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BRING BACK THE BOOK: THE ROLES OF LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS IN PROMOTION OF READING AND LITERACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Decline in Nigeria reading culture since mid 80`s till now is a worrisome situation; that speculation is high in a near future, Nigeria polity may completely lose consciousness in reading especially in discovery and re-discovery of new knowledge and in production of quality human resources (capital), which are essential requirement for surviving in present world of fast growing knowledge economy. Respondingly, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan , on the 20th of Dec., 2010 launched an initiative " Bring Back the Book"(BBB), aimed at revitalizing and restoring reading culture and to make reading materials available, reachable, and accessible to Nigerians. Owing to this, a lot of criticisms arose, querying the neglect of place of libraries, and librarians as the resource person(s). Therefore, this paper is aimed at reviewing the reasons why the initiative -BBB should be promoted and sustained. The importance of reading, the roles of libraries and librarians in promotion of reading and literacy, the challenges of the libraries in the campaign and solutions were also discussed.

Keywords: Book, Reading, Literacy, Promotion/Campaign, Library/Librarian, Nigeria.

Introduction

18th and 19th centuries witnessed great influence of agricultural and industrial economy in the world. Today is the 21st century, popularly known as "jet age" or "computer age" which by implication, refers as information/knowledge economy. It recognizes that everyone needs to develop the ability to access, assess, retrieve and use information and information technology resources in variety of ways, especially in achieving economic goals. Reading is crucial for acquisition of lifelong skills suitable for participation and survival in present day working environment. Education –the bedrock of every innovation has consistently been repositioned and re-defined to suit the recent knowledge demand. And library is a necessary consideration to carry-out this vital role in making available and accessible the reading materials needed for finding knowledge.

According to (Irunegbo, Opara & Ohanyere, 2011), library is a place of information or a place lending services that lead to finding knowledge. The information resources (reading materials) available in the libraries, unveil an opportunity for the people to find and discover knowledge by themselves. Fundamentally, reading becomes imperatives for discovering the required knowledge. As it's said, reading is the total sum of the knowledge accumulated through interpreting and understanding of the written words. By

concept, reading is a “decoding” and “understanding” of symbols. National Accessible Reading Assessment Projects (NARAP)(2010) defined reading in three segments;

A. Reading is decoding written text. Decoding requires translating the symbols of writing system (including Braille) into the spoken words they represent. Understanding is determined by the purpose for reading, the context, the nature of the text, and reader`s strategies and knowledge.

B. Reading is decoding and understanding text for particular readers` purposes. Readers decode written text by translating text into speeches and translating directly to meaning. To understand written text, readers engage in constructive process to make the text meaningful, which is the end goal or the product.

C. Reading is the process of deriving meaning from text. Some individuals require adaptation such as Braille or auditoriszation to support the decoding process.

The above stated reasons why reading entails understanding, development of knowledge, discovery of new knowledge, and acquiring knowledge which are the essential criteria for attainment of literate populace, and for achieving a better society. Library being the central hub or institution bestowed with responsibilities of acquiring reading and other education materials, as well as providing services, leading to the optimum use of the information materials cannot be ignored but to strategically positioned to attain the desire objectives.

Why BBB?

Books and other reading materials need to bring back to the Nigeria society. Foreseeing the whopping danger that may engulf our society in a near future; if the essential resources (books) required for developing our citizens mentally are scarcely available? How can we reasonably justify our efficiencies in production of human capitals? When there is no exposure to adequate knowledge. This and many other questions will be raised if books failed to be our greatest weapon for economic sustainability, curbing of political thuggery, illiteracy, and poverty. With the current rise of arms in Nigeria region –militant in south-south, kidnapping in south-east, political assassination in south-west and recently dreaded Boko-Haram in the north, one can easily conclude that

Nigeria is raising arms against herself; and significantly only the supply of books and relevant information materials can replace this arms militia with intellectual militia.

