RESEARCH ARTICLE

LIBRARIES AS CHANGE AGENT IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper discussed how libraries are positioning themselves as change agents to transforming education through various professional development programmes that will equip the teeming populace with basic skills, new knowledge and right information that will continue to boost Nigerian educational landscape. It paper however revealed some bottlenecks to the education transformation agenda in Nigeria. Results showed that there has been massive deployment of e-libraries across Nigerian institutions of learning even in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA's) of government which not just popularizing effective library services but has continued to bring accolades for libraries in Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources that empower the educational institutions to produce highly resourceful people to impact positively on the nation's economy and transform the educational landscape. Umar (2004), the realization of the enormous power of information has made libraries and information services inevitably present in all levels of education. Hence today, libraries are found in all the three levels of our educational system including public enterprises, research institutions and private organizations such as banks, insurance companies, etc. Libraries have always served as agent for advancement at all levels of education. Akintunde (2004), states that it is because libraries contain information which is a vital tool for the pursuit of academic excellence at all levels of education. We are in the 21st century, an age that is powered by information in all its ramifications. It is the age of information explosion in which the internet and its associated technologies are being used to take advantage of the immense knowledge of man all over the globe for the benefit of the accelerated development of the society. Furthermore, libraries in Nigeria are joining their counterparts in many parts of the world now to maintain 'hybrid libraries' in order to make provision for both traditional (book) and digital collections to meet the information needs of users in this era where Information and Communication Technology facilities have forced changes in access to information. Ajibero (2000) and Opeke (2004), opined that this wide range of benefits from information technology facilities are the hallmarks of the electronic libraries of this age.

According to them, they concluded that information has received a widespread acceptance as the essential feature of production, consumption and exchange in this modern era. The backbone of every nation is education. This is because no nation can develop beyond its investment in education. It would be right, therefore, to state that the development of any country is directly proportional to the development of its education sector. It is imperative to consider the status of Nigerian education. Such consideration is bound to assist in discovering where we were, where we are and where we ought to be with the view of actualizing a progressive educational landscape for Nigeria. Nwafor, (2018), It is worthy of note that in global rankings of institutions of higher learning, no Nigerian university is ranked among the thousand best in the world. Even in Africa, no Nigerian university is among the first fourteen. In the 2018 rankings of top five universities in Africa, University of Cape Town was ranked first, followed by University of the Witwatersrand. The third ranked was Stellenbosch University, fourth went to University of KwaZulu-Natal, all in South Africa. The fifth was Makerere University, in Uganda. The University of Ibadan, UI came up as number 15, whereas in the 60s, we had a lot of foreign students from United Kingdom and Africa in our universities. They patronized our universities because of its quality in learning and infrastructure. It would not be out of place to say that the education sector calls for a state of emergency and a total overhaul. Research has proven that the percentage of budget a nation allocates to education speaks volumes of the importance of education to such country. President Muhammadu Buhari confirmed the decadence in the sector

during a Presidential retreat for members of the State Executive Council, FEC, Abuja, on November 13, 2017. He said that the nation's education sector was seriously in bad shape, adding that it required serious concern and immediate attention. According to him, it was tragic for teachers to fail primary school test, adding, that the state of education in Nigeria calls for a serious concern. The problem is no longer a secret that the quality of education in Nigeria requires greater attention and improvement. "That our country is facing numerous challenges in education as a result of historical abuses, mindless neglect and corruption is not news to anyone".

