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# LITERACY LEARNING SPACES, STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INFORMATION AGE: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN CREATING AND ENHANCING LITERACY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined literacy learning spaces, strategies and opportunities in the information age, with the view of identifying the roles of libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment for national development. The findings of this study should guide both the children and adult learners on how best to adopt new strategies to learning, and also welcome them to various opportunities that literacy provides in our contemporary society. It will also equip the librarians to become part of the learning community and, experts in information management. The study was guided by four objectives and four research questions. A descriptive survey design was adopted in this research, with population of fifty (50) staff selected randomly from three different universities. The instrument used to generate data is questionnaire and the data generated was analyzed using frequency tables and percentages. It was found that there are various strategies of literacy learning available in the information age such as: identifying problems and seeking appropriate solutions, decoding and comprehending information from multiple sources, understanding the meanings and contexts of words and symbol systems, participating in audio-visual conferences, responding to e-mails and working in a virtual environments, etc. The major roles of libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment include providing free and equitable access to information for all, identifying user needs and communicating solutions, providing information on community issues such as health, employment, continuing education and local history, and offering relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages and all literacy levels. The major challenges found are inadequate funding of libraries, poor power supply, inadequate professional staff, low knowledge of handling of ICT facilities in the library and inadequate proper training. Nevertheless, a solution was proffered such as adequate funds should be provided by libraries, stable power supply, training workshops, conferences, seminars for the librarians. It was also suggested that libraries should extend their services to the rural and disadvantaged communities, and also be trained on good handling of information technologies.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Literacy learning, Information age, Libraries, National development, Literacy environment, strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

Literacy has been defined as the intellectual process of gaining meaning from a critical interpretation of the written or printed text. It is the ability of individuals to acquire and possess skills necessary to interpret both written and printed texts and symbols, and be able to pass these meaning from one person to the other. Over the past decades, the nature and scope of literacy has expanded. Various researches has shown that literacy has undergone constant re-definition – from acquisition of skills in reading, writing and basic numeracy to the acquisition of skills in task performance, social practices, and critical reflection (Wagner et al., 2004; Lytle and Wolfe, 1989). As a result, the international community also expanded its understanding of literacy – from viewing literacy as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills to using these skills as bases for personal and social change contributing to socio-economic development and to building capacity for social awareness and critical reflection (UNESCO, 2005a).

Although extensive academic research has been explored on literacy learning (Anstey, M. & Bull, G. 2006; Bruce, C. 1997; Shiohata, M. 2005; Torres, R.M. 2006; Wagner et al., 2004; Lytle and Wolfe, 1989), much less studies have been conducted on the role of libraries in creating and enhancing this literacy-learning environment. The study unfolds prominent roles played by the libraries, with the view of adopting various diverse strategies which will expose a wide range of opportunities for learners. It suggests that libraries play a key role in creating literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all ages and all literacy levels and by offering adult and family literacy classes. They embrace the social responsibility to offer services that bridge social, political and economic barriers, and traditionally make a special effort to extend their services to marginalized people. The demand for new strategies and reassessment of the notion of literacy stems from the fact that existing literacy programmes have made little impact in promoting and enhancing literacy level of individuals especially in developing countries like Nigeria. The study tends to bridge the huge

## **Statement of the Problem**

Creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment should be recognized as a serious aspect of library services which seeks to satisfy the hunger of the user for information. The learning of this information should be easy, enjoyable, and exciting for the learners to sustain their interest. Libraries in their efforts to promote literacy should create sustainable literate environments for the learners to build in themselves the confidence that will enable them to transform from new learners to lifelong learners. They should make available, information materials that will build and sustain the interest of the readers. Exposure to these new ideas and forms of learning is important in keeping these individuals as transformative literates and lifelong learners.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling an individual to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in the community and wider society. Nevertheless, the role of libraries in promoting this learning to enable an individual achieve his or her goals has been found wanting, especially in the developing countries. To this end, the basic purpose of this to develop among the learners a love for lifelong learning that gives inner and intrinsic rewards of self-satisfaction and fulfillment. It will help libraries to determine its role in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment. These environments should provide an atmosphere where new literates can develop and continuously use their literacy skills for the improvement of their lives. Learners with limited access to materials tend to slide to the left of the literacy continuum.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to contribute to the theoretical understanding of literacy learning. Specifically, the objectives are as follows:

1. To identify various strategies and opportunities of literacy learning in the information age.
2. To find out the roles of libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment.
3. To identify various challenges confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment.

