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Abstract

This research work is focused on the effects of economic recession on Nigerian university libraries. This position paper explained the roles and importance of university libraries in achieving the mission and vision of its parent institution. Consequently, it is aimed at assessing the impact of the current economic downturn in Nigeria and its effects on the university libraries. It identified the causes of economic recession in Nigeria, including poor government policy plans, corruption by government officials, unscrupulous spending by government agents/agencies, decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) etc., and its consequences on the university library operations. Furthermore, the paper outlined the adverse effects of economic recession on Nigerian university libraries and the untold hardship being experienced by them, such as, inadequate funding for the procurement of library materials and equipment's, inadequate funding for staff training and development and lack of staff motivation which often leads to poor job performance, etc. In view of these, the university library must thrive in this turbulent situation, as such; strategies for overcoming the effects of economic recession on university libraries were discussed and recommended not only to Nigerian university libraries, but libraries globally experiencing this situation.

Keywords: *Economic Recession; Effects of Economic Recession; Nigerian Universities, University Libraries.*

Introduction

The global economic hunch has experienced a steep downturn that is affecting all sectors of society. The United Kingdom officially entered a recession in January 2009, that action taken made public cuts inevitable. Accordingly, the Federal Government of Nigeria officially made pronouncement of austerity measures in September, 2014 which affected government expenditure such as staff training, overseas travel and so on. Subsequently, President Muhammadu Buhari officially pronounced in June 2016 that Nigeria entered a recession (Daily Trust Newspaper, September 1, 2016). In all, academic libraries are particularly vulnerable to the unanticipated changes in the world economy because of their reliance on highly-priced globally-sourced information products and dependence on expenditure allocations from parent institutions that are depending heavily on funding(Ray and Sheila, 2011).

Economic downturn, crunch or recessions are general terms that have the same conceptual definitions and meanings, they are used interchangeably to describe decline in economic activity over a sustained period of time. It can happen in a specific region for example the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s or on a global scale – like in the late 2000, 2009 to 2010 respectively, there was global financial crisis. These financial crises affected high institutions of learning, industrial and commercial nerves of the world, only the strong could survive. This stunted research and academic activities resulting in brain drain and half-baked graduates especially from universities and other institutions of higher learning, right sizing or downsizing or rationalization of staff in many organisations across the globe. Presently, from 2015 to 2016 Nigeria is going through a stringent financial crisis. The academic institutions have been faced with stringent financial difficulties resulting from disbursement of meagre allocations to percentage payment of staff monthly salaries, little or no subscription of library resources (books) to the libraries and obsolesce of materials amongst others.

Furthermore, economic recession can be described as a period marked with general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a sharp or gradual drop in stock market. Paul (2009) observed that a recession is less than a depression. He stressed further that the balance for a recession generally falls on Federal Leadership, often the president himself, the head of the Federal Reserve or even the minister of finance and head of economic team or the entire administrative cabinet. In other words, the success or failure of any economy depends

on the leadership ability or inability respectively, to anchor on effective planning, execution and monitoring to caution the effects.

According to American Library Association (ALA) (2017), a library is a collection of resources in a variety of formats that is organized by information professionals or other experts who provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and offer targeted services and programs with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole. In addition, a library can be viewed as a collection of book and non-book or electronic materials that have been selected, acquired, processed, organised, and systematically arranged and preserved for easy accessibility and utilisation by clients. Subsequently, a university library is a library or library system established, administered and funded by a university to meet the information, research, and curriculum needs of its students, faculty and staff (Reitz, 2004 as cited in Emenike,*et al*, 2014). Generally, any library attached to a university is called a university library. It is an academic library established to support, compliment and supplement the curriculum of the university in which it is situated.

