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Nigerian Libraries and National Development in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The paper highlights the possible role of Nigerian libraries in national development, especially in the prevailing Digital Age. It is guided by five objectives including discussing the state of Nigerian libraries in the Digital Age, highlighting indices of development and establishing the place of Nigerian libraries in national development. The paper also established that Nigerian libraries have the potentials to serve as a platform for development of Nigeria in the Digital Age. This is hinged on the provision of certain tools and infrastructure including library buildings, computer hardware and software, training and re-training of staff and provision of adequate funding. Several challenges were identified as hindering the effectiveness of libraries and paper concludes by recommending that librarians and professional bodies should step up advocacy and love for the library profession as a ladder for the attraction of patronage and attention to Nigerian libraries.

Keywords: Nigeria, Libraries, National Development, Digital Age

1.1 Introduction

Libraries all over the globe are acknowledged agents of development. The status stems from the role of the library as the engine room academic endeavour and also the sole of education. It is an established fact that the library is central to any serious academic exercise beginning from primary to university education. Education is also a central pillar in the development of any sector, organization or nation. It is therefore taken for granted that any agent that powers education cannot be ignored in issues concerning development. As far as human memory can stretch, libraries have always been associated with development and transformation leading Nwokocha (2018) to argue that societies are as

developed to the extent of their libraries. The impact of libraries on societal development can be further gauged by the fact that whenever libraries are transformed, it usually follows that societies are equally developed. Udensi & Akor (2013) are of the view that the most important information required in societal development is the one that will help the individual to settle uncertainties or problems and enable rational decision-making. According to them, this implies that even legislators would require accurate, unrestricted, and prompt access to libraries to facilitate the efficient performance of their duties. Abdulraham, Ape & Egbe (2019) submit that libraries across the world, play important roles in enhancing societal

development which is often achieved through promotion of reading habit and information literacy while Nwokocha (2017) summarizes that “scholars and world leaders are largely agreed in the affirmation that books, information and libraries are interwoven and are known to work together to promote education and societal development”.

Economy and politics are the platforms on which all democratic nations of the world operate. In this sense, the economy stands for trading, manufacturing, import and export of goods and services that go on in the country while politics represents the administration of the country by the political leaders. These two elements are the engine that move other enablers of development. Other activities that go on in a nation are geared towards assisting or facilitating the speedy development of the country either in the political or economic sphere. According to Nwosu (2015), development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that pervades all facets of human life including growth and changes in social, political, economic, technological and structural dimensions of the society. Sauda (1992) asserts that development process in modern societies is mainly concerned with improvement in the quality of life of citizens thereby ensuring that they live a better life. It also addresses the fundamental issues of inequality, deprivation, injustice, poverty and equal participation in political processes in each country.

The Digital Age which can also be referred to as the Information Age, Knowledge Management Age, Computer Age or New Media Age has been described as an evolution in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (<https://historyoftechnologyif.weebly.com>). Digital Age has brought about tremendous technological changes as developments in the last few decades have shaped and are still shaping the pattern of communication as well as the way people share and receive information. The

impact of the Digital Age is all embracing and can be felt on the social, economic and political life of the society as it has brought so much changes in several aspects of peoples' daily life, thereby helping to improve and reshape the environment with the aid of practical, experimental, and scientific knowledge or technology (Essays, 2018).

Education has been acclaimed as the greatest enabler of political and economic development in any country. Development of any type is usually powered by education which brings about knowledge to perform different developmental strides. On the other hand, acquisition of knowledge is achieved through reading of books and other information materials which are normally stored in the library. The implication is that the library appears to be a constant decimal in the equation pertaining to knowledge, information, education and ultimately societal development. Libraries have remained in the forefront of fostering stable and functional education which is fundamental to the development of any society.

According to Abata-Ebire, Adebowale & Ojokuku (2018), libraries play a critical role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is not surprising given the fact that libraries all over the world are the centre of research and a place of information empowerment and people have continued to retain faith in the capacity of the library in the promotion and realization of the goals of political and economic development of the country.

Many scholars have, and rightly so, linked the level of development in Nigeria to the literacy or illiteracy level. According to Osundare (2009) a country's level of development is a function of its level of mental and cultural evolution as well as the state of its educational advancement which is critical to the attainment of high literacy level. This probably led Nwokocha & Ogwo (2015) to posit that development depicts

improvement in people's lifestyle through improved, qualitative, and functional education, incomes, skills development and gainful employment. They further argue that an educated and well-informed labour force is a source of productivity for national development.

It appears that many scholars consider the library as a catalyst towards education of citizens of nations and by extension the development of the society. The question that begs for an answer is to what extent Nigerian libraries fit into this exemplary role?

