

## THE LIBRARY: AN AGENT OF REFORMS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses the importance of the library in reforming tertiary education. As a repository of recorded knowledge, library is a place where information resources, both print and non-print, are processed and preserved for use. Libraries in tertiary institutions, academic libraries by classification are the "nerve-centres" for the Teaching, learning and research work of such institutions. The paper stresses that whatever reforms that are done in tertiary education should be reflected in the library. This is necessary because the library as a service agent reaches out to every member of the academic community-students, researchers, staff and other members of the society. It is only when the library is involved that the benefits of reforms in tertiary education will be fully realized.*

### Introduction

Education is the foundation of a virile nation. No nation has developed without a sound educational base. The quality of every nation depends on the standard of education given and received by its citizens. (Chikwe, 2004). With the oil boom of 1970's the economy expanded and there was a rapid growth and development of the education sector in Nigeria. Then, in the 1980's, there was decline in revenue from petroleum products, which led to major economic problems that also affected the education sector. Obviously, the education industry has not recovered from the economic depression of the 1980's. The effect of this is that the infrastructural facilities that aid teaching and learning are dilapidated. Libraries are inadequately equipped. Basic equipment is either

lacking, obsolete or in a state of decay; to mention but a few. This is why some universities and other institutions are crying out about their financial plight and appealing to government for help. The grants allocated to the universities are becoming smaller and smaller in relation to the actual needs (Adesina and Gravenir, 1981). The low funding of educational institutions has invariably affected the standard of education in Nigeria. If this trend continues the quality education will deteriorate the more.

### Objectives of tertiary education in Nigeria

According to the federal government Nigeria (2004) in the National policy of Education, tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in University, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnic including those

institutions offering correspondence courses. As stated in the National Policy on Education the goals of tertiary education are to:

- i. Contribute to national development through high-level relevant man power training;
- ii. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of individual and society;
- iii. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- iv. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- v. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- vi. Forge and cement national unity, and
- vii. Promote national and international understanding and interaction (FGN,2004:7)

Tertiary institutions are established to achieve these goals. Nwuzor and Ocho(2003) stated that tertiary institutions include such traditional multi-purpose university institutions for graduate and post graduate studies and research; specialized institutions of science and technology, professional institutions in various areas of human needs and endeavour. Others are purpose institutions of polytechnics which are intermediate manpower, institutions of technology and other intermediate professional preparation institutions.

Universities and other academic institutions are centers of academic excellence. They are communities of scholars established by law with sole aim of conducting research, teaching and learning, extending the frontiers of knowledge offering community service (Ozioko, 2005). According to Igwebuik (2003) Nigeria University has six main functions:

- a. Conservation of knowledge
- b. Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge through teaching.
- c. Advancement of knowledge through research, pure, applied and development oriented.
- d. Provision of intellectual leadership
- e. Provision of intellectual leadership
- e. Development of human resource for meeting manpower needs
- f. Promotion of social and economic modernization.

To perform the above functions creditably, institutions of higher learning are provided with necessary infrastructural facilities, such as, libraries, laboratories, workshops, studios, etc. The absence of these facilities will amount to being handicapped.

At the commencement of any academic programme, these facilities are provided, all things being equal. Infact, accreditation exercises are carried out to ensure their availability. With time, some of them begin to wear out and need either refurbishing or replacement. This is rarely done. As students' population increases, these facilities ought to increase also. In a situation where the students' population increases and more facilities are not provided, existing ones will be overstretched; thereby making it impossible for effective teaching and learning to take place.

The essence of tertiary education as can be inferred from the National policy on education is essentially to produce high level manpower, inculcate proper value for survival of the individual and help the individuals acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable him or he become self-reliant.

At this point, there is need for an assessment, to ascertain the progress so far made in tertiary education. In doing this ,a pertinent question should

be asked." Are the objectives of tertiary education being realized? "The answer is not far fetched. It is obvious that these objectives are not fully realized. Failure to achieve the objectives can be attributed to many factors.

A major constraint militating against tertiary education is in the area of funding. Tertiary education which is the bed-rock of nation and development has been in financial crisis for the past two decades. Maduabum (2006) noted that the prevailing financial constraint facing the universities, which has resulted in the scarcity of all resources in the university except students is making it increasingly difficult for the universities to promote academic excellence. He further stressed that promoting academic excellence requires quality facilities and consequently adequate funding. Education at the tertiary level is grossly under-funded. The result is that the infrastructure that facilitates teaching and learning are dilapidated. Libraries are inadequately equipped and there are no laboratories and workshops. Basic equipment is either lacking, obsolete or in a state of decay. In some tertiary institutions students listen to lectures standing, sometimes, on corridors and peeping through the windows of over crowded lecture halls. (Okolo, 2004). In the light of these circumstances, it is obvious that there is a fall in the standard of education in our institutions of higher learning.