4. To recommend solutions to these problems.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the various strategies of literacy learning in the information age?
2. What are the roles of libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly Environment?
3. What are the various challenges confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment?
4. What are the solutions to these problems?

## Literature Review

Defining literacy in today's context could be seen as an elusive task. Traditionally, literacy has been commonly defined as the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication. It has been defined as the ability of a person to read, write and count with understanding. It can also be seen as the ability to read and write one's own name and further for knowledge and interest, write coherently, and think critically about the written word. As new technologies for information, communication and collaboration continually appear, new literacies emerge (Bruce, 1997a; Leu, 2000b; Reinking, 1998). The pace is moving too fast for research to catch up! As (Leu & Kinzer, 2000a), point out: Literacy, therefore, may be thought of as a moving target, continually changing its meaning depending on what society expects literate individuals to do. As societal expectations for literacy change, and as the demands on literate functions in a society change, so too must definitions of literacy change to reflect this moving target (p.108) from the digital revolution. A definition from the past cannot accommodate new ways of meaning-making, such as locating information across multiple modalities, participating in audio-visual conferences, responding to emails, virtual environments or creating a personal website, blog or wiki. Readers are no longer confined to simply decoding and comprehending the printed word. They author texts, respond to and critique texts and comprehend information from multiple perspectives. There is no set of backline masters to guide their participation and determine what they pay attention to. Readers are expected to make sense of a complex design that includes a myriad of images, pop-ups, hyperlinked texts and icons. Evolving definitions of literacy often include all the symbol systems relevant to a particular community. Literacy encompasses a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development.

In a technological society, the concept of literacy is expanding to include the media and electronic text, in addition to alphabetic and number systems. These abilities vary in different social and cultural contexts according to need and demand. More recently however, literacy has taken on several meanings. It includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. Over the past decades, the nature and scope of literacy has expanded. It has

undergone constant re-definition – from acquisition of skills in reading, writing and basic numeracy to the acquisition of skills in task performance, social practices, and critical reflection (Wagner et al., 2004; Lytle and Wolfe, 1989). Literacy, then, is no longer limited to reading and writing words. It involves awareness, understanding and acceptance of the meanings and contexts of these words and eventually taking reflective action. It is an educational process that unfolds the full potential of people at various stages of their lives, making each of their literacy experiences transformational. (Leu et al 2004), point out that changes in how literacy is defined and taught must be considered within today's social context. They identify three forces at work to change the nature of literacy:

1. global economic competition within economies based increasingly on the effective use of information and communication
2. the rapid emergence of the Internet as a powerful new technology for information and communication
3. public policy initiatives by governments around the world to ensure higher levels of literacy achievement including the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies .

A social revolution is underway as homes and workplaces embrace the use of digital technology as a normal part of everyday life. With increased access to the Internet comes increased opportunities to access information, conduct transactions, communicate in multiple modes via social media sites and to be entertained. Social contexts for learning are changing and as an example, (Lebo, 2003), explains that Internet users report an increase in the time they spend on the Internet and a decrease in the time they spend viewing television. In addition, (Lenhart et- al 2005A), studied the technology habits of 1100 teenagers and found that 84% owned one or more personal media device, 87% used the internet and 51% went online daily. As consumers of Internet content and active content creators, students are interacting and learning through networking and collaboration. As the definition of literacy changes and new technologies emerge, the nature of what it means to be a literacy learner also changes. An introduction to quality literacy teaching highlights some of the new decisions learners face in a

technological world, for example, they need to know how to establish reliability and credibility of multiple sources of information, know how to validate information, scan websites to locate information and navigate between links, be aware of online privacy and safety guidelines, and use images, print, music and narration to communicate ideas. Literacy learning is a skill required to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. In a technological society, the concept of literacy learning is expanding to include the media and electronic text, in addition to alphabetic and number systems. The idea of literacy learning, emerging with the advent of information technologies in the early 1970s, has grown, taken shape and strengthened to become recognized as the critical literacy for the twenty-first century (Information Age).