The response to return books back to the Nigeria society now is panacea owing to the proliferation of influence in western culture, technologies, imperialism, and global diplomatic games that are making us an “indirect slavery” in the world comity. In this case, books are supreme to direct one for better understanding of foreign relations/policies. And guide them for decision making and secured future.

Also, an increase in social activities, orchestrated by increase in social networks, entertainment, fashion and designing, movies and music, have been marring the culture of reading, thus, fussing a bleak literate society, injecting starvation in innovation/technology, and derail new ideas/knowledge which are paramount for modern world. Therefore, adequate libraries and book will surely make knowledge available for everyone and access to information been limitless, easy and fast in an auspicious of time. This, will vehemently lead to quality of education acquired and open a society of long life learners`.

Furthermore, Okebukola(2001) affirm that, through reading, human have the tool to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generations. It allows one to listen to the wisdom of the peoples of the ages. This has resolve that, reading is an important process that accumulates to the amount of knowledge/ideas exhibited by a person.

Human is a laborer, and mental equipment is required for better functioning and efficiency in productivity. Books and other relevant written documents are implicit to grow the brain. Therefore, it becomes imperative for availability of reading material which the content and curriculum of course requirement must be measured for adequate training of manpower.

Recreationally, reading is an aspect of relaxation, when the brain opt for resting, it does not necessary mean sleeping, but may implies doing a casual reading like newspapers, story books, and magazines. Again, reading provides pleasure to the reader as well as reduces the risk of amnesia. Research has proved that reading for leisure is therapeutic and curative which is strongly recommended for ageing. Library has been very supportive to this

purpose through provision of reading materials and creation of resource centre within the library.

From the foregoing, one can easily deduce that the initiative –BBB is a campaign to be sustained, supported, and re-structured to leverage the opportunities in reading into limelight. For this reasons, the initiative should not be separated from additional role of libraries and librarians whose growing roles are fast pushing towards promoting reading habit, attainment of quality education, literacy and information needed for achieving 21st century knowledge economy.

Importance of Reading

Reading occurs in day-to-day activities. Some authorities see it as a part of life. Among various reasons for reading, it is pivotal that, it cannot be separated from our living. The many dimensions of its importance are elaborated below:

1. Reading is a vital skill in finding a good job. Many well-paying jobs require reading as a part of the job responsibilities and performance. There are reports, memos, letters and documents to be read and be responded to. The amount of knowledge one acquired, is mainly measured through reading.
2. The mind is brainpower that needs constant exercise, and understanding the written words is one way through which the mind grows its ability. One with good reading habit develops language and speaking skills easily. It helps to develop listening abilities and ability for teaching and learning activities.
3. New ideas, knowledge and things are discovered through reading. Books, journals, magazines and recently internet are to be read and decode what is read. One who knows how to read can educate oneself and teach others in any area of life they are interested in.
4. There is an old saying “the pen is mightier than sword”. Ideas written down have changed the destiny of men and nations for better or worse. The flow of idea cannot be stopped. We need to read and research to build on the good ideas and then expose the bad ones before they bring destructions. Only by reading we can be armed in this life that is full of unending struggle.
5. Reading is fundamental in developing good self image. Non-readers or poor reader often have low opinion about themselves and their abilities. Many times

they feel as if the world is against them they feel isolated, and behavioral problems or inferiority complex can surface.

6. Knowledge is power, and education is a process of acquiring knowledge (power). Reading therefore, is inseparable in achieving success in education. Reading is basic and fundamental to the degree of opportunities that exist in the global trade.
7. “Words”-spoken and written- are like blocks in building-up life. You are right now, the result of words that you heard and read. What you will become in the future will depend on the amount of words you read. Families, relationships and nations are built with “words”

Finally, we subdue the earth today through reading. Technologies, science, research, arts, and history were developed through reading (discovery) and writing. So, to continue to exist and become important in life simply implies to be constantly and consistently be involved in reading and researching; which are imperative in taking the advantages of the present world.