With an estimated 13.2 million children out of school, high illiteracy level, infrastructural deficit and decay, unqualified teachers, and inadequate instructional materials, to mention some of the challenges, we can clearly see the effect of decades of neglect that the education sector has suffered. We are determined to turnaround the sector for the better." The entire education status requires a total overhaul and policy redirection given the global mandate which is now largely driven by information technology. Libraries are expected be an important change agent to transforming our educational system in their teaching and learning processes at all levels. Consequently, it is only a nation which is conscious of the importance of libraries and information technology in the drive towards the accelerated development of education that can survive and thrive in the comity of nations of this age. This is to say that technologies have come to incorporate into the teaching and learning process, a blend of interactive capabilities including computer-mediated instruction to create innovation and transformation in education. There also have been various professional development programmes embarked by libraries, Nigerian Library Association and LRCN for librarians in Nigeria recently in collaboration with the U.S Mission in Nigeria on e-library and to equip participants with basic skills for the deployment of e-library especially in all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA's) of government which popularizes e-library services in Nigeria. Libraries provide opportunities for individuals to develop and inculcate proper values and intellectual capability through a structured programme like Annual Reading with Comprehension competition organized by National Library of Nigeria to promote the culture of reading among students, ICT training workshops organized by NLA to meet the needs and expectations of library users.

In the furtherance of the above programmes, the Registrar/CEO of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria, Professor Michael Afolabi had in his welcome speech during the opening of the 3rd Conference of Certified Librarians organised by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) from 7th to 11th November, 2016 in Abuja stated that the Council is making efforts geared towards the transformation of the public libraries in Nigeria. "LRCN did a mapping of the 316 public libraries in Nigeria and have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to use about 300 public libraries as Digital Community Opportunity Centres." He also called on the government at all levels, to as a matter of urgency, increase funding to public and school libraries as a viable means of revitalizing the education sector. Professor Afolabi then informed that LRCN has commenced the assessment of the current state of school libraries in Nigeria using Abuja schools as a pilot. This is with a view to identifying the gaps in the system and developing

needs-based intervention strategies that will transform the libraries into modern learning centers. He said the transformation is expected to improve performance in public examinations and that LRCN will also introduce measurable monitoring and evaluation instruments to assess the impact of school libraries on performance in examinations. The Council also conducted the assessment 97 libraries in government organizations in the Federal Capital Territory.

Transformation as a Road Map to the New Nigerian Educational Landscape: Transformation is the product of hard mental exercise which involves going beyond the usual situations and carrying out gradual alterations and refinements over a period of time in order to discover a better, improved, and readily accepted ways of doing things. As noted by Rao (2012), transformation could be likened to creativity which simply means the ability to imagine or invent something, better still, generate new ideas by combining, changing, or reapplying existing ideas. The Education sector today is in a particularly difficult situation in Nigeria where poverty and its consequences (hunger, illiteracy, uncontrolled population growth, deteriorating environment, and pandemics) confound the majority of the population daily especially the rural and urban poor. It is a systemic malady and corrections must be made from the primary through the secondary to the tertiary levels. The usual excuse of Governments for the poor attention and low priority accorded to education has been to express fiscal inability to satisfy the demands of the sector vis-à-vis other competing interests such as health, security etc; however, this is not tenable since education underpins the progress within those secondary sectors. Individually, Nigerians are respected all over the world in terms of intellectual ability and resourcefulness but what apparently is lacking is a renewed positive (YES! WE CAN) Attitude and the ability to work together as a system to achieve specific commendable landscape. As a result of the information society, libraries are changing and so also are the skills needed to run them and the way they utilize human capital. Opeke, (2004:42), it is this human capital that must be developed in our educational institutions at all levels through the use of libraries well stocked with all the relevant information resources necessary for sustaining the teaching, learning and research functions of these institutions. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of these 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 the teaching, learning and research activities.

Obe (2009), opined that the current revolution in our world, which is the concurrence of information and communications technology, is the soul of the current evolution of knowledge' societies or 'knowledge' economy. Transformation is targeted at providing the strategies for reconstructing or rediscovering our pathways and thereafter provide a road map for driving innovations and development in Nigeria, keeping in mind that libraries as specialized institutions are 'lamp' that lights the pathways in societies more so, in developing economies with attendant additional cyclical challenges of poverty, hunger and corruption. He therefore stated that developing economies, such as ours, can only fast-track and/or leap frog their growth through targeted research and development. A practical way to do this is to do what is generically referred to as reversed information technology system. The onus now lays on libraries to provide a road map to circumvent these road blocks to

indigenous technology enhancement necessary for driving transformation in Nigerian education. Library must orchestrate the brainpower for training new generation of talents that will actively participate in the transformation of education through introduction of new ideas, knowledge, skills, and techniques to create a needed change for efficiency and dexterity in services delivery as governments continue to invest heavily in the schools and higher institutions' libraries cutting across both public and private.