The Roles of the University Libraries

According to Ola (2011), the library is the pivot around which every academic research and recreational activities of the parent institution rotates. This means that, the library performs a number of roles in the academic and research world. It is important to note that university libraries carry out functions that are specific to the aims and objectives of the parent institution as follows:

1. Provision of support for scholarship and research generally.
2. Contributes directly to the institution's academic objectives and help to equip students with the necessary skills needed to attain academic excellence and employability.
3. Investment in e-resources has direct impact in the universities and also triggers productivity, improving quality research and access to e-contents.
4. Provision of quality library resources plays vital roles in attracting academic prowess and development which in turn portray the good image of the institutions.
5. Serves as repositories of knowledge, and provides services that are fundamental to the institution's experiences. The university library helps both students and staff to maintain mutual relationship which permeate the necessary ground for continuity.

6. Development of human resources for meeting manpower needs. The university library trains library staff internally and externally to boost the professional competence of the staff for effective service delivery.
7. Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge through teaching, and advancement of knowledge through research, pure, applied and development oriented.
8. Promotion of social and economic modernization.

Causes of Economic Recession in Nigeria and its Demerits to the University Library System

Economic recession cannot exist in a vacuum. Libraries derive their operational mandate from their parent institutions which they are dependent on. University libraries are established principally to support the Teaching, Learning and Research (TLR) of the university and its community development efforts. In Nigeria, universities are categorised into three (3), based on ownership: federal, state and private. Moreover, the federal and state universities are public funded institutions, thus, they belong to the federal and states government respectively. Literature reviewed and observations by the researchers have identified the following as reason for economic recession in Nigerian university libraries:

- i. Poor government funding: it's a known reality that university libraries depend primarily on government subvention. Ola (2011) observes that subventions are released through the NUC as Library Development Fund (LDF) to the university administrations who in turn, disbursed the funds to the libraries and that this was fairly enjoyed by universities until early 1980s. According to him, university libraries in the country then were made to have book acquisition for all disciplines and courses covered; journal subscription were paid for as at when due; libraries could engage in exchange programmes with other libraries locally and internationally; library staff enjoyed local and foreign in-service training; there were enough staff to discharge library services and respond to users' needs. But then the global economic glut in the crude oil market in the early eighties ushered in stiff national economic measures almost choked universities. As a result, the universities experienced huge cuts in their budget allocations even funding became more irregular.
- ii. Poor government policy plan: Another reason for economic recession in university libraries is the so called 'strategic agendas' brought up by the government. During the oil wind fall in the early nineties and 2010 – 2014 the crude oil price was relatively

stable, the government was buoyant in terms of revenue generation and foreign reserve was equally high. But, the government in the nineties introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) with all the DFRRRI projects all around the country. On the other hand, education and in particular university libraries were not given such priority. Subsequently, the policy plan of the government between 2010 to 2014 such as the Seven Point Agenda (SPA) and the Transformation Agenda (TA) was not favourable to the university and the libraries by extension. Moreover, the plans made by the government of those times was for the immediate needs of the country, it does not cater for the needs of the future, i.e. no posterity plans. In other words, even if government policy plan is good but not accompanied with proper monitoring and implementation it will boomerang on the economy and crunch the university systems which will therefore paralyze the activities of the university libraries.

- iii. Corruption by government officials: corruption is a cancerous wound, and has become a norm in Nigeria. Corruption has penetrated every sector in Nigeria, even in the university systems and libraries, corruption abounds in various forms. According to Smah (2014), defines corruption from the legal perspectives to mean any behaviour that contravenes what has been officially disallowed and includes the fact that it is aimed at obtaining some benefits and attempts for effort to evade the consequence of such act. In most cases, when meagre and irregular allocations are sent to the universities by the relevant authorities, what happen to the Library Development Fund (LDF) that is supposed to go the libraries? Whether they are given at all? And if they are, how judicious are these funds being utilized is another pressing concern. The fact is that both the corrupt government officials and the university administrators have most times played down on the university libraries. In either way, it is either the libraries are under-funded or not funded at all.
- iv. Unscrupulous spending by government agents/agencies: Government functionaries rather than being accountable and prudent with coffers, some are being ingenious in sapping or stealing from the purse. Ola (2011) asserts that Nigerian government and its agencies and parent institutions tend to view libraries as necessary parasites. This means that libraries have always been neglected. Though other university libraries such as Federal University Lafia, have enjoyed fair treatment from the parent body, this gesture may not be so with other university libraries. If funds meant for university libraries are allocated promptly and accounted for, the libraries will be furnished with

adequate resources and delivery of quality services to their clientele. Whereas, the funds are been diverted by unscrupulous politicians and groups who shamelessly steal funds meant for library development to their individual pocket.

