

REVOLUTIONIZING KNOWLEDGE: THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA AND BEYOND

Adaobi Chioma Okeke¹

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Abstract

Librarianship in Nigeria, as it is recognized today, had a humble beginning in a land where the concept of libraries and written information was unfamiliar. Nigeria's historical roots lie in oral tradition, where the cultural legacy of the people was passed down through generations by elders who committed essential information to memory. The society itself served as the repository of knowledge, with cultural heritage expressed and disseminated through songs, folktales, and instruments like talking drums, such as the Ikoro. The demise of these human repositories represented a significant loss, as many did not manage to transmit their knowledge to the younger generation. This paper explores the transition from an oral tradition to the emergence of librarianship in Nigeria and the challenges posed by the loss of these invaluable sources of knowledge.

Introduction

Librarianship is alien to the area that is today known as Nigeria. The Nigerians were not aware of a building that contains information materials like books etc known as library. Rather the area was known for oral tradition. The cultural heritage of the people was transmitted from one generation to another through elders who memorized the important oral information. In other words, individuals in the society were repositories of knowledge. The cultural heritage was presented and disseminate in form of songs, folktales, talking drums (Ikoro). The death of the human repositories of knowledge was a big loss because some of them did not transmit the knowledge they had to the younger generation.

Evolution of Libraries In Nigeria

Libraries in the territory, that is today known as Nigeria came into existence as a result of colonialism. Libraries were highly influenced by the colonialists and they were developed in line with the needs and interests of the colonial masters. Public libraries and other libraries in Nigeria were established with the ideology of the colonial masters in mind. In Lagos there was a private library known as Tom Jones library which established between

¹ Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri

1910 and 1920. Tom Jones was a wealthy Nigerian merchant who established library for the people of Lagos. Herbert Macaulay and Henry car also had libraries.

Ugocha (2011) quoted Nnaji (1986) as saying that in 1910, the High court library and the Federal Ministry of Justice Library were established in the 1920s . The Lagos Book club was established by a group of expatriate civil servants who were predominantly British citizens. (Olanlokun and Salisu ,1993)These expatriates circulated the books among themselves (Ugocha 2011). In 1932, the Carnegie corporation of New York gave a grant of \$6000 to the Lagos book club and it metamorphosed into Lagos Library in June the same year. It was a subscription library, apart from the Lagos Book club there were subsidiaries located at Abeokuta, Portharcourt , Zaria, Enugu etc. There were also public Reading rooms opened during the second world war that were used to spread propaganda and they were found more in western and Northern Nigeria. The Lagos Book Club was the forerunner of public library in Nigeria. Public libraries existed in western Region in 1967, Midwestern Region had libraries in 1963 and Northern Region established library services in 1952 (Saliu, 1999).

The Eastern Region had the most flourishing library which was established in July 1955 after the UNESCO public library seminar that took place in 1953 at University of Ibadan. The Eastern Regional Library which was a UNESCO pilot public library project, had legal backing (Aguolu and Aguolu, 1997) Academic libraries in Nigeria are synonymous with academic institutions. The University libraries in Nigeria started with the establishment of University College Ibadan in 1948. The nucleus of University of Ibadan library was based on Henry carr's library. The school libraries in Nigeria were associated with missionaries that came into Nigeria.

The various churches had schools and these schools had libraries. However school libraries in the real sense started in 1961 and resulted in the appointment of UNESCO school library Adviser Mr. H.V Bonny in 1962. In Nigeria, the first special libraries were established by colonial masters in the High Court and Ministry of Justice Lagos (Oyedum, 2006).

The Challenges of Libraries in Nigeria.

Libraries in Nigeria are bedeviled by the following challenges.

1. **Lack of skills and expertise among libraries: many librarians** lack the skills and competencies to pilot the affairs of libraries. Some libraries have the equipment to provide services to users but the librarians do not have the skills to use such equipment. The major issue is lack of training and retraining of staff. The libraries complain of lack of funds. Public and school libraries are the worse hit, may be, because they are run by state governments that always complain of lack of funds. The qualified staff of public libraries always go for green pasture in academic libraries.

2. **Poor State of the Economy:** The state of Nigerian economy is very bad. Adigu, Usim, Sanyaolu and Obienyi (2019) quoted Nigeria's Debt Management office (DMO) as saying that Nigeria's, debt profile is #24.387 trillion (\$ 79,437) billion. This dangerous scenarios further confirmed by Baje (2019) who quoted Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, the president of the African development Bank as saying that 50% of Nigeria's revenue is used to service debts compared to an average of 17% for other African countries. Majority of Nigerians are affected by this economic predicament. The United Nations in its latest report has ranked Nigeria as one of the countries with the worst food indices in 2018 (Agbota, 2019). The global report on food crisis indicated that no fewer than 113million Nigerians experience high level of food insecurity. The unemployment rate is 25.70 percent by the end of second quarter and the rate is projected to 30percent in 2020 and the inflation rate is 11.08 percent in July 2019 (Trading Economics,2019) The situation under review is to a great proportion affecting funding of libraries. The public libraries in Nigeria are almost not functioning because of lack of funds. The National Library

is still operating on rented accommodation while academic libraries depend heavily on tertiary education trust fund (Umar 2018). The exchange rate is #365 per dollar.

3. **Corruption:** the total resources budgeted for libraries are not released and the meager resources approved are not made available to Head librarians to enable them work. The amount of money budgeted for the library is not released and at times the money is diverted by management of institutions to other projects ostensibly regarded as more important.