1.2 Objectives

1. To examine the state of Nigerian libraries in the Digital Age
2. To highlight the indices of development
3. To determine the possible role of libraries in national development in the Digital Age
4. To ascertain the problems confronting libraries in Nigeria in the Digital Age
5. To proffer solutions to the problems identified

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Development is a general term used to describe a process of changing a situation for the purposes of growth, education, or evolution. Development can be seen from several dimensions including physical, environmental, social, demographical, economical, or political, among others. Obasi (2005), argues that development is a social process through which citizens of a country can harness, mobilize, and utilize all available resources, human and material, for the purposes of transforming their environment. This also includes ensuring the dissemination of credible and adequate information to citizens in the format they would understand. Seidman (2019) defines economic development as the process of transforming low-income national economies into modern

industrial economies. It is often seen as a technique of alleviating poverty in distressed economies. The term has often been used as a synonym for economic growth, however it is generally used to refer to a change in the economy of the country involving quality of life of citizens. It can also be used to refer to the adoption of new technologies, transition from agro-based to industrialized economy.

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According to Hiber (2019), economic development is a process that aims at achieving economic well-being and enhanced economic life for citizens of a country, state or local community. Economic development is often used as intervention process enhancing the economic life of citizens. Glass (2000) asserts that there is a current trend where most businesses go to the library with the primary aim of accessing business information and services, and where they are unable to go physically, they usually place a telephone call to the library.

Political development according to Pooja (2019) is a more elusive concept when compared with economic development. It presents more controversial scenarios whenever attempts are made to measure it in empirical and operational terms. This is the case because political development has to do with human beings and their political activities. He further explains political development in ten spheres and capacities including: political prerequisite of economic development; the politics typical of industrial

and advanced societies; political modernisation under which advanced nations are regarded as pacesetters; and the operations of a nation-state. Others are administrative and legal development; mass mobilisation and participation involving new standards of loyalty and demagoguery; the building of democracy; stability and orderly change; mobilisation and power. According to Lal, Gaumer & Manlica (1999) political development has to do with the way a nation is governed including the activities of citizens and institutions as well as how they articulate their interest and exercise their rights and obligations.

Political Development as a term can be traced to 1950's when many American political scientists attempted to study the political dynamics of emerging countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The term is still in the process of evolution as there is hardly any unanimity among the scholars on the constituent of political development. However, Thomas (2011) views political development as an increase in political unity and political participation. It further connotes increased differentiation and specialization of national structures and increased secularization of political life and culture.

Prittchet, Woolcock and Andrews (2013) assert that economic development is associated with improvement in a variety of areas or indicators (such as literacy rates, life expectancy, and poverty rates), that may be causes of economic development rather than consequences of specific economic development programmes. According to them, improvement in the health and education sectors have been adjudged to be closely tied to growth in the economy arguing that the challenge of economic development is closely tied to the challenge of security and national unity.

2.2 The State of Nigerian Libraries in the Digital Age

The condition of libraries all over the world is changing due to technological advancement in political and economic development in this new age of digitalization. In the Digital Age, most libraries have benefitted from information handling and management which has made libraries to be dynamic engines for knowledge. It has also positioned libraries and librarians to carry out responsibilities of providing information services for national sustainable development. Basically, the change is hinged on libraries' quest to build quality collections and services, serve users information needs and demands.

Nigerian libraries not being in global isolation, have also been affected by the wind of the Digital Age not different as there has been notable changes in the improvement both politically and economically from the past till date. Uzuegbu and Amadi (2019) in their paper on current trends in Nigerian University libraries assert that many of the emerging trends have changed from what is practiced in the past.

In a study, Emmanuel and Anele (2018) revealed that the Digital Age through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has impacted the lending services of university libraries in South-South Nigeria. They enumerated the service points effected to include ICT-Base-Document Services, Internet speed search of information, reduction in the theft of library materials arising from increased use of soft copies. Other services improved upon are: Virtual reference services, inter-library loan services, e-mail services, Videoconferencing and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) among other services.

Many libraries in Nigeria have taken advantage of the Digital Age to automate their operations. International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Ibadan is reputed to be the

first library in Nigeria to automate and completely replaced their manual catalogues with computerized ones in the 1980s. Several other libraries including university libraries have since joined in the automation of their services including Bowen University which deployed Koha Library Management Software. According to Otunla and Akanmu-Adeyemo (2010), Koha has been used to automate the Bowen University library in the areas of acquisitions, serials management, membership management, fines management and Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC).