- v. **Decline Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** Daily Trust (1st September (2016) reported that Nigerian economy has drifted into recession as the Nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped by all-time low to a record of 2.06% in the second quarter of 2016 with the rising inflation rate. Typically, economic recession is a reduction in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Product (GNP), which could be for two or more consecutive quarters. The GDP of a country is the total market value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. An example of one type of GDP would be the value of all the petroleum products or Portland cements produced within Nigeria for one year, or the quality of information and educational services a country can provide to its citizenry. GDP only takes into account new products that have been manufactured. Therefore in the case of a country like Nigeria, our GDP is low because we are a monolithic economy, also, Nigeria as a country does not manufacture goods anymore, but rather a consumer nation. This alone has worsen the current situation of the country in terms of percentages in payment of workers' salaries, states not being able to pay their staff or even government inability to embark on meaningful infrastructural development, poor budgetary allocation to education, obsolete resources in the libraries and so on. This also affects university library development in Nigeria.

Upshots of Economic Recession and how they affects Library Operations

Obviously, economic recession have negative effect on university libraries' well being. Below is an outline of the consequences of economic recession and how they affect library operations.

- i. **High interest rates:** One of the major indices of economic recession is marked by high interest rate in the capital market thereby limiting liquidity and perhaps the amount of money available to invest with. This adversely affects the university budget and acquisition strength of the library.
- ii. **Inflation:** This is another consequence of economic recession that denotes arise in the prices of goods and services over a period of time. In other words, inflation leads to so much money in circulation within a country going after few goods available.

Therefore, as inflation increases, the percentage of goods and services that can be purchased with the same amount of money decreases. In this regard, only few resources can be acquired to the library which cannot meet the teeming users' information needs.

- iii. Decline in consumer confidence: this is a situation whereby consumers believe that the economy is really in bad shape. The need to survive the “jungle” and provide safety nets becomes imperative, as a result, they keep their money rather than spending it on things like constructions or real estate, educational infrastructure and library materials like book publishing and production, invest in information and communication technologies or even capital market etc. This in actual fact is psychological but can have adverse effects on any economy, university and library operations.
- iv. Wages Reduction: Another consequence of economic recession is reduction of staff wages due to inflation. When there is falling real wages, it implies that the pay package or wages of library staff is not keeping up with inflation i.e. the price of goods and services are on the increase whereas staff salaries doesn't increase or even decrease. Hence, the staff purchasing power will be reduced even if he/she is making the same amount of money or a little more.
- v. Low Output: Low output or turn-over rate is a clear sign of economic downturn. Almost every economic activity comes to a standstill during recession because there is little or no motivation and as a result has lowered excellence, dampened morals and productivity in services delivery of the universities library staff.

It should be added that, economic recession in Nigeria is a phenomenon that the library is beginning to live with, as such, librarians currently are deeply aware of the consequences the situation has plunged them into. In order to build up a defence mechanism, Perez (2014) observed that libraries contribute to a competitive economy, and to provide library managers with valid arguments to defend their position against competition from other sectors. He maintained that libraries are rather an investment and not expense dependent. This is against the assumption by most people that library is only consuming and not contributing to the economy, this explains the reason why libraries are being treated with negligence. However, the enormous contributions of university libraries to the economic development of the country cannot be over emphasized both in quality and quantity.