The primary sense of literacy still represents the lifelong, intellectual process of gaining meaning from a critical interpretation of the written or printed text. Key to all literacy is reading development, a progression of skills that begins with the ability to understand spoken words and decode written words, and culminates in the deep understanding of text. Reading development involves a range of complex language underpinnings including awareness of speech sounds (phonology), spelling patterns (orthography), word meaning (semantics), grammar (syntax) and patterns of word formation (morphology), all of which provide a necessary platform for reading fluency and comprehension. Once these skills are acquired the reader can attain full language literacy, which includes the abilities to approach printed material with critical analysis, inference and synthesis; to write with accuracy and coherence; and to use information and insights from text as the basis for informed decisions and creative thought.



## **LITERACY LEARNING SPACES, STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INFORMATION AGE**

With the advent of new technologies, literacy and literacy strategies are changing at a pace never experienced before. Changes in digital technologies are happening much faster than we can monitor their impact. In the process, the look and feel of learning environments, the role of libraries, the nature of the learner and what and how they learn are being transformed. New technologies are transforming current literacies and literacy strategies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, these new technologies impact on literacy instruction in classrooms (Hagood, Stevens & Reinking, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Lewis & Finders, 2002). These strategies are built on foundational literacies and skills, such as comprehension, phonics, vocabulary knowledge, phonemic awareness, writing, and spelling. Learners need to continue to build on these foundational literacies and skills in order to adopt and adjust to literacies of the future. Learning traditions of the past will not adequately equip students for the unimagined literacies of the future.

(Leu et al 2004), point out that changes in how literacy is defined and taught must be considered within today's social context. They identify three forces at work to change the nature of literacy:

1. Global economic competition within economies based increasingly on the effective use of information and communication
2. The rapid emergence of the Internet as a powerful new technology for information and communication
3. Public policy initiatives by governments around the world to ensure higher levels of literacy achievement including the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICT).

This means that with increased access to the Internet comes an increased opportunity to access information, conduct transactions, and communicate in multiple modes via social media sites and to be entertained. This literacy learning strategies helps one to sharpen his or her ideas, thereby promoting and facilitating learning. Literacy learning, with the help of new technologies has

provided great opportunities for learners to develop self-confidence and worth in decoding and transmitting written texts and symbols for easy communication. A learner's awareness of the difference between "what is" and "what ought to be" is an initial "awakening" to learning. It is the first sign or hint of a learning need.

As mentioned earlier, literacy is a skill not only for reading words, but also for understanding words and contexts and finally taking the necessary steps in applying what has been read and learned in one's life. Literacy, therefore, could be viewed as transformative literacy wherein non-literates realize the value of learning for life that entails an endless journey towards developing and acquiring, positive attitudes to constantly learn new things. It inculcates in learners behaviours that build their self-confidence, self-worth, and self-dignity enabling them to take initiatives, be creative, and value excellence. Literacy learning merges thoughts and feelings of people leading them to think, feel and act responsibly. Literacy learning in the information age has grown to accommodate new ways of meaning-making, such as locating information across multiple modalities, participating in audio-visual conferences, responding to emails, virtual environments or creating a personal website, blog or wiki. Readers are no longer confined to simply decoding and comprehending the printed word. They author texts, respond to and critique texts and comprehend information from multiple perspectives. There is no set of backline masters to guide their participation and determine what they pay attention to. Readers are expected to make sense of a complex design that includes a myriad of images, pop-ups, hyperlinked texts and icons. With modeled and guided literacy teaching, students are supported to critically analyze, synthesize ideas, identify purpose and audience, interpret messages within messages and engage in reflective practices. Information literacy is conceivably the foundation for learning in our contemporary environment of continuous technological change. As information and communication technologies develop rapidly, and the information environment becomes increasingly complex, educators are recognizing the needs for learners to engage with the information environment as part of their formal learning processes. Literacy learning is generally seen as pivotal to the pursuit of lifelong learning, and central to achieving both personal empowerment and economic development.

