CHAPTER TEN

ACADEMIC LIBRARY AS A PIVOT OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CHANGE IN NIGERIA

Onwueme, George A.
Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas,
Bonny. Rivers State

David, Hanatu
Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas,
Bonny. Rivers State.

Abstract

Higher education in Nigeria has come a long way admits different phases and challenges. The production of top quality graduates, who will navigate the future development of Nigeria, largely rests on the various available higher educational institutions in the country. In this era referred to as the information age or knowledge economy, the role of the academic library in assisting higher education to turn out competent graduates becomes very important because the academic library is the vault of the intellectual capital of higher education.. Therefore, this paper attempts to promote the academic library as a pivot for higher education in bringing about change to the overall development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Academic Library, Change, Higher Education, Nigeria

Introduction

With the many revolutionary innovations and technological advancements, being witnessed globally today in the higher educational activities of teaching, learning and research, the place and relevance of the academic library in supporting the mission and goals of higher education is demanding more attention especially for a country like Nigeria, where the desire for tertiary education is on a rapid upsurge. This has become very important in this political dispensation, where the present Federal government has adopted the catchy word of change as its agenda for the citizenry. The change mantra as propagated by the All Progressives Congress (APC) since ushered into political power in 2015, seeks to implement a performance based education system as against the current certificate based qualification as one of its manifesto on education. This implies that in implementing a performance based educational system; noticeable changes must be witnessed in the turnout of confident graduates who can make sound decisions and competently apply their acquired skills and knowledge in solving real life situations. (Hilliard 2015). With this noble aspiration in mind, what roles can higher education play in bringing the

desired change to the Nigerian educational system, which presently emphasizes qualifications over competencies? According to Sanyal (2001) "Higher education is at the top of the educational pyramid and determines to a large extent the state and quality of the educational system of a country. As such, it has a responsibility towards the whole education system as it has towards the whole of society." Higher education has an important role to play in the manpower development of any nation, through its graduates who should provide leadership roles in education as researchers, teachers, consultants and managers, and who should create and apply new knowledge and innovations, providing analytical perspectives on developmental problems and service to both the public and private sectors. Higher educational institutions through their activities of teaching, learning, research and community services, are expected to contribute massively to society by widening access to higher education, continuing professional development, applied research, contributing to local economic impact, and improving social inclusion. (Beebe, 2004; Okiy 2010; Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

Therefore, in actualizing these high expectations laid out for higher educational institutions, the appropriate facilities, organization, regulations and structures must be in place. Chief among these facilities in realizing the mandates of the higher educational institutions is the (academic) library. According to Thanuskodia (2009) "a well-equipped and well-managed library is the foundation of modern educational structure. It is said that education without library services is like a body without soul, a vehicle without an engine, and building with bricks but no cement." Okiy (2010) further states that "the central place of academic libraries is called into play because it is the duty of these libraries to provide the necessary information to the lecturers and students to achieve their teaching learning and research needs in the easiest, fastest and most comprehensive way." The present information age which is highly characterized by the numerous developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), also presents a better opportunity for academic libraries to reposition themselves for change as the library and information profession is equally experiencing significant transformations and stiff competition for relevance in service delivery. (Quadri, 2014) In fulfilling these goals of Higher education, what is the place and relevance of the academic library in higher education in Nigeria? This paper therefore seeks to give an intervention in asserting the academic library as a pivot for higher education in bringing about the desired change of producing competent and knowledgeable graduates, fully ready to conquer any field of human endeavour.

Higher Education in Nigeria: The Journey So Far

Various Historians and Educational Researchers have traced the origin of higher education in Nigeria to the colonial era and this was at the beginning of the 20th century. There were some forms of technical or vocational education being offered to Nigerians, who after secondary school education were serving in the various colonial government departments such as the Railway, Central Agricultural Research Stations (CARS), established at Moor Plantation, Ibadan and another one at Samaru in Zaria. So also, the Centre for Veterinary Medicine was cited at Vom, Jos and the Nigerian Railway in Lagos as the centre for engineering training; all providing sub-professional training for Nigerians before 1930. However, the clamour for proper higher or tertiary education in Nigeria was being pursued vigorously by many of the frontline Nationalists, with some of them having obtained university degrees abroad. Though, the Yaba Higher College was established in 1932 as Nigeria first higher educational institution, it was not well received by the Agitators, as they criticized the narrow mindedness of the curriculum taught and that it blocked the prospects of Nigerians for promotion in the civil service. They advocated for an education that was very adequate in equipping the colonial citizen with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage the affairs of a prospective independent Nigeria.