From the foregoing, other negative impact/consequences of economic recessions on university libraries' operations has been identified as follows:

- i. **Inadequate funds for collections development:** One of the most devastating effects of the economic recession is decrease in the purchases of libraries collections. Basically, the life wire of any library is the resources it acquires and maintains but this has suffered a lot of setbacks in recent times because, budgetary reduction in this area will terribly affect acquisition of books, serials, audio-visual and electronic resources. The sad thing is that librarians will lose their relevance if there is not enough fund to buy library resources to meet users' needs.
- ii. **Inadequate funds for staffing:** Another serious area is when there are cuts in budget, it brings about negative implication on employees motivations which impedes the professional efforts and success of the employees in the library. It is rather dehumanizing for staff to work harder and longer hours at the end given lower wages or peanut as percentage payment. The economic crunch can also affect staff benefits and training/development opportunities due to insufficient funds to undertake such tasks. In the same way, it can impact negatively on staffing and recruitment into the libraries thereby giving rise to high attrition from the library profession to other professions or sectors.
- iii. **Poor Service Delivery:** Economic recession have stalled a lot of investment in libraries collections, buildings and even changing content consumption habits of users. This same trend has affected the attitudes of librarians themselves, as their job performance have become so poor in such a manner that cannot be proportionate with the expected/desired services. Of course, if users too could not get their information needs, it suggests that the library could not satisfy them. Similarly, the Internet services are epileptic due to lack of adequate funds establish one or increase the bandwidth where available, because it is rather low and slow most times. Associated with this is inadequate power supply to power electronic equipment in the library, and this is as a result of economic instability in the country.
- iv. **Social Vices:** Another dispassionate impact of economic recession is that it create vacuum for anti-social activities which are characterized by militia activities, such as kidnapping, robbery, child trafficking and labour. The reason for some of these occurrences is that many have been relieved of their economic strong holds or sacked from their jobs, which leads to poverty, hunger or starvation, hostilities, books theft

from the libraries etc. These have adversely affected the credibility of university educational system because of the dysfunction in the society; the university library is suffering the same fate too.

- v. Insecurity: Another dangerous impact of economic recession that affects university libraries is insecurity. Insecurity in humans can arise from fear and dissatisfaction in people, especially the youths who are mostly affected in terms of unemployment, drops out of schools as a result of high rates of school fees or strike. They become vulnerable to disgruntled politicians to cause havoc to human lives and property such as vandalism or destroying government properties under the guise of protests. Typical example of these are suicide bombing by the inglorious Boko Haram in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria and bombing of oil pipelines by the Niger Delta Militants otherwise known as Niger Delta Avengers or the agitation for Biafra by some Igbo youths of the South East in Nigeria. These illicit activities have serious negative impacts on the economy, even schools in the affected areas are closed down as a result of crises, and all of these atrocities are capable of grinding any nation to her feet.

Universally, Tejvan (2012) also identified the following as negative impacts of economic recession which have characterized the 2008 to 2012 world great recession, these are:

- i. Fall in GDP/National output.
- ii. High unemployment.
- iii. Some firms will go bankrupt and staff will lose their jobs.
- iv. Libraries, agencies and other firms cut back on hiring new staff, this affects young people the most.
- v. Lower wages occur as result of reducing costs; under-employment, workers become part-time staff, general fall in effective income.
- vi. Government experiences a fall in tax revenue; less profit from firms, government receives lower corporation tax, lower income for workers, government receives lower income tax, lower expenditure, lower VAT payment etc.
- vii. Rise in government spending on welfare payments.
- viii. Increase in the budget deficit and total government debt.
- ix. Government bond yields fall.
- x. Austerity measures-in government spending.
- xi. Aggravate debt profile and make it unsustainable.
- xii. Loss of output or lower investment opportunities.