Across the world, educators in primary, secondary, tertiary and professional education contexts have been developing strategies and policies for designing learning opportunities that

will enable learners to take advantage of the information and communication infrastructures available to them. Learning opportunities that enhance information literacy not only make use of information and communication infrastructures, but are designed to bring the information practices, that are effective in professional, civic and personal life into curriculum. Such opportunities make it possible for learners of all ages to experience the power of effective information practices. When reflection on learning to be information literate is added to the experience of information literacy, students are helped to recognize the transferability of the processes involved to everyday life, community and workplace contexts. (Patricia Breivik, 1998), captured the essence of the strategies required for learning in order to realize the potential of information literacy education for lifelong learning. Her argument centers around the need to move away from the dominant paradigm of prepackaging information for students in the form of textbooks, lectures and even artificially constrained multimedia resources, to facilitating active learning using real world information resources. Such learning processes, she concludes, would necessarily involve the information processes, practices and experiences described as information literacy.

The workshop on “Literacy and learning strategies” held in Hamburg during the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education in 1997, had the important task of looking for new participatory strategies, learning from other methodologies and considering people as the basis of a new educational agenda. The demand for new learning strategies and reassessment of the notion of literacy stems from the fact that both governmental and non-governmental education programmes have made little impact on improving people’s living conditions. In most less developed countries, poverty is increasing. The workshop highlighted the need for adult basic education to start with the learners’ community and environment. Rooted in their culture, learning should aim at forging links with others and broadening inter- communication. The ever-increasing demand for a new literacy learning strategies has ramifications for literacy instruction in classrooms. In summary, (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro and Cammack, 2004), point out that the curriculum of the future will demand learners to adopt the following strategies:

1. Apply problem-solving skills
2. Identify problems and seek appropriate solutions

3. Locate useful information relevant to problems
4. Critically evaluate information, sorting out accurate information from inaccurate information, essential information from less-essential information, and biased information from unbiased information
5. Synthesise information
6. Rapidly and clearly communicate solutions to others.

Learners will be called upon to be discerning and confident users of websites and search engines, participants of social networking sites, scrutinizers of complex mazes of information, strategic and critical explorers. As (Jenkins et al 2006), specify students will be required to: distinguish fact from fiction, argument from documentation, real from fake, and marketing from enlightenment.

In summary, they will need to know how to question and critique what they hear, see and read. They also have to consider the ethical choices they make as participants and communicators and to consider the impact that their choices have on others.

### **THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN CREATING AND ENHANCING LITERACY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

All over the world libraries are dedicated to providing free and equitable access to information for all, be it in written, electronic or audiovisual form. They play a key role in creating literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all ages and all literacy levels and by offering adult and family literacy classes. They embrace the social responsibility to offer services that bridge social, political and economic barriers, and traditionally make a special effort to extend their services to marginalized people. Libraries assist in finding, using and interpreting appropriate information that opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, informed citizenship, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, critical thinking, and ultimately, empowerment in an increasingly complex world. Libraries assist in finding, using, and interpreting appropriate information which opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, and ultimately empowerment in an increasingly complex world. By providing equitable access to information for all, libraries encourage critical

citizenship in a global democratic society. They also play an important role in helping to bridge the information gap by providing free access to information and communication technologies, especially the Internet (Krolak, 2005). In particular, they play an important role in the acquisition, maintenance and development of literacy skills (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006). As they provide materials and services to all reading levels and age groups, they are perfect locations for offering literacy classes. Furthermore, they are often friendly and inviting places, they might have additional working and meeting spaces and they are often located centrally in the community. They are also ideal places to break the cycle of non- and semi-literate families by offering family literacy and inter-generational activities. By using the library with their children, parents and care-givers are setting a good example and help to establish motivation for reading and a pattern for lifelong learning.

Today the role of libraries and professional librarians is changing worldwide. They are no longer passive keepers and preservers of books; rather, they have evolved to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions. Modern libraries are unfolding the community's learning potential by providing information on community issues, such as health, employment, continuing education and local history. This equitable access to information is essential to enable educated and informed citizens to participate in a democratic global community. Libraries are also custodians of the local and national culture by storing popular and academic knowledge and material for current and future generations. Public libraries play the most important role worldwide in helping to bridge the information gap by providing free access to information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet. They are inclusive in that they build bridges between individuals at the local level and the global level of knowledge. In industrialized countries, access to modern information technology is currently one of the most attractive library services. For example, in the United Kingdom, public libraries secured government funding in the middle of the 1990s for computers in every library as part of the "People's Network Project" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2004: 24), a project that assures that no one needs to be excluded from the information revolution. Compared to providing access to ICTs and the Internet in other public spaces such as post offices, libraries have the educational role of assisting users in finding information online. Modern librarians are facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions.