4. **Infrastructure Problem:** In Nigeria there is absence of very important infrastructure like power supply, Telecommunication, good network of roads, good architectural design of library, library equipment etc. Nigeria generates about 4000 megawatts of electricity which quite insufficient (USAID, 2019).

Ogunfuwa, (2019) quoted Ookla's Global Index as saying that the internet speed in Nigeria has remained slow despite recording increasing subscription to third generation of wireless technology 3G and fourth generation of wireless technology 4G in the past one year . Nigeria ranked 107th in mobile internet download speed as at February 2019. In February 2019, the average mobile internet download speed was 12.22 megabits per second. Ookla Global Speed test index also indicated that Nigeria's ranking for fixed broadband downloading speed was 139th position globally in February 2019. Information and communication Technology need to be used effectively in libraries.

5. **Inadequate Information Resources in the Library:** In Nigeria, most libraries are filled with outdated materials and gifts that are not relevant to the needs of the users. In some libraries 80% of their resources is based on gifts that do not satisfy the needs of the users. They are kept in the library to make people believe that they have many books even when such materials are not useful. Most Nigerian libraries depend on gifts (Umar 2018:108).

The Future of Libraries in Nigeria

The future of librarianship in Nigeria and other of developing countries will be very bright if they following precautions are taken for the improvement of library service to users.

Training of Staff: There need for training and retraining of staff. Library staff should be trained to enable them have the requisite skills for provision of effective services to the library users. The staff should possess requisite ICT skills required for working in the library. The society is dynamic, so new ways of improving services are developed on a regular basis. Library staff should be regularly trained to have the necessary skills. The library staff should be able to teach information literacy to students and other users, for academic performance, lifelong and national development.

They need to, know about application of ICT to library and information students and other users, for academic performance, lifelong and national development. They need to, know about application of ICT in libraries and the various library softwares.

Change of Attitude: The Library staff should be willing to get all the skills and competencies required to provide effective services to users. The reference librarian should be willing to help library users instead of waiting for users to come to the library. Other service institution are providing services to users outside their offices. For instance, the banks provide automatic Teller Machine (ATM) services and other online banking services. The library should be willing to provide services to users promptly. The Selective Dissemination of Information, Document Delivery Services etc should be harnessed effectively for provision of services to users in the future. The provision of traditional library services portends great dangers for libraries in future. The librarian should be enthusiastic, flexible, have empathy, be amenable to team work, patient and have a good sense of humour (Hansen, 2003). The librarian should be willing to embrace innovation that will facilitate the development of

libraries. The librarians should be a „deep generalist“ ,learn to market oneself and be amenable to change (Haas, 2003). The librarian should embrace research in library and information science instead of depending only on products of research from developed countries. Instead of waiting for KOHA, millennium, Alice for windows and other library softwares, librarians in Nigeria should develop library software“s that suits them.

Provision of Infrastructure: The Nigerian government has a major role to play in the provision of enabling environment for libraries and other establishment to thrive. The telecommunication bandwidth should be increased and electricity supply should also be improved. The present 4000 megawatts of electricity cannot take care of libraries not to talk of various industries and government establishments. Many multinational industries in Nigeria like Michelin, Dunlop etc have closed their outlets in Nigeria because of power supply. The government should be willing to be trusted partners in development of libraries through provision of infrastructure.

Corruption among government officials should be completely eradicated so that funds will be used for the projects for which they were budgeted . The present practice of lining pockets of politicians and their cronies with money meant for development projects and building/ equipping of libraries should be stopped through establishment of independent and corrupt free law enforcement agencies.

Improving Reading Habit among Citizens: The library should liaise with the government to create awareness on the importance of reading in the life of a citizen. The library administrators should liaise with the government to mount effective information literacy programmes for users of all types of libraries-National, Public, Special and School. Information literacy will help users and even non-users to know that information literacy and reading play a major role in national development and lifelong learning. Anyaoku, Ezeani and Osigwe (2015) emphasized the need for information literacy for optimum access to information resources. The National Orientation Agency of Nigeria should carry out vigorous campaign on the importance of reading. While this effort is being made, the government should provide water, food, and shelter for citizens because a hungry man is not interested in reading and information literacy. The state of Nigerian economy presently does not encourage reading and acquisition of learning because teaming populations of graduates are unemployed.

Embracing Information and Communications Technology: In view of the fact that “library is a growing organism” according to Ranganathan, effort should be made by both library staff and library users to embrace information and communication technology. While the library staff need ICT to select, retrieve, store and disseminate relevant information for users, the library users need knowledge of ICT for utilization of information they need. Simisaye, Salisu and Awodoyin, (2018) believe that libraries should provide innovative services like online innovative library and information service, online business services for start up, web design services, blogging services, podcasting services, electronic publishing services, digital reference services, online search services, online entertainment services, mobile application services and digital marketing services. They urged librarians and libraries involved in collaboration and networking among themselves to achieve their objective of provision of effective services to users.

Conclusion

The future of libraries in developing countries is bright if concerted effort is made to provide innovative services that will attract users to the library. The libraries should not wait for users to come to the library. They should introduce innovative relevant services which will be rendered to users in their homes and offices. This requires sacrifice, funds, knowledge of ICT, acquisition of requisite skills in retrieval and dissemination of information, teaching information literacy skills to users, adopting friendly attitude towards provisions of effective services and willingness to collaborate with other libraries as no library has all the resources required to make it functional.

Emmanuel Uwazie Anyanwu

The developing countries should not accept hook, line and sinker, library policies and technologies from the developed countries. The developing countries should however adapt these technologies and policies to suit their purpose.

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