provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions in accordance with the established standards. They shall also provide for training of librarians and library assistants for this service.
- G. State and local governments shall establish public libraries and actively promote readership in the use of authority. pp 51-52

All of the above can be best achieved with the practical inculcation of the library and information centres in schools, not just recognising the place and importance of the library and information centres and failing to give it the practical grounds to operate. A close look at the Nigerian school curriculum and what is expected to cover makes this almost impossible for schools to practice ideal and functional library services at the primary and secondary levels respectively. There is no time for these students to visit and use the supposed libraries they have, if at all available. According to Hewlett and Walton (2001):

Library services are integral to support and guidance to the students through six aspects of provision at the higher education institution. These six aspects of provision are: curriculum design, content and organization; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and achievement; student support and guidance; learning resources; and quality management and enhancement. pp 84

At the primary level, Igboechesi, Musa, Enna, and Solomon, (2021), states that schools struggle to meet up with the overloaded curriculum provided by the government that they hardly have free periods and space for the students to use the library. After closing for the day, mostly between 2 and 4pm daily, the students are tired and everyone is expected to leave the school premises. With such scenario, it's almost impossible for a moderate and law abiding elementary or primary school student to know about the library and what it offers. From another angle, most of these schools in Nigeria don't have librarians, and or library officer(s) that manage their libraries so as to help in the orientation and the space for such, because the system is designed to make such practically impossible. Usually, the attention is mainly on the grades the students get or expected to get and not in the pedigree. Even after going home, most of these students, especially the privileged ones are engaged in private lessons at home by a hired "Lesson teacher". No school, teacher or parent is mindful of the fact that students need time to read different books outside the needed in school because they need other books to sharpen their knowledge and understanding on what they are being taught in school. This makes the students grow with little knowledge on what the library is and what it has to offer.

At the secondary level, this is also translated. Igboechesi, Musa, Enna, and Solomon, (2021) posits that they have "glorified libraries" primarily for the purpose of government accreditation for official license to run the school, centres for junior and senior state and federal examinations. They further stated than an average secondary school in Nigeria starts classes each day at 8:00am and ends at 2:15 or 2:30pm each day. Preps take them to 4:00 or 4:30pm. Some of these schools even start classes by 7:30/7:45am daily to meet up with the over jam-packed or grossly bulky curriculum given by the government. The average number of classes for the junior secondary students is between 8 to 9 subjects per day, even when these subjects have supposedly reduced by the Education Ministry; they are still the same in practice as they still need to be taught by respective teachers to ensure qualitative content. E.g. Basic Science and Technology (BST) is ideally supposed to be handled by three professional teachers in the fields of Integrated Science, Introductory Technology and Computer Science or Information Technology but it is official seen as one subject by the education ministry. So it boils down to the same thing as it used to be, if one wants to get it right and prepare the students for a good performance during their Junior and Senior examinations. Basically, students have up to 14 to 16 subjects to cover. How does a student have any space for library usage when such is placed? The student, teacher, parent and school management are all focusing on the grades (result) of the student. There is hardly the need to cautiously create the system that will spur the students to library usage. This is why the research and report presentation prepared for EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) by TNS RMS East Africa on Perceptions of public libraries in Africa, discovered that "Most people associate the Library with traditional book lending and reference services, rather than innovation and technology". This shows that the average African student's understanding

about the library is just a place that books are stored for history purpose. In another development, Ashaver and Bem-Bura (2013) opined that:

Students in these universities (Nigerian Public universities) have a negative perception on the library services rendered by these university libraries. This perception arises from lack of awareness by the students on how to search for information materials and ignorance on information search/retrieval strategies. pp 45.

This means that the students have little or no knowledge of the intended need for the libraries. As stated before now, the secondary schools don't even have librarians to help such situations. They are not even considered for such positions because the general orientation about education is not tilting towards such grounds.

From the angles of the teachers too, the issue is not good too. Igboechesi, Musa, Enna, and Solomon (2021), averred that they hardly have anything to do with the library, except for relaxation, marking of papers and assignments, writing of their self-expressed weekly frustration called "lesson Plan" and "Lesson Note". The word frustration is used to really paint the right view of these teachers about it. It is largely frustrating because most of these teachers are over worked; most of them teach between 2 to 3 subjects. In most cases, these classes at each level have different arms as well. If one teacher takes three different subjects in different levels, imagine what it means to write their lesson plans and notes. How does this help a teacher to use the library and be more productive? The perception of the teachers on the library is also not farfetched as they were also formed into what they are from the same system. The only possible thing is to find quick short cuts and or cut corners, which is what is obtainable in schools that run such system of teaching. You find such in most private schools, guaranteeing maximum profit for the owners, while reducing the path to great development in the life of the teachers through the library. What automatically happens to a student that has such experience from the primary and secondary school when he/she gets to the university is better imagined.