The Role of Libraries in Promoting Reading Culture and Literacy

The trend in ICT and information literacy in recent age has redefined and changed the role of libraries and professional librarians- they are now not only passive keepers and preservers of books; rather, they are also the facilitators of information and lifelong learning with an emphasis on services identifying user`s information needs and communicate solutions to them. Adams(2002) asserted that in 1980`s, more flexible and proactive facilities, often called resource centres (libraries), began to emerge as a force for social change and democratic reconstruction of civil society. These centres explores new relationships with their users valuing local culture, supporting community development and preserving indigenous knowledge

According to (UNESCO: Basic) quoted in Krolak (2005), the goal of education for all also involves the development of literate societies in the developing world, and cannot be attained solely by providing quality learning materials to schools. If people are to stay literate, they “MUST” have “ACCESS” to a variety of written documents and continue the habit of reading in their adult lives. In line with this, libraries are a vital tool to provide access to information sources, and ensure that users are in frequent contact with them. They

achieve this through planning –exterior of the library should be inviting and the interior made attractive. Serene environment should be maintained, lighting fitting, and good furniture properly fixed. Also, terms of services postulate proper users' information services and needs.

Literacy is an integral part of societal life; it is needed at home, in the classroom, in the workplace, for development and preservation of the cultural heritage and that of history. Literacy programs should be designed to functions within a framework of relevance. In other to inculcate value and achieve desired goal via dissemination of information. Here libraries play a vital role in provision of information (reading) materials for all.

Books and libraries are often seen as redundant in some societies that are mainly based on oral tradition. In such societies, people stop reading once their education is assumed completed. They derive more pleasure from the oral and performing arts, like singing, dancing, and socializing instead of forming their private and individual lives through reading of books. Since the majority is illiterate, it affects the minority who are literate, with the result of making oral mode prevalent, (Totemeyer, 1994.). The way forward is to develop basic reading materials that support literate base on local knowledge, that are attractive to neo-literate. Such materials facilitate the learners from an oral-culture to a transforms literate culture. At this point, library through the acquisition of reading materials integrate the written words with oral norms in such societies.

Africa produces only 2% of the world books, despite constituting 12% of the world population (Krolark, 2005). It is estimated that sub-Sahara Africa import books up to 70%. The majority of it been university text and vocational books that cost US$ 25 per copy (makotsi, 2004). In Nigeria where people struggle for daily survival, it is beyond their purchasing power. Libraries stand to be one of the practical solutions and useful tool for promoting literate communities. They acquired books through bulk purchase/order, donations from the public and banquet. These materials are in due time made available and accessible for public use.

Furthermore, parents have to be good readers themselves. Children who grow-up in a literate home are at an advantage in schools and are more likely to be successful through out formal schooling than their peers from non or semi-literate home. (Steftung- lessen, 2004)

United Kingdom has recognized the important roles books and library play in giving children a head start in education. Therefore, they (UK) initiate a slogan "BookStart" and "family literate program" co-ordained by the tiers of libraries and relevant agencies; a scheme where by every nine months old baby receives free books when visit a health services. Commending this genuine policy, Makotsi (2009) stated that giving children a free book or two may seems a modest endeavor, but it has provided extra ordinary result. Children in the pilot school out-performed their peers in their baseline assessment and later in the key stage 1SATs. If books can have an impact on education attainment in the UK, where information is plenty, it is likely to be greater in sub-Sahara Africa where learning resources are so scarce. Libraries at this point, play a central role in providing wide range of reading materials free, and make provision for borrowing for parents who cannot afford to constantly buy books.