In response to the yearnings of the Nationalists, and following the recommendations of the two different commissions that were set up in 1943 by the British Colonial government, to look at the possibility of having University education introduced in Nigeria, namely, the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa and the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies, the University College Ibadan was established as a campus of the University of London in 1948. With independence very much in sight and the intense competition among the various Regional governments in bringing meaningful developments at that time, three additional universities were set up as the Eastern Region initiated the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which came on stream in 1960, while University of Ife and the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) were established in 1962 by the Western and Northern Regions respectively. Also, the Federal government in 1962 established the University of Lagos and upgraded the University College Ibadan to the University of Ibadan. The mid west Region which was created in 1963 also nursed the ambition of having its own higher educational institution by setting up the Institute of Technology which later became the University of Benin. The University of Benin which came on in 1970 completes the list of Nigeria first generation Universities. (Ade-Ajayi, 1975; Ahmed, 1989; Abdulrahman-Yusuf, 2012; Oni, 2012; Jaja, 2013).

Oni (2012) further revealed that owing to poor funding of some of the new institutions, the Federal Military Government in 1975 took over all the existing universities in Nigeria and this was the case until 1979 when the 2nd republic constitution made higher education to be on the concurrent list. This allowed for State governments to establish their own universities and Private investors were also invited to follow establish their own. Abdulrahman-Yusuf (2012) stated that "the Third National Development Plan of 1975 to 1980 gave Nigeria seven new Federal Universities, vis-a-vis the Bayero University, Kano; Usman Dan Fodiyo University, Sokoto; University of Ilorin, University of Calabar, University of Port Harcourt, University of Maiduguri and University of Jos. These Universities are today known as second-generation universities.

The 1980s saw further founding of federal and state owned universities and the emergence of specialized universities like the Federal Universities of Technology sited at Akure, Owerri, Minna and Yola and the Federal Universities of Agriculture located at Abeokuta, Makurdi and Umuahia. By 1999, when civilian rule was restored, Private Universities began to spring up and are still increasing in all parts of the federation. The Federal Government established the National Board for Technical Education in January 1977 to help regulate the programmes and activities of the available Technical and Vocational colleges. The functions of the Board were extended to include accreditation of academic programmes in all Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) institution and this was followed in 1979 with the establishment of seven Federal Polytechnics (Sanni, 2009).

Challenges of Higher education in Nigeria

The Nigerian higher education sub sector has come a long way and has generally, witnessed rapid developments in the number of institutions established, new programs introduced, and especially, an upsurge in the numbers of students admitted, propelled by an insatiable demand for higher education from the populace. According to Aina (2015), "demand for greater access to tertiary education continues unabated due to its social benefit, especially in a society in which social mobility depends largely on the level of education acquired." This gives credence to the notion that the educational sector is one that is certificate or qualification driven instead of a performance based education that produces competent and knowledgeable graduates. In this vein, Ade-Ajayi (1975 noted that "the official stamp of Universities on all certificates and diplomas remains very attractive as the surest way of achieving respectability and status." One major fallout of this development is the continued decline in Technical and Vocational education

as majority of the applicants seeks admission to the Universities. The Polytechnics and other colleges have not received fair treatment generally from the government in planning and executing educational policies just as the public perception and acceptance of Polytechnic education and its graduates is still very poor. Some Polytechnics and Colleges of Education initially founded to train middle-level manpower, ended up becoming Universities and this seems to have rendered the Polytechnics as less important to the overall development of the country. (Ade- Ajayi (1975) This point is further re-echoed by Asibeluo (2015) who warned that "the ill treatment given to Polytechnic graduates by the government, employers of labour and the general public in Nigeria should be immediately stopped because a dispirited person(s) cannot be adequately focused to give his/her best particularly knowing that he/she is not appreciated by his/her immediate society and this will only continue to negatively impact on our dear nation technologically".

Another important challenge of higher education in Nigeria is anti-intellectualism, which was well identified by Eribo (1996) as he state that the frequent abuses and intimidations of the Lecturers by the various Military regimes in the various campuses, impeded the drive for the pursuit of knowledge, slowed down research activities and the Military were wasteful with proceeds from oil exportation which became the Country's biggest foreign exchange earner in the 1970s, thereby leading to neglect of essential infrastructure and facilities such as libraries, laboratories, hostels etc. This resulted in the brain drain syndrome in which thousands of Nigerian Professors and Intellectuals have abandoned the country and taken their services elsewhere. Jaji (2004) in Jaja (2013) identified underfunding of higher education in Nigeria as a major problem and the effects of this problem includes According to Jaji (2004), the effects of inadequate funding of the Nigerian higher education sector include, among others:

- Inadequate and outdated library books and journals;
- Inadequate scientific materials;
- Non-existent fund for conferences and exchange programme;
- Inadequate resources for recurrent expenditures;
- Inadequate capital resources, which have led to suspension and or non-completion of capital
- projects, leading to overcrowded and rundown facilities, lecture hall and hostels;
- Inadequate staffing and training, poor motivation and low staff morale;

- Instability in academic calendar caused by incessant strike actions by students and teachers;
- Deficiencies in the curriculum and its delivery;
- Cultism in student life;
- Examination malpractices
- Mercenary attitude to teaching and research

Academic Library

Academic libraries are generally described as those libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and research institutes (Abubakar, 2011). Singh and Kaur (2009) stressed that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent institutions, which is teaching and research. Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities, which comprises of students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Many a times academic libraries are referred to as the heart or nerve centres of institutions of higher learning where all academic activities revolved. An Academic library is a library that is attached to a higher institution, which serves two complementary purposes, to support the school curriculum, and to support the research of the students, department, faculty/schools, and the community at large.

