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# The Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Adult Education in Nigeria

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## Introduction

We must mobilize the uneducated, the poor, and the underdeveloped to build a society that is self sufficient. We need to develop them, since many of them have potential yet untapped and when they fully developed will be of immense benefit not only themselves but to the nation as a whole (Onyeonwu, 1980). The ability of the individual to contribute to the development of country lies in his ability to read and write. There cannot be meaningful development in modern society where majority of the populace is illiterate. In spite of the importance of education, to improve standard of living, Nigeria has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world (World Development Report, 1998 and Adeleye, 2001).

Ratio of the adult literacy in Nigeria and other developed countries, 1997

Countries	Adult Literacy Rate %
Nigeria	49
Japan	97.2
France	96.4
UK	97
USA	99.5
Switzerland	97.2
West Germany	98

Source: *International Journal of Economic Development Issues*, 2001

This low level of literacy partly accounts for the low level of development in Nigeria. One major means to promote adult literacy in Nigeria is public libraries. Every nation requires information that satisfies their socioeconomic objectives. Great importance is attached to information. Public libraries are institutions that provide information resources to the public. However, there has not been effective utilization of information especially in the developing nations. The causes of failures to seek information even when available are:

1. Illiteracy due to lack of appreciation of the value of information
2. Ignorance of the citizenry of the existing information
3. Failure to approach public library librarians for an information.

This paper will focus on the role of public libraries in adult education and the educational requirement of the society and its dependence upon public library based information services.

## Adult Education Requirements

Public libraries are information and communication systems. The more complex the society is in its educational requirements the greater its dependence upon library based information services. Specifically, the primary purpose of public libraries according to Wheeler and Goldhor (1962) are as follows:

- a. Enable information education opportunities for the citizens in the communities.
- b. Enrich the knowledge of individuals in various subject disciplines where they undertake formal education.
- c. Provide awareness to meet the information needs of people.
- d. Support the educational, civil and cultural activities of groups and organisations.
- e. Provide recreational opportunities and encourage constructive use of leisure time.

Public libraries in carrying out this role of education can provide necessary materials such as textbooks, journals, magazines and exercise books related to the curriculum of the existing literacy institutions in the community be it conventional schools or adult classes. In this way, it has assisted in the campaign to make the society a more literate one.

Public libraries are regarded as the people's university providing and independent decision taking (Oyegade, Nassarawa and Mokogwu, 2003). Public libraries attempt to meet a wide varies of readers needs, providing varied information resources such as text books, journals, literary books and other publications. For example, in the United States, public libraries are considered as particular form of the freedom of expression because public libraries are conceived as a necessity for an informed society to enable the system function effectively (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2000).

The 1994 UNESCO manifesto sees public libraries as a living force for a practical demonstration of universal as a life long process. Public libraries can richly compliment the educational activities by assisting adult in no longer of school age, developing their attitudes, extending the knowledge and by acquiring, needed technical or vocational skills. In this way, the adult education products would emerge as responsible members of the society.

In carrying out its role, public libraries can also train the personnel carrying out the different educational programme in the community. This can be done by the library carrying out seminars, workshops and conference on the different subject areas of the literacy programmes; so that they can become better at their various fields. Public libraries can also carry out their roles as education providers for their community by setting up literacy institutions such as adult literacy programmes in their community. By doing this, public libraries would have successfully carried out a literacy campaign since adult literacy programme would aid literacy (Apotiade, 2002).

The early protagonists of public libraries like Edwards Edwards of Great Britain spent most of adult life campaigning for the creation of public libraries, which would service the population to be educated. This was why the international organization like UNESCO and IFLA encouraged literacy and the use of Information materials for educational advancement in many developing countries. For examples programmes like Universal Bibliographic Control (UBS) and Universal Availability of Publications (UAP) are such programmes that have helped to provide access to information resources.

Public libraries are very important in the life of any nation. If Nigeria must develop, if Nigeria must achieve possible growth rate per capital income, the majority of the populace must be educated. We must tap majority of the populace who are illiterate to the development of modern society. This is because human resources is the most important indicator towards a nation building. Ogunsheyc (1997) rightly points that:

The most important indicator of a nation is the quantity of its humans resources and general capital. The most effective method of developing human resources is through education.

In support of the observation, Onyconwu (1980) states that the development of manpower is one of our national objectives. public libraries go a long way in contributing to manpower development. If teachers are thought of the importance of public libraries and they know how to use public libraries, they will see the libraries as laboratory for students. Through this, the adults are encourage of effective use of the library in reading, and working independently. The adults will be better equipped and to make the teaching more interesting and purposeful.

Through education, the masses can attain literacy that is a prerequisite for any success in our national development. Public libraries provides book and non-book materials to meet the educational needs and support the efforts of the adults education programmes to help contribute to the growth of a nation. public libraries have vital role to play in decision and policy making. It is in search of this justification that public libraries were established.

Granting of awards and scholarships is another way through which public libraries can assist in adult education especially in the rural areas. The scholarship is awarded to deserving people undertaking education programme in the community. These awards and scholarships to those who have excelled will encourage others to want to excel too, thereby, making this gesture a form of literacy campaign.

Public libraries continue to play an important role in the adult education programme in sustaining the diverse forms of cultural expressions. public libraries acquire, process, organize and preserve materials, which depict the way of life and experiences from others. Through public libraries, the adults' illiterates' class can develop the skills in computer usage in searching for collection. indexing and abstracting services.

An important aspect to be considered in the process of inducing the development of Nigeria is to develop an effective, information system mechanism for a nation to be successful. An exchange of information is necessary to co-ordinate, control and directs the activities towards accomplishing the objectives (Adeleke, 2001). To ensure the collection and dissemination of information on a regular basis, it may be necessary to develop formal communication channel whereby the public can be informed of development. Such a channel will provide information on innovations and the technical changes taking place in Nigeria. public libraries are recognized as essential resource centres, which no user can afford to dispense with if he want to attain his goal.

The institutions provide reading and learning materials to help argument lectures notes with facts and with ideas; provide information service, which is an essential element in the communication process. One requires information to communicate effectively (Nwogu, Obiagwu and Ekere, 1999).

public libraries serve as information system to allow one to explore parameter of his topic, promote functional literacy and education for adults outside the formal school system. They provide appropriate reading materials to assist the government efforts in providing the illiterate adults in improving their educational standard and technical competence ((Nwogu, Obiagwu and Ekere, 1999 and Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002). public libraries can play their role of information by making available journals, newspapers and all other reading materials in the indigenous language so that education will be available at the grassroots (Apotiade, 2002).

Public libraries provide the information needs of the illiterates that constitute the bulk of the population in the developing countries and unite all who enter its house to partake full in its intellectual activities. The institution serves as the society's memory, standing the same relationship as the human memory does to the individual (Gelfand, 1968). The society draws from the libraries in the same way that an individual draws from his memory to meet his varied needs.

## Conclusion

Public libraries are vital institutions, which cannot be separated from education. The provision of public libraries is crucial and indispensable to adult education in Nigeria. Therefore, whatever is done to improve the quality of adult education is done to improve the nation. The absence of public libraries will have negative effects on adult education. Therefore, adult learners should be encouraged to use them.

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