In the state of fund scarcity, to create literate citizens has been a difficult task and more challenging in school and at home. The world Educational forum in Dakar(2000) quoted in Makotsi(2004) stated that schools that are trying to meet government target for Universal Primary Education lack vital textbooks, literature, and supplementary reading materials. It is common for one text to be shared between six or more pupils, and often, there are no textbooks at all. School libraries are imperative in sustaining reading and learning. Now, if the school libraries are properly positioned to render optimum service. They will have abilities to leverage the opportunities in globalization to pull-out our school environment from pool of books scarcity and return them to the stream of knowledge abundance.

The positive impact of books and access to reading materials continue to be greater. In Singapore, Sri-Lanker, and Fiji, the slogan "BookFlood" is an initiative used to increase the level of reading material in circulation. According to Lisa(2005) "BookFlood" initiative has bring dramatic improvement in reading, writing, listening, vocabulary, drama and critical thinking; especially for younger age groups, and where children are reading in a language different from their home language. In this case, if the initiative BBB is carefully design alongside with readership program initiated by the Nigeria Library Association (NLA), it will then have the capacity to cater for literacy demands in Nigeria, and vehemently leverage the "potentials" in younger

generation in the era (information explosion) they found themselves; and as well use the "potential" to unlock the opportunities that exist in the global labour market.

Finally, libraries are the custodian of local and international culture. The past generation lives on by the reading of their stored life event. Right from the medieval period till now, (Libraries) public has been very helpful in publicity, assisting in publication and in promoting education, history and peaceful co-existence. Through invention of internet libraries have succeeded in bridging the gap between countries with information plenty and those with lesser information access and create an open society called an information society.

BBB: The Position of the Librarians Based on Five (5) Laws of Library

In 1924, S. R. Ranganathan propounded a theory, confirmed in 1928 as five laws of libraries:

i. Book is for read

ii. Every book its reader(s)

iii. Every reader(s) its book

iv. Save the time of the reader(s)

v. Library is a growing organization

The professional librarians' services are conveying towards satisfying or meeting-up these laws. They promote reading, and literacy within a possible practice. Speaking through the laws, the position of the librarians in initiative BBB is intact, imperative, visible and recognizable, if they are properly fixed in the centre-stage of the campaign.

Law I: Book is for Read; at all times, the aim of the librarians is to maximize the use of the books. They are happy when see the readers kept the shelves constantly empty. They provide the services –cataloguing and classification, which lead to the access to the books. By way of charging and discharging of books, readers are allowed to borrow books within a time limit. Librarians sensitize the public on the importance of reading that is why in Nigeria, September 8th, has been marked as "Book Day" or "Library Day" in cognize with readership program initiated by NLA. Every damaged book is sent for

repairs, periodical weeding, and constant acquisition of new ones leading to greater use of the book.

Law II: Every Book its Reader(s); Here, librarians identified that readers (users) are the prime factor and their requirements must be satisfied. As professionals in information management, they carefully select books that are closely correlated to users needs. This law gave rise to “types” of libraries: national, public/community, school, academic, and special library and each “type” with its identity of reader(s). This has helped to provide right book(s)/information for every user. Therefore, for librarians to manage BBB initiative simply means giving everyone its book(s) at appropriate time and in a given place.

Law III: Every Book its Reader(s); the emphasis is book. Librarians know the word –subject, language, message of every book, thereby, try to locate their readers. Books/information materials are acquired based on the class of people(s) identified as users. Also, inter-library loan and referral services are other important services librarians render to direct readers to their books. At this level, librarians have brought the books to the reader; which is the fulfillment of the law.

Law IV: Save the Time of the Reader(s); Librarians always assumed that readers’ time is precious and must be saved. They organize the library resources in such a way that, the required information is found within the shortest time. Information/books acquired are processed, classified, catalogued, and issued a “call number” – that Is, number used in calling-up a particular book in the shelve. Open access is useful in this context as well as current awareness. Provision of short-range reference services are important means of helping the readers so that their time can be saved,(Kumar,1991). Based on this, librarians vividly understand the information seeking-behavior of the readers. They know their class, profession, aims, and are prepared to meet them. Hence, it will be a worthwhile decision to integrate the BBB-initiative with national literacy campaign and readership program already initiated by NLA into the bill and programs of the libraries and librarians, based on support from the government policies promoting libraries and appropriate funding.