They are unfolding the community's learning potential by providing relevant materials and information on community issues. To understand the needs of potential users, they should conduct surveys and studies in their particular community or area. By participating in or even organizing and sponsoring need-based materials development processes, they can ensure that their literacy and library materials are relevant for their target groups.

For various reasons, libraries are the perfect place to provide adult literacy classes. They have ideally easy access to all the resources needed to run an adult literacy programme, including printed and audio books, magazines for all reading levels, videos and newspapers. Most of them can provide space for students and tutors. They are usually centrally located and accessible by public transport. Libraries are friendly and hospitable places, ideally with service oriented opening hours and approachable staff. Adults with low literacy levels often have bad memories of schools and a negative attitude towards formal education. They can be invited to the library to enjoy non-reading activities, such as lectures, movies or discussion groups to facilitate their first step back into learning. Apart from teaching literacy, the library has to focus its collection development on the needs of its neo-literate users. This means a strong focus is needed on the acquisition of relevant and interesting reading material for adults with low vocabulary or literacy skills. If this material is for whatever reasons not available, the library can develop its own community newspaper, ask the course participants to write their own biography or publish a collection of student writings. These are valuable educational tools which encourage students to write, give them an audience for their products, enable them to gain confidence in their writing abilities and encourage organizational skills.

In Botswana, Village Reading Rooms were established to support and extend library services to literacy graduates in rural areas. As they were mainly established in primary schools, they are today mostly used by pupils and teachers. Nevertheless, they provide a useful and cost effective means of giving access to educational materials in areas where no traditional library service operates. A strong focus of the last decade has been on using libraries to break the cycle of family illiteracy. The library is a perfect place to offer family literacy programmes as it provides materials and services to all age groups and reading levels. By using the library with their children, parents are setting a good example and help to establish a motivation for reading and a pattern for lifelong learning. In Slovenia, public libraries were among the first providers of

inter-generational lifelong learning processes that included children, youth and adults who came together and learned from each other by exchanging knowledge, experiences and viewpoints (Adams, 2002: 30).

The absolute key to making a library a successful literate environment is the librarian's ability to collect and make accessible relevant and appropriate materials and to make the library a welcoming and interesting place to visit regularly. Merely providing a collection of well-organized reading and literacy materials will reach only those community members who are already interested in using the library. The challenge is to pro-actively reach out to the remaining part of the community, for example by visiting them with appropriate reading and literacy materials in their classrooms, families, workplace or other community locations. Another option is to organize creative and interesting programmes in the library, such as reading and writing competitions, book clubs, author readings, creative writing classes, summer reading programmes, study support, discussion groups, celebrations and festivities, exhibitions or storytelling sessions. Such programmes can also enable adults with low literacy levels, who might have negative memories of formal schooling, to take their first step back into learning (Krolak, 2005).

Finally, libraries assist in finding, using, and interpreting appropriate information which opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, and ultimately empowerment in an increasingly complex world. By providing equitable access to information for all, libraries encourage critical citizenship in a global democratic society, thereby playing a major critical role in overall national development.

## **CHALLENGES CONFRONTING LIBRARIES IN CREATING AND ENHANCING LITERACY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT**

The situation of libraries differs from one country to the other. While libraries in developed countries of Europe enjoys more support from both governmental and non-governmental organizations, those in developing countries of Africa enjoys little support, thereby hindering them from functioning efficiently.

The major challenges facing libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment are discussed below:

**Poor funding:** One of the most significant challenges facing libraries especially in developing countries is poor funding. Many libraries are under-funded. For instance, 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. Adequate funding is needed for acquiring relevant materials, hiring of professional staff, ICT development, and library furniture, for continuing education, for computers with internet access and for running costs.

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.