The Nigerian libraries are not only a repository but also have active role to play which serves as a catalyst in this digital age for national development. National development as defined by the online dictionary (www.onlinedictionary.com), cited in Alabi and Sani (2013) is the ability of a nation to improve the social welfare of people, for instance, providing social amenities, good education, water and environment.

Opara (2008) examined the state of public libraries in contemporary Nigeria and concluded that the tempo of public library development in the country in the years immediately after independence and after the Nigerian civil war could not be sustained due to inadequate financial support by the establishing authorities. The paper identified inadequate funding, demoralized and inadequate workforce, inadequate accommodation etc as the challenges confronting these libraries and however proposed a remediation of these conditions as a way forward. This remediation will help in the development of Nigerian libraries in the digital age.

2.3 Indices of Development

Economic development has been linked to an increase in output coupled with improvement in social and political welfare of people within a country. It is the development of economic wealth of a country, region, or

community for the well-being of its inhabitants. Economic development is also referred to as the efforts that seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of lives for communities by creating and/or retaining jobs and supporting or growing incomes. According to Woodruff (2019) The most common indicators of economic development are Gross Domestic Product (GPD) per capita, the poverty level, life expectancy, the proportion of workers in agriculture and changes in the physical quality of life. Similarly, Saka, Momoh and Mohammed (2019) report that the concept of 'national development' can be viewed as achievement or progress attained by any nation and the key indicators to national development include GPD, literacy life expectancy, human development indices.

Economic development usually refers to the adoption of new technologies as well as transmutation from agriculture-based to industrialised economy, and general improvement in living standards. Madu, Abba and Joel (2019) agree that the level of the nation's economic development determines the living condition and social and economic well-being of the nation and its populace. However, economic development has been summarized by Seidman, (2005) as a process of creating and utilizing physical, human, financial, and social assets to generate improved and broadly shared economic well-being and quality of life for a community or region.

Agarwal, (2019) highlights some Common Characteristics of Developing Economies to include: Low per capita real income, High population growth rate/size, High rates of unemployment Dependence on primary sector and Dependence on exports of primary commodities. In the opinion of Diffen (2020), economic development is an upward movement of the entire social system in terms of income, savings and investment along with

progressive changes in socioeconomic structure of country. According to the agency, economic development relates to growth of human capital indexes, a decrease in inequality figures, and structural changes that improve the quality of life of the entire population.

Political development is part of the act of voluntary involvement of persons in political activities of their country. It is often used synonymously as mass participation of citizens in political activities of a nation which ultimately leads to national unity. More so, political participation which is one of the political indicators enhances a sense of belonging and a better management of the political system. American Library Association (1995) asserts that democracy have a symbiotic relationship making it almost impossible to have one without the other. While democracy vests power on the people, libraries provide the wheel on which democracy revolves by providing access to information to enable citizens make decisions necessary for governance.

Kaplan (2012) outlines indices of political development to include: the functionality of competitive economies, the degree of hunger prevalent among the citizens, the degree of freedom enjoyed by the press, how risky investments are and how corrupt the public servants are? A scrutiny of these indices helps to determine how countries compare with other nations of the world. This becomes a barometer in the hands of leaders to assess their performance and possible areas and determine areas for improvement. Political indices are used as a compass by nations to gauge how prone they are to conflicts and determine the level of current political system. Political development can be measured by several indices including political participation, civil liberties, and human and labour rights. It has four critical perspectives: stability and gradual change of political development, political participation and mass

mobilization of political development, nation building and sense of national dignity in international affairs.

2.4 Possible Role of Libraries in National Development in the Digital Age

The Digital Age swept through the planet Earth like a tsunami leaving no sector untouched including the library. In the case of the library, the effect of the Digital Age is not only pleasant but revolutionary. It positively altered many aspects of library and information sciences thereby placing the library in a better position to offer more professional, specialized, speedy and personalised services. According to Irokah and Ndulaka (2019), one major thing the Digital Age has done for libraries is to revolutionize the way information is generated, processed, packaged, disseminated and stored. It therefore assisted librarians to transit from caretakers of books to managers of information which is central to national development.

Some of the areas that libraries have shown promise in helping in national development include:

Creation of awareness in the political sphere including using information to mobilize the electorate to choose the right candidate over moneybags during elections. Alex-Nmecha, Horsfall and Igbinovia (2017) argue for the need to foster national integration from through the political dimension using the library as the key information institution. They are of the view that the library as a social-based information institution is rightly positioned to function outside the box to meet the political information needs of the public and equip them to become better citizens that are politically inclined. Nigerian libraries can create more awareness for the institutionalization of political education taking advantage of information and

communication technology (ICT) made possible by the Digital Age. According to Halvorson, (2013) this is expected to foster a healthy democratic development and directly address current Nigeria's volatile political landscape.