Law V: Library is a Growing Organism; past are days when the roles of the librarians are limited to acquisition and organization of books. Today,

librarians appear in various facet of life that brings about societal growth and development. They are seen as agent of change, literacy and readership promoters, information justifiers, verifiers, and providers. The increasing demand for knowledge, education and in formation technologies has also posed to the librarians a new and task-full role to their existing ones. They have shifted from traditional paradigm to technological regime, that is the application of computers, internet/software, telecommunication networks in discharging of library services. At present, we speak of walless (virtual) library, paperless (software) library, and /or electronic library etc; a state where knowledge, books (documents), information are enabled online. By skills, the increase in use of the digital applications on basics functions and services of the libraries are nearly making conventional system look like a rounding error. The curriculum on librarianship has been since re-defined and re-positioned to meet the present requirement. Again, constant acquisition of book materials has beefed-up the library stock far beyond the original point. This means that, library is alive and growing to match its content to meet the contemporary needs. Therefore, librarians can now not only promote reading and literacy in traditional form, but also, use ICT`s/electronic medium called virtual system.

Challenges of Library in Reading and Literacy Promotion in Nigeria

As the situations of libraries differ worldwide, so their challenges. In Nigerian context, the life circle of libraries is unfavorable and bleak, from policies establishing them to poor funding and design, and inadequate manpower, and myopic vision. Some libraries may exist, but by mere shadow of nomenclature. The major problems why Nigeria libraries cannot function efficiently or get-better of the challenges are discussed below:

1. Poor Funding; Nigeria does not have direct budgetary allocation for library development and services. In a situation where the parent institution allocate fund to the libraries (as a subsidiary) is grossly unpalatable. In academic libraries, the said 10% of the total university budget to go for library is not realistic. In almost all the states in Nigeria, no state can boast of running public library efficiently. In some states, the presence of public library has completely disappeared, or operating in a mere image of nomenclature. According to (Irunegbo, Opara & Ohanyere, 2011) inadequate funds account for lack of hiring of ICT professionals, inadequate acquisition of reading

resources –books, periodicals, and other ICT resources, lack of intensive training and re-training of staff, infrastructural deterioration and poor maintenance. It also stunts design and disrupt implementation of programs which reading and literacy are part of.

2. African Factors:(Irunegbo, Opara & Ohanyere, 2011) maintained that lack of maintenance culture, lack of innovative spirit, absence of information technological environment, droning reading and learning habit, negligent of ICT application, over dependence on foreign inventions/materials (technology), absence of indigenous commercial library services, deficiency of staff skill in information/knowledge management, incessant corruption among the leaders and deficiency in program design, militate against library and its literacy promotion in Nigeria.
3. Economic Factors: In a country where majority are living in poverty, it means that reading cannot be their problem. “Empty stomach comprehend nothing’’, Nigeria citizens are battling with hunger, until food is presented on the table of common man, reading will still be a pending agenda for people. Again, Nigeria economy has failed to curtail inflation, if prices of essential commodities like wares, food items, shelter, transportation and services are high; Library may not have enough fund to purchase a good and adequate books needed for promotion of literacy.
4. ICT Challenge: Lack of ICT-proficiency among the Librarians and users is great hiccups challenging ICT base knowledge/information awareness. Again, the global information access which tends to bridge the gap in knowledge availability between developed and developing countries are stalled. Some Libraries have computers, and some with access to internet but almost none provides access to information especially as concerns to e-library services. This is because librarians lack constant training in ICT, orchestrated by lack of stable electricity in Nigeria, high cost of ICT training, and inadequate knowledge of software application, poor funding and lack of critical Information literate skill.
5. Lack of Professional Staff: The curriculum of librarianship needs to be restructured to suit the present day information services. The situation whereby librarians are half-baked does not transcend positively in the league of efficiency in library management. Inadequate hiring of experienced

librarians in most Nigeria library has directly, hampered the core function of library and invariably queers the needed reading and literacy campaign.