At the tertiary level, you find that the issue is a bit different this is because at the inception of any student's involvement at the university, the place of the library is established. They register as users, offer a compulsory course on it (Use of Library, under the General studies, GST). This is the time that these students begin to get the tip in the ice berg on the library. Igboechesi, Musa, Enna, and Solomon (2021) observed that at this point, they are not easily moved to even make maximum use of the library even after having an idea of what it stands for because by default (even without them knowing) they are used to passing or making it without the library usage. This is so because of the established background. Only a few out of these students actually overcome such education abnormality and step up. In the universities also, the library thrives primarily because of the nature of the students classes. It gives them time to visit the library. At

interval they can use the library. The lecturers also give them assignments and areas of research that will prompt them to use the library. According to Martyns and Igboechesi (2019), negligible number of lecturers (32%) also uses the library to develop their course contents and or outlines to help them lecture better, while also using them to develop their personal research on different issues. Most of them hardly use the library because they prefer to buy their books and equally enrich their study rooms at home; others use the internet connectivity available at the University to access what they want online.

CHALLENGES OF THE NIGERIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES:

From the discussion so far, it will be fair to list the following as some of the impediments facing library and information centres advancement in Nigeria. The challenge of:

1. Over bloated curriculum and subjects at the primary and secondary school level.
2. Emphasis on Grades rather than pedigree.
3. Poor Orientation of Students and compulsory subjects on Library at the primary and secondary and tertiary institutions on all classes and levels.
4. Lack of professional librarians/library officer at the primary and secondary levels.
5. Over bloated work load on teachers. This hinders them from personally using the library, thereby indulging the students to do same.
6. Poor library orientation and policy enforcement and lack of routine inspections by the ministry of education and professional library bodies or associations like NLA (Nigerian Library Association) and LRCN (Library Registration Council of Nigeria)
7. Inadequate finances (Poor funding): low budget policies for the educational sector from the government which militates against provision for and access to good library facilities for schools through the ranks of private and public schools (primary, secondary and tertiary). Leading to inadequate availability of library materials, and resources (books, periodical, documents and special collections, electronic resources, furniture, power and personnel.
8. Poor parental knowledge of the library is also a contributing factor. Literacy level among parent varies largely as a good number of parent in Nigeria at large do not have knowledge of what the library can offer. The primary reason to this is also tied to their little or no knowledge of the library too. Hence, the lack of inspiration towards their children on the use library for their overall excellence.

CONCLUSION

Library and information centres advancement is a pertinent aspect of learning and information gathering, which is centre to the development of the different levels of academic pursuit and the development of the Nigerian society at large. This paper has shown that the much concentration on the tertiary institution libraries is so much so that the lower levels of education libraries is

barely talked about. In reality, these libraries are actually supposed to be revamped for the ones at the tertiary level to have the needed patronage and growth. These other levels of Library (primary and secondary), form the essential part of the contributions to the achievement of the tertiary institutions' aspirations to providing high quality research and learning environments that meet group and individual needs. As the saying goes; "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a step", in the case of the library, there have been missteps in this journey to a vibrant library for students because, the beginning steps have been greatly ignored.

This article is a wakeup call to all stakeholders in the education industry of Nigeria and information professionals, they practically need to take steps to advance the library and information centres in Nigeria, starting from the revamping of the libraries in the basic education level (primary and secondary schools), so that the Nigerian student can go beyond the class room learning and become a force in the global space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For there to be advancement of the library and information centres in the Nigerian educational system, this paper proposes a short and long term solutions:

A. SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS

1. Robust orientation to both teachers and students of the Primary and Secondary schools on the need for the use of the library
2. Greater emphasis should be placed on the pedigree of a student rather than grades
3. Compulsory pacts with primary and secondary schools to have in their employ or a valid and working consultant, a professional librarian that will help them do the needful.
4. Regular verification of the libraries at the primary and secondary level to ensure proper operations and rich materials. The ministry of education should partner with the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Library Association (Nigerian Library Association) and other relevant professional bodies, setting up a special task force to see that schools in all levels adhere to the regulation provided by the ministry in building and effectively utilize the library facilities. This committee is to pay a visit to schools in space of two to three years to make certain the said libraries are still very much functional.
5. Librarians and library associations should subsequently organise public lectures and workshops for all level of targeted users or audience in other to enlighten and orientate them on the needs for library usage.

B. LONG TERM SOLUTIONS

1. Reduction of education curriculum by the government and inculcation of compulsory library subject at the primary and secondary school levels:

2. Community libraries should be advocated for and strongly given an attention in Nigeria if we are to make a difference in advancing the use of the library and information centres. The government through the ministry of education in conjunction with the Local Government Councils should provide functional libraries with facilities for communities to further raise the knowledge of the library among the local populace.
3. Encourage extracurricular reading and knowledge to expand the knowledge and views of the students
4. On the governments public libraries, interest should be placed on proper funding so as to enable these libraries revive and become functional again. While that is placed, enticing orientation about them should be done, to spur students to wanting to use the library. E.g. quiz and prize by these libraries on books in their libraries and students who have read the chosen books for such quiz. Such students must have a noted and official history of visiting the library for a specific time and spending a specified time while there, to qualify for such. Prizes should range from full or half scholarships, monetary stipends for studies etc.
5. Internet resources are key in today's world of information technology. This must be made available to all libraries in all level and, with high speed internet. Operating hours should be very conducive to the users or targeted patrons as well.

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