The Way Forward: In the light of the above, it is necessary that libraries at all levels of education in Nigeria be reorganized drastically in line with the electronic libraries of the modern era. In doing this, the problems identified by Alasa and Kelechukwu (1999), as militating against the use of information technology facilities in libraries in Nigeria should be addressed. They include;

- Poor telecommunication and computer facilities
- Poor level of computer literacy and internet awareness facilities even within the academic community.
- Minimum involvement of academic institutions in network building and diffusion;
- Ignorance of decision or policy makers of the power of information network on the economic and industrial development of a nation.

For a start, libraries at all levels of education in Nigeria should be well stocked with books and other information materials as a stepping stone to the provision of computers and their associated technological facilities for our libraries. Oberg (1995), pupils and students should be taught how to navigate their way through libraries and the world of information to obtain knowledge from them. They should be taught not simply to reproduce knowledge from information sources but to construct knowledge in new and creative ways. They also need digital literacy. This is the ability of an individual to identify any information required to satisfy a need, know how to use computers and digital systems to source the information as well as know how to use the information collected to solve a felt need. These are the skills that would empower the products of our educational system to fit well into the modern industrial system to which highly skilled manpower has become indispensable. The present world now depends to a large extent on intensive information transfer by means of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). Therefore Nigerian pupils/students must be given the kind of training that would impart sufficient understanding of the technology that powers the information society.

The use of library and information literacy programme should be incorporated into the curriculum of schools to provide students with a wider range of information handling skills which encompass accessing, processing and retrieving relevant, timely, accurate information for identified need. Opeke (2004:43), supported that such skills will empower students to be conscious of the power of information in all spheres of life and hence be able to apply the same in decision making and the construction of structures that make for enduring social and economic development of Nigeria. Government should put policies in place to promote the provision of adequate library facilities and resources at all levels of the educational system in Nigeria. This, being the primary place where the pupils and students are given the opportunities to experience well stocked libraries that would

develop the spirit of independent inquiry and the manipulation of information to obtain knowledge. Government will need to put in place suitable policies to enable Nigerian children to possess the skills to effectively use libraries and the present day information and communication facilities to apply information to their daily endeavours and hence be able to function effectively and compete favourably with their counterparts in other advanced countries of the world. The Nigerian government should rise to the challenge and provide all the essential resources to put the educational system in proper perspective by providing the right type of libraries which will enable the products of the educational system to serve as effective agents for accelerated education. It is also imperative that librarians in all types of libraries should possess literacy among other competencies so that they can adequately guide library users. The Nigerian Universities Commission, the Nigerian Library Association, the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria, etc, should be properly sensitized and coordinated to carry out some social and academic exercises. Information consciousness coupled with skills in handling ICT facilities to obtain quick and relevant information for decision making are the hallmarks of the highly skilled manpower required for transformation of Nigerian educational landscape in this highly information dependent global world of the 21st century.

Conclusion

The libraries required for the transformation of Nigerian educational landscape are the types that are well stocked with up-to-date books and other library resources equipped with ICT facilities typical of the modern electronic libraries. It is believed that transformation of Nigerian education landscape requires the incorporation of ICT in teaching and service delivery through strong advocacy by the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) that would help put the role of librarians in perspective to the appropriate authority. This advocacy role will bring librarians into full focus and optimize the utilization of their skills and abilities. There is the need for Nigerians from all walks of life to be conscious of the importance of information and hence take steps to utilize libraries effectively in obtaining information regularly for use. The Nigerian government is enjoined to take up the challenge and make adequate provision of funds and other resources to equip all types of libraries in line with the present day type of electronic libraries. It is only through this way that libraries in Nigeria can continue to serve as effective agents for transformation of education and national development.

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