In view of the aforementioned, the negative impacts of economic recession on the university library and other aspects of the Nigerian economy are unquantifiable. The psychological effects is very frustrating, stressful and dehumanizing, unemployment makes people and their areas vulnerable to social vices such as advanced feud-fraud (419), armed robbery, kidnapping, women/children trafficking, illicit drug abuse/trafficking, bribery and corruption, impersonation, vandalism etc. Unemployment also leads to social instability such as riots, insurgency, militancy, cultism in the institutions etc. There is unemployment or under-employment in which staff loses the opportunity to gain adequate skills and embark on regular on-the-job training. Long term unemployment makes it difficult for staff to gain job in the future or even make them fizzle out of the labour market completely.

Economic Recession and the Financial State of the University Libraries

The university library is arguably one of the most dependent arms of the university as their financial strength lies on the parent body for funding. This has made the university librarians in some universities weak, almost irrelevant, and going cap-in-hand to the university administrators or managements asking for their allocations as if it is not a right but a favour. According to CIBER (2009)report over the last ten (10) years, UK universities net expenditure on libraries has grown significantly, but not nearly as fast as universities overall income and expenditure. Research and literature also revealed that the total expenditure on libraries has risen from £322m (3.0% of total university expenditure) in 1997 – 1998 to the sum of £550m (2.1% of total university expenditure) in 2007 – 2008. However, it was argued that this may not be the reflection of the reality on ground as the structure of many universities libraries are not the same in the provision of information technology services.

The Nigerian scenario differs, as the library runs on the annual budgetary allocation. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC) (2009), a minimum of 15% of recurrent budget of academic institutions should go to their libraries. In addition, the minimum guideline of the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) (2014), states that 15% of internally generated revenue (IGR) of academic institutions should also go to their libraries to fund library services and operations. Furthermore, that 5% of the capital budget and 10% of overhead allocations of academic institutions should go to the libraries. Nevertheless, whether or not the institutions are complying with the allocation requirements to their libraries, are issue that desires much attention by appropriate authorities. The extent

to which the current oil dwindling have affected the Nigerian economy and allocations to institutions have a crippling effect on library operations in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the library apart from the allocations should have other sources of income generations that if properly harnessed would boost library operations in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. They include internal sources; photocopying fees, room hire, fines for late returns, book binding services, digital referencing etc. And the external sources include; research and project grants, donations, exhibitions, launching etc. As librarians, it is an undisputable fact that libraries make little or no gains from the internal sources, whereas the external fund raising have to be coordinated by the institutions and in a situation whereby the university administrators or managements are not library friendly, it make things more difficult for such libraries to succeed. The culmination of this and others reasons place libraries in a down grading state, inept and perpetual dependence.

Challenges before the University Libraries

Apparently, libraries especially university libraries in Nigeria are faced with a number of challenges arising from the effects of the on-going economic turmoil that befell the Nigerian economy from 2015 till date. Some of the challenges include the following:

- i. Shortage of manpower in most of the Universities libraries because of lack of funds to recruit more staff is great challenge to both the university management and that of the libraries.
- ii. Lack of adequate fund to purchase library materials.
- iii. Lack of fund to send staff on training.
- iv. Lack of adequate financial motivation to the library staff, as such, they perform poorly in their jobs.

Strategies to Overcome the Effects of Economic Recession on University Libraries

According to David and Rowlands (2010), the libraries alongside the weighty changes affecting the economics of the world, there have been significant changes in the services provided to users. With particular reference to Nigeria, this infers that due to the dwindling oil price which is the major source of income, staff in university education sector in Nigeria have reverted to packaging their services through the institutional repository with minimum cost. The digital revolution has changed the information seeking behaviour of users in the way

and manner information is being accessed and used. Similarly, readers have been structured to be more current and expect immediate 24/7 access to a wide range of such services.

Furtherance to this, the social, economic, educational and technological activities that will occur during social networking. Ukachi and John-Okeke (2012) opined that the virtual learning and research environments of cloud computing, and that of ubiquitous or presage will continue to be an intensive change in the next few years. From the above assertion, it is believed that the digital revolution is to enhance access to information infrastructure to university libraries in Nigeria.