6. Irrelevant Materials: Most libraries are at the mercy of archaic materials. The books are not current, not repaired (when damaged) and not relevant for the target readers. Inadequate publishing of local books, over reliance on foreign books (donations), and librarian's limited knowledge on collection development, has constituted to the acute shortage of books/information sources, thereby, leading to irrelevant library stocks.
7. Lack of Needs Analysis: Most libraries in Africa are established with-out a professional needs analysis of the host community, resulting in information services based upon assumptions and not on actual needs. Libraries are virtually cut its services from the majority of general public; often the contents are relevant to urban-based class who are relatively educated. Lack of professional librarians with research skills contributes to research being done by researchers and consultants rather than library practitioners, (Mostert, 2001, quoted in Krolak, 2005). Just as need analysis is necessary before establishing a service library, continuing monitoring, and evaluation with active community participation is also crucial to ensures that library services remain relevant.
8. Lack of Functional Information Policy: Lack of working paper (policy) on information is a weak point on development of information and literate society. Where there is no functional information policy, released fund will not have a directional impact. Also, there will be inadequate circulation, regulation, quantity and qualitative information materials. Mostert(2001) stated that a written information policy should be made prerequisite for every country involved in information provision . Where this is lacking, the country may lose vision on acquisition, organization and dissemination of information, especially as relate to national literacy achievement.

Finally, frequent power failure, mismanagement of library fund, poor existence of archives institutions, corruption and government negligence of educational sector adversely affect reading habit in Nigeria.

Way forward

Base on the challenges facing the libraries and librarians, and effort made to attain a reading culture cum literate society. The following were recommended to sort practical and workable solutions to the problems.

1. The initiative “Book-First” should be considered by Nigeria government as drive to formulate a policy mandating every child from one-year-plus (1yr+) to receive a free book or more on visit to health service. Also, school libraries should serve as resource centre -where children will have access to reading material, and such centre should extended its services to day-care, pre-nursery, and nursery schools.
2. Re-introduction of community/mobile library will be a bold step to reach-out books to the door-step of every Nigerians.
3. “BBB” initiative should be managed by national, public, school, and academic libraries, for efficiency and productive campaign.
4. Direct budgetary provision should be made for library development. With this, efficiency is guaranteed in policy implementations, program design, planning and execution. Opportunity for staff (re)training and general library maintenance is also assured.
5. Adequate funds should make available for local publishing companies, through single digit interest rate and government partnership with publishers should be friendly.
6. Government should be participatory with NGOs, individual or groups with programs that promote reading and literacy, through financial and welcome policy support.
7. A good policy encouraging information society should be formulated and implemented to ensure nation-wide coverage on literate awareness.

On the future of good information, literate, and reading society, Tong(1993) sum that, the future belongs to those countries, whose citizens know how to handle information, knowledge, and technology productively. These are today the most important factors for economic success, not the traditional resources or production factor.

Conclusion

“BBB” initiative is one among the numerous initiative formulated globally towards attaining education, literacy, learning and information-based society.

In each case, books/libraries play a cardinal role in achieving the desired goal on programs which tends to inculcate reading habit to the populace. Insufficient funds, outage policies, and lack of genuine commitment in execution of designed programs, have consequentially pointed to be the reasons for reading and literacy campaign failure and unsustainability in Nigeria. Resorting on the recommendations above, by the government and all the concerns, it's of hope that, the impediment of the library on smooth-outing of the initiative will be dismissed; then, enshrine the culture of reading in Nigeria society.

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