**Inadequate professional staff:** Many libraries in developing countries are run by non-professional staff. The quality of any library is dependent upon the quality of its professional staff, and this in turn depends on the quality and relevance of the training that they have received. Running a library with unprofessional staff means that the quality of services provided to the learners will be grossly inadequate and inefficient. This will in turn affects the literacy level of individuals in the society.



**Lack of proper training opportunities:** Most libraries do not provide adequate training for their staff. One of the major reasons cited for this is lack of funds. Libraries play a key role in creating, developing and sustaining literate environments. Therefore, adequate training should be provided for librarians in order to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to provide useful information to the learners. Modern library training must emphasize how to reach out to potential users and how to be at the centre of community development. Training should therefore include advocacy, public relations, and community mobilization.

**ICT Challenges:** Modern libraries are facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on ICT application. Most libraries of the world (developing countries) are facing great ICT challenges. For learners to be exposed to lifelong learning opportunities there is need to ensure the sustainability of the literate environments. Creating such environments can only be met through the application of modern ICT facilities in the library. The advent of radios, televisions and other audiovisual media aided the development and production of literacy materials. Now, with computers, mobile phones, internet and online services like email and social networking, there are new opportunities to apply them to literacy development and lifelong learning. This new technology can be used to provide information quickly, leading to an electronic literate environment or an e-literate environment. Unfortunately, many libraries have no financial resources to acquire these new technologies in their libraries.

**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.

## Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population which were randomly selected include library staff from two federal universities: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (35) and Federal University, Oye-Ekiti (15), and also one Private University- Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State (10). The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the respondents. 60 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 54 copies were returned. Of the returned copies of the questionnaire, 50 were found usable. Data collected for this study were analyzed using frequency distribution and percentages. Data was analyzed in line with the research questions.

## Results

### Section A:

**Table 1: Biodata of Respondents.**

Categories of Staff	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Academic	32	64
Administrative	10	20
Junior	8	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

From the result of the study, majority of the respondents are academic staff 64%; administrative staff are 20%, while junior staff are 8%.

## Section B

**Table 2: Strategies of literacy learning in the information age.**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Understanding the meanings and contexts of words and symbol systems.	45	90
Identify problems and seek appropriate solutions	47	94
Developing the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication.	40	80
Locating and identifying information across multiple modalities.	38	76
Ability to validate information, scan websites to locate information and navigate between links.	40	80
Decoding and comprehending information from multiple sources.	46	92
Understanding and appreciating various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.	30	60
Evaluating information, sorting out accurate information from inaccurate ones.	38	76
Participating in audio-visual conferences, responding to E-mails and working in a virtual environments.	45	90

Data in table 2 shows the strategies of literacy learning in the information age. 45 or 90% suggests understanding the meanings and contexts of words and symbol systems. Identifying problems and seeking appropriate solutions has the frequency of 47 or 94%. Developing the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication has frequency 40, representing 80%. Locating and identifying information across multiple modalities recorded the frequency 38, representing 76%. 40 or 80% indicated ability to validate information, scan websites to locate information and navigate between links. 46 or 92% suggests decoding and comprehending information from multiple sources. Understanding and appreciating various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media has the frequency of 30, representing 60%. Evaluating information, sorting out accurate information from inaccurate ones recorded frequency of 38, representing 76%, while Participating in audio-visual conferences, responding to E-mails and working in a virtual environments has frequency of 45, representing 90%.

**Table 3: Role of libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment.**

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Providing free and equitable access to information for all.	48	96
Identifying user needs and communicating solutions.	45	90
Offering relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages and all literacy levels.	40	80
Providing information on community issues such as health, employment, continuing education and local history.	46	92
Providing information resources for adult literacy programmes.	30	60
Providing a conducive environment for reading and research work.	42	84
Acquisition of relevant and interesting reading materials for adults with low vocabulary or literacy skills.	38	76
Providing free access to information and communication technologies, particularly the internet.	48	96
Extending information to the rural areas and disadvantaged communities.	44	88
Providing mobile library services to the users.	35	70
Providing audio-visual materials to the users.	40	80