### **Objectives of Academic Libraries**

Ifidon(1999),Edoka(2000),Igwebuike(2003) Ogbonna (2002), as quoted by Ozoioke (2005)stated that the major objectives of academic libraries are:

i. Provision of materials in support of the learning process, that is, materials for students course work, assigned reading as well as reading for essays, term papers and projects.

- ii. Provision of materials to meet the requirements of faculty specialists and postgraduate students who are doing research.
- iii. Provision of materials to assist library users in their own personal self development.
- iv. Cooperation with other academic libraries with a view to developing a network of academic library resources, which are at the disposal of all students and teaching faculties.
- V. Meeting the specialized information needs of the region within which the institution is situated.
- vi. Provision of expensive standard works especially in the professional disciplines.
- vii. Stimulation of researchers' interest in the printed world.

To meet these objectives, libraries acquire, process and make available information bearing materials. It is on the basis of this that Ifidon (1999) Aguolu and Aguolu (2002),Igwebuike (2003)and Ogbonna (2003) said that the library has to collect materials; published and unpublished, print and non-print, in some depth and globally in almost all fields of knowledge.

Where such information resources are lacking, the library cannot perform its functions. Such is the situation in academic libraries in our tertiary institutions. This is why Okiy(1998)observed that the situation in Nigeria university libraries has been that of inability to provide the basic requirements for effective discharge of their duties. In the same vein, Aguolu (1984) noted that the library and information services provided in the country do not truly conform with the stated national objectives.

### **The Library as an Agent of Reforms.**

The library essentially is a service-oriented institution, which serves the needs of its users. The academic library is the nerve center of any tertiary

institution. It is an integral part of the parent institution. As a resource center it occupies the central and primary place in that it performs all the functions of university-teaching, learning and research. The library is the principal

Instrument of higher institutions for the conservation and transmission of recorded knowledge. (Ozioko, 2005) As knowledge is generated, the library acquires it and processes or organizes it in such a way that it will be accessible to users.

It stores information in various media. According to Ozioko (2005) information can be stored in books, periodicals, newspapers, technical reports, pamphlets, microforms, conference papers of learned societies and professional associations, machine readable databases, manuscripts archival materials and in many other formats.

Igwebuike (2003) discussed some standard information sources that libraries in tertiary institutions house and provide for users as follows:

**a. Textbook:** These are useful materials provided in libraries for transmitting knowledge on various disciplines.

**b. Periodicals:** They are very useful in providing current information in various disciplines.

**C. Reference books:** They are ready reference materials meant to be consulted for specific information or background information on some topics.

**d. Projects, Theses and dissertations:** These are research works conducted by students of higher institutions in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of certificates and degrees.

**e. Special Collections:** They are produced by government ministries and departments, national and international agencies, etc.

**f. Information technologies services:** Academic libraries provided their users information technology services through the aid of computer.

Library users consult these information sources to gain knowledge and make further research. It is sad to note that these information sources are inadequately provided. Ehigiator (2000) observed that existing libraries are overstressed due to over population that they can no longer meet effectively the information needs of their users.

The dire need of reforms in tertiary education is also applicable to libraries in tertiary institutions. Whatever reforms envisaged for the tertiary institution in Nigeria should begin with the library. Most university and other higher institution libraries are in old colonial designed buildings. The library, as a pivot of the educational machine should be in the “state of the art” buildings and equipped with high-tech Internet facilities. The buildings housing tertiary libraries should be spacious to accommodate users (students) population surge. If the library must perform its role of teaching, learning and research effectively and efficiently, there must be sufficient resources in terms of finance, information sources, personnel, etc. A well-equipped library creates enabling environment for user to utilize library resources.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

It is certain that libraries are indispensable in the running of any academic programme. One cannot think of the existence of any institution of higher learning without the support of a functional library.

Academic libraries provide users, especially students, information sources and services, to develop their potentials and acquire relevant manpower that makes for national development, if the library must live up to its expectation, it must be reformed. It is only when the library is reformed that the benefits of the needed reforms in tertiary education will be fully realized.

Any effort to reform the library will address the issues of underfunding, provision of basic infrastructure and information resources, and recruitment of professional staff. It is therefore recommended that the government, non-governmental organizations and the universities/tertiary institutions authorities should embark on restructuring and rebuilding old libraries in line with modern times and needs. That calls for adequate funding.

Again, the world today is fast paced. An internet use and internet facility is the in-thing now. The improvement and the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge worldwide (globalization of knowledge) are made speedily possible by access to the internet (ICT). Modern libraries, particularly libraries in tertiary institutions should be equipped and harnessed with internet facilities to hook on to daily advances in spheres of knowledge worldwide. Modern libraries should take the lead in sourcing and conserving information via the internet.

The libraries in tertiary institution should have “business out-fit” section where users could come and pay to browse for whatever information they want. Thus the library makes available to whosoever wants access to advances in global knowledge via ICT-Internet.

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