Consequently, librarians major concerns as they face the current economic challenges associated with the kind of financial pressures outlined above, are determine to ensure high levels of service to both staff and students in most university libraries. They can also continue to innovate and exploit new technologies so that their services keep in step with their competitors not only in Nigeria but in the rest of the world. These strategies will make university libraries to operate beyond the level of dependency to creative, sustainable income generating giants and service friendly. In line with the above, Ukachi and John-Okeke (2012) support that the precarious state of the economy has negatively affected the institutions libraries resulting in scholars and students accessing only a small portion of the necessary library facilities in the institution library.

Conclusion

Librarians have for long played a central role in the continued existence of universities all over the world, in supporting learning, teaching and research development. Since universities themselves vary considerably in the nature, range and scale of their activities, it is not surprising that university libraries come in many different nomenclatures, objectives, roles and sizes. This is in line with the rest of the higher educational sector, however, all of them have experienced over the past decade a period of unprecedented change. They have transformed their operations as they have responded to the opportunities of the digital revolution, and further challenges that lies ahead. Like other sectors, university libraries are now facing a renewed and intensified period of financial hardship to such an extent that some academic libraries cannot afford daily newspapers or magazines for their users' needs. It is such an appalling situation. Notwithstanding, the university libraries must thrive in this perilous times.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, there is the need for university libraries and Nigeria at large to brace-up in order to remedy the situation from further decline. Consequently the following recommendations were made as succour to the challenges of economic recession in Nigeria and on university libraries, if actualized, it would no doubt enable Nigerian universities libraries acquire current materials, send their staff regularly for trainings and also recruit competent staff to render effective and efficient service to their clientele.

- i. The federal government of Nigeria should consider the option to borrow locally or externally or pump the looted money into the economy as a way out.
- ii. Budgetary or monthly allocation to universities libraries should be consistent and paid in full to enable the library to access her 10% of the allocation so as to make proper plans and implementations. The results of this are the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) loan 2015. The Bailout Funds provided by Federal Government to States in order to pay salaries. The Paris Loan the Federal Government accessed part of which is to enable the States pay their salary backlogs. Subsequently, the bailout fund by the federal government to both states and local governments should be monitored judiciously to ensure proper implementation and make policies to prevent diversion or leakages of the fund. This will alleviate the plight of states owned university/institutional libraries and even public libraries staff at both states and local governments.
- iii. Government should encourage indigenous publishers and book traders/vendors. This will help to strengthen the value of naira and also make loans available for them to acquire world class equipment that can stimulate publication activities in the country, this will restore hope for universities libraries and make them more buoyant in terms book acquisition.
- iv. Federal government should lift the ban on importation of published materials and publication equipment and reduce the custom duties on them. The benefit of this is that it will lower the high cost of publication and books will be more affordable to universities libraries and even individuals to purchase. More so, it will boost economic activities in the country.
- v. The economic hardship on the masses should be lessened by releasing money for both recurrent and capital projects and make necessary plan to help states pay the outstanding salaries of workers and end the woe on percentage payment which has

brought untold hardship to the Nigerian populace, the universities library staff are no exemption to this menace.

- vi. The central bank of Nigeria should quickly adjust the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) otherwise known as the lending rate down ward for organisations/institutions to access loans with ease. This is because the lending rates in the banks are so high such that it scares manufacturers from borrowing. If reviewed down ward, it will enable universities to access facility from the banks which will help to effectively fund their libraries.
- vii. Government should increase or introduce luxury tax for the upper class and discourage importation of luxury products; this in effect will help to conserve the foreign exchange. The increase in tax should not affect the lower class or common man who is already living a miserly life style.
- viii. In order for government to resuscitate rural economies, to create market for farm products and manufactured goods, government should commence payment to local contractors as well, encourage them by awarding contracts for rural infrastructure rather than paying foreign contractors that will exert pressure on the foreign exchange and will worsen the recession.

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