From table 3 above, it is evident that providing free and equitable access to information for all is one of the major roles provided by libraries as witnessed in the frequency of 48 or 96%. Libraries also have the responsibility of identifying user needs and communicating solutions. This has 45 or 90%. Offering relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages and all literacy levels has the frequency of 40, representing 80%. Another important role of libraries as witnessed in the table above is providing information on community issues such as health, employment, continuing education and local history. This recorded the frequency of 46 or 92%. Libraries also provide information resources for adult literacy programmes (30 or 60%). Providing a conducive environment for reading and research work is also one of the essential roles of the libraries (42 or 84%). Acquisition of relevant and interesting reading materials for adults with low vocabulary or literacy skills has recorded the frequency 38 or 76%. It is also witnessed that providing free access to information and communication technologies, particularly the internet is an inescapable functions of libraries. This witnessed an impressive frequency of 48, representing 96%. Extending information to the rural areas and disadvantaged

communities also has an impressive frequency 44 or 88%. This will enable these set of people to have access to the daily dissemination of information. Providing mobile library services to the users is also important aspect of library responsibilities (35 or 70%). The table also shows that providing audio-visual materials to the users is very important (40 or 80), as this will enable the users to remember all the information presented, thereby becoming lifelong learners.

**Table 4: Challenges confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment .**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Inadequate funding of libraries.	48	96
Inadequate professional staff.	40	80
Poor power supply.	46	92
Inadequate proper training opportunities for librarians.	38	76
Low knowledge of handling of ICT facilities in the library.	40	80
Lack of functional information policy.	20	40
Non-availability of current information materials.	25	50

Table 4 above shows that the major challenges confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment are inadequate funding of libraries, which has the highest frequency of 48, representing 96%. The libraries, especially in developing countries are poorly funded. This is followed by poor power supply (46 or 92%). Inadequate professional staff has the frequency of 40 or 80%. Majority of the respondents also agreed that there is low knowledge of handling of ICT facilities in the library (40 or 80%). The above table also shows that libraries do not often provide proper training opportunities for librarians (38 or 76%). Others that did not score the percentage of major challenges are non-availability of current information materials (25 or 50%) and lack of functional information policy (20 or 40%). As such they are not the major challenges confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment.

**Table 5: Solutions to the problems confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment.**

<b>Solutions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Providing adequate funds for libraries.	48	96
Organising various training workshops, conferences, seminars, etc for library staff.	40	80
Libraries should evolve a strong and functional information policy which will be reviewed from time to time.	28	56
There should be a stable power supply.	44	88
Libraries should extend their services to the rural and disadvantaged communities.	40	80
Librarians should be trained on good handling of information technologies.	42	84
There should be a strong collection development policy.	35	70
Libraries should be updated with current information materials and irrelevant/ out-dated materials should be weeded from time to time.	32	64

Results obtained from table 5 shows that all the solutions made were accepted by the respondents. These includes: Providing adequate funds for libraries (48 or 96%). There should be a stable power supply (44 or 88%). Librarians should be trained on good handling of information technologies (42 or 84%). Organising various training workshops, conferences, seminars, etc for library staff (40 or 80%). Libraries should extend their services to the rural and disadvantaged communities (40 or 80%). There should be a strong collection development policy (35 or 70%). Libraries should be updated with current information materials and irrelevant/ out-dated materials should be weeded from time to time (32 or 64%) and libraries should evolve a strong and functional information policy which will be reviewed from time to time (28 or 56%).

## **Discussion**

From the bio data of the respondents in this study, it is very clear that academic staff are more in number than other categories of staff as can be seen in the highest frequency of 32 (64%). Administrative and junior staff have the frequency of 10 (20%) and 8 (16%). This is due to high knowledge that academic staff possess in the subject matter.

The findings shows that there are various strategies of literacy learning available in the information age but the mostly accepted ones are identifying problems and seeking appropriate

solutions, decoding and comprehending information from multiple sources, understanding the meanings and contexts of words and symbol systems, participating in audio-visual conferences, responding to e-mails and working in a virtual environments, developing the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication, ability to validate information, scan websites to locate information and navigate between links, locating and identifying information across multiple modalities and evaluating information, sorting out accurate information from inaccurate ones. In line with this, (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro and Cammack, 2004), point out that the curriculum of the future will demand learners to adopt the following strategies: Apply problem-solving skills, identify problems and seek appropriate solutions, locate useful information relevant to problems, critically evaluate information, sorting out accurate information from inaccurate information, essential information from less-essential information, and biased information from unbiased information and rapidly and clearly communicate solutions to others.