In its effort to play its role, Anunobi and Okoye (2008) stated that academic library provide necessary informational resources such as print and non- print materials. E-library and e-resources are becoming the order of the day in library and information practice. Omekwu and Echezona (2008) also stated that for the library to be where their users are, they have to fully recognize the fact that the world is living in virtual realities, where library services are in cyberspace and are not affected by opening and closing hours. Users of academic libraries now expect to be given what they need, when they need it and from whichever location they may be. University libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies and e-resources necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium. Jacinta and Uzoigwe (2013). Some Services

offered by Academic library includes Reference service, Reprographic services, Internet services, Provision of user education/orientation of staff and student, Access to online data base, Bibliographic services, interlibrary loan, Exhibition and display etc.

Academic Library as a pivot for Higher Education in promoting change in Nigeria

It is important that we stress the point that the academic library should be perceived as a pivot for higher education not just in Nigeria but in any part of the world where educational institutions are found. According to Merriam Webster's dictionary, a Pivot is defined in the following ways: -

- A shaft or pin on which something turns
- A person, thing, or a factor having a measure or central role, function, or effect; a key player or position
- The action of pivoting; especially the action in basketball of stepping with one foot while keeping the other foot at it point of contact with the floor

A pivot is what holds objects and allow a turning effect, when the pivot is removed from these objects, it seized to maintain its original nomenclature and would not give room for change, which implies that, when the library which is the major tool room for instrument of learning and research is removed either consciously or unconsciously in institution of higher learning, then it's no longer a learning institution. According to Okiy (2012) "the library is regarded as the heart of any educational institution, particularly the tertiary institutions which are relied upon to produce the middle and higher level manpower for national development. This is because the quality of the products of these institutions is measured to a very large extent by the information resources provided by their libraries for teaching and research required to equip the students with the necessary skills and knowledge for national development".

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 (Aghauche 2007). Kim et al (2007) asserts that academic and research libraries are very important towards the advancement of higher education by organizing and disseminating information that facilitates scholarly communication and research. Librarians in such organizations are key assets as they are the ones who provide information services to the research community. Anuobi

and Okoye (2008) stated that Academic libraries no longer restrict themselves to print services such as collection development, cataloguing and classification, circulation and reference services, current awareness, selective dissemination, and other bibliographic services, but have extended their efforts to interdisciplinary concepts and computer software and hardware and telecommunication engineering and technology. Bell (2013) presented five ways in which Academic libraries can help higher education to change the society.

1. **Support the transformation to openness:** Bell notes that while library resources and services are generally provided freely in higher education to support learning and research, the reality is that these resources cost a lot of money especially the subscription to electronic resources. He notes that currently, there is a growing agitation for open access to scholarly information and publishing. "College and university librarians are advocates for a new system of scholarly publishing that broadens public access and encourages faculty to publish in open-access journals that can be produced at much lower costs than commercial publications. Shifting from closed to public access requires the cooperation of faculty and a rethinking of the tenure and promotion system."

2. **Support the transformation to online learning:**
   As a physical entity, the campus library is typically perceived as the exclusive territory of the on-campus undergraduate. The virtual college library, which provides access to vast amounts of digital content, is open to all campus constituents no matter where they may do their learning. Academic libraries are well positioned to support online learners at least those matriculated at the institution. We must support online learners, be it by providing online research instruction or delivering hardcopy materials in other ways. As more students take online or hybrid courses, the academic library infrastructure, honed for years to provide remote access support, will be there to serve them, and to help the institution make the transformation to digital education.

3. **Support the transformation to high productivity:**
   No one, neither faculty nor students, has, as much time as they would like to get to all of the work that needs attention. Talk to these individuals and it is clear that digital distraction is taking its toll. Keeping up with new technology alone takes considerable time, and traditional higher education is in no position to allow its community members to fall behind in putting technology to use for learning and productivity. Librarians are experts at transforming through technology and helping others learn to use

which some of those historic moments were captured and highlighted in this paper. The world presently, in which we are witnessing, is knowledge-driven and information age and higher education in Nigeria cannot afford to be left out. The desire to bring about positive changes in higher education, in which competent and knowledgeable graduates are produced, must recognize and accord the academic library its rightful place in fulfilling this dream. While the academic library was primarily established to serve the mission and goals of its parent institution, it must be embraced as a driver of the present knowledge economy and a bank of intellectual capital in which its students requires in order to be empowered to function effectively in the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria and be active player on the global stage. Therefore, whatever is required of the academic library to function effectively in terms of staffing, finance, tools and other enablements, must be provided, so as to position the academic library as a pivot for higher education in promoting tangible changes to the wellbeing of Nigeria.

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