Secondly, libraries can impact on national development by the provision of access to relevant information. Libraries in Nigeria are central in the pursuit of national development as they help in promoting access to relevant information for the development of effective national policy framework which will enhance development in Nigeria. The library's unique role as a social institution is saddled with the responsibility of acquiring, organizing, and disseminating information to all members of the society, naturally position them to ensure that information is provided and that citizens have access to information that will enable them function reasonably and make useful contributions to nation building.

Thirdly, libraries are also positioned to play a role bothering on economic advancement of the nation. All types of libraries can carry out this function, however, public, special and national libraries are known to be in the forefront of this national duty. In the era of economic recession or high inflation, Nigerian libraries can play the role of furnishing citizens with information bothering on economic matters. The information may bother on sources of purchases to avoid high prices of different commodities and services in addition to awareness of contraband items. Economic information provided by Nigerian libraries such as NISER Library in Ibadan especially on economic indices go a long way in promoting economic development in Nigeria in this digital age.

According to Umar (2018) Nigerian libraries have always played crucial roles in different campaigns designed by government the citizens to the tenets of development via information dissemination and orientation.

These campaigns include: Green Revolution, War Against Indiscipline(WAI) and Change Begins with Me which are intended to awaken in the citizens the spirit of patriotism and ultimately development of the nation. This is probably why Krolak (2006) argues that libraries and indeed librarians should become facilitators of information with emphasis on service and proffering solutions to challenges confronting communities.

3.1 Challenges Confronting Nigerian Libraries in the Digital Age

In its commitment to be part of national development, libraries in Nigeria are often confronted with several challenges. According to Ibegbulam and Echezona (2019), several developing countries, Nigeria being no exception, have not attained the acceptable technological level although they are still being influenced by globalization of information, ICT and ultimately the Digital Age. Notwithstanding the level of application of ICT in the teaching and research component of university functions, it is still expected that libraries in Nigeria should be in the forefront of the adoption of ICT for national development, especially in the Digital Age. However, available literature and statistics indicate that Nigerian libraries are confronted by several challenges most These challenges are well known as they have been there for long. These include lack of attention by leaders at all levels especially political leaders who call the shots. This is closely followed by and of course related to lack of adequate funding which has made most libraries in Nigeria a shadow of themselves. Epileptic or total absence of power supply is another barrier to effective library services. The worse of all the challenges is the lack of adequate professional advocacy by librarians themselves. Any trumpet that is kept without blowing usually rusts and becomes unusable. This is the case with the library profession

where librarians are shy to advocate for the proper funding and stocking of libraries.

3.2 Solutions to Challenges Confronting Nigerian Libraries

The possible solution to most of the challenges confronting Nigerian libraries in this Digital Age can be summarized into three: improved funding, training and re-training and stepping up the level of advocacy. There should be concerted effort to properly fund libraries in Nigeria at all libraries. ICT is capital intensive, therefore libraries hoping to make an impact in this Digital Age must be properly funded. Adequate funding is needed for the procurement of ICT hardware and facilities. In addition, Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) and National Library of Nigeria, must be encouraged to reserve a large chunk of their budget for the purposes of advocacy to make libraries more visible and appreciated in Nigeria. Greater visibility of the library will make its services to be appreciated by citizens and political leaders thereby leading to better funding and improved resources and services.

Training and re-training of staff and personnel are key to application of ICT to library services. For libraries to be able to play a key role in national development their manpower must be professionally trained and re-trained. Knowledge in the manipulation of computer hardware and application of the various software packages is critical to provision of services by libraries thus the need for training and re-training of library staff.

For librarians to attract the attention of government and key stakeholders, there is need to embark on effective advocacy. The starting point should be for librarians to have love for the profession and be convinced of the centrality of the library in the enterprise of information storage and dissemination.

Conclusion

Functional and by extension digital libraries are vital to any developmental in any country including Nigeria. In this Digital Age where computer and ICT as whole have dominated activities of human beings to the point that almost every human activity is dominated has been dominated by ICT. Books, information and libraries are the platform for the attainment of any developmental platform. Research and observation have shown that countries across the globe are as developed as their libraries and information centres. This is to say that the developmental height attained by most countries is usually powered by their Digital Libraries. Nigerian libraries have the potential to play active role in the development of Nigeria, socially, economically, politically and educationally. However, this can only happen optimally if libraries are supported with physical structure, infrastructure, software applications, trained staff and overall proper funding. When the above condition is created, we shall certainly see our libraries in the forefront of national development in this Digital Age.

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