The results also revealed that libraries have a very major role in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment. These include: Providing free and equitable access to information for all, identifying user needs and communicating solutions, providing information on community issues such as health, employment, continuing education and local history, offering relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages and all literacy levels, providing information resources for adult literacy programmes, providing a conducive environment for reading and research work, acquisition of relevant and interesting reading materials for adults with low vocabulary or literacy skills, providing free access to information and communication technologies, particularly the internet, extending information to the rural areas and disadvantaged communities, providing mobile library services to the users and providing audio-visual materials to the users. These roles will enable the libraries to position well as they create and enhance literacy-friendly environment. By providing equitable access to information for all, libraries encourage critical citizenship in a global democratic society. This is in line with (Krolak, 2005), who stated that libraries play an important role in helping to bridge the information gap by providing free access to information and communication technologies, especially the internet.

Also, (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006), opined that libraries play an important role in the acquisition, maintenance and development of literacy skills. As they provide materials and

services to all reading levels and age groups, they are perfect locations for offering literacy classes.

The result found based on the challenges confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment are enormous, but the major challenges as witnessed from the findings include: Inadequate funding of libraries, poor power supply, inadequate professional staff, low knowledge of handling of ICT facilities in the library and inadequate proper training opportunities for librarians. These problems hinder the smooth running of libraries in their efforts to create and literacy-friendly environment. Adequate funds are required for libraries to function effectively. 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.

On the solutions to the problems confronting libraries in creating and enhancing literacy-friendly environment, information gathered suggests that libraries should be provided with adequate funds, there should be a stable power supply, library staff should be provided with various training workshops, conferences, seminars, etc., libraries should also extend their services to the rural and disadvantaged communities, librarians should be trained on good handling of information technologies, There should be a strong collection development policy, libraries should be updated with current information and there should be a strong and functional information policy which will be reviewed from time to time. As regards the problem of funding, (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2004: 67), suggests that adequate funding is needed for the building, for acquiring relevant materials, library furniture, for continuing education, for computers with internet access and for running costs. Libraries must be supported by specific legislation and must be adequately financed by national and local governments. They can also seek support from international organizations and other NGO's. In proffering solutions to the problems confronting libraries, (Kunaka, 1998), states that libraries are the logical access point and support centre for community-based literacy programs. They have to particularly support family literacy, as a literate home environment is the key factor in enabling and motivating children to read.



To be most effective, libraries need to be an essential part of a long-term policy framework for the whole education sector, embracing literacy, information provision and lifelong learning, and co-operating and networking with other education stakeholders, including the local publishing industry.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the above analysis, it must be realized that literacy is an essential requirement for the development of any nation. The provision of library and information services is a positive step towards making information widely available to the people, make them information literate, be able to access and use accessed information to develop the country. A literate person is one who can decipher meanings from written or printed records. Literacy for all is crucial to national and personal development, while illiteracy is a major obstacle. Literacy is the ability to communicate or be communicated with effectively. Librarians are agents and major gateways to knowledge as such; it is recommended that adequate funds should be provided for the libraries. Direct budgetary provision should be made for library development. With this, efficiency is guaranteed in policy implementations, program design, planning and execution.

Also, with these funds, adequate training should be provided for the library staff in order to render quality services to the users. A good policy encouraging information society should be formulated and implemented to ensure nation-wide coverage on literate awareness.

Mobile library services should also be provided by the libraries. This will help to extend library services to the rural communities and to the disadvantaged communities. Information is a right and not a privilege. These set of people needs daily information in order to be updated with current happenings in the society. Libraries are the logical access point and support centre for community-based literacy programs. They have to particularly support family literacy, as a literate home environment is the key factor in enabling and motivating children to read; Libraries have to offer a wide range of activities, with a special focus on reaching out to marginalized groups. Professional staff with great skills and knowledge should be hired in the libraries to provide professional quality services to the users. Libraries have to be an essential part of a long-

term policy framework for the whole education sector, embracing literacy, information provision and lifelong learning.

Finally, libraries are the logical access point and support centre for community-based literacy programs. They have to particularly support family literacy, as a literate home environment is the key factor in enabling and motivating children to read.

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