

The 21st Century Library: A Tool for Educational Advancement in a Changing Society

Idoniboye-Obu T.I.

tamunotonyei@yahoo.co.uk

Opurum, Augustine Chineme

austinedchineme@gmail.com

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Faculty of Education, Department of Library and Information Science, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The paper examined the 21st century library as a tool for educational advancement in a changing society. It described the library as a spring of that irrigates the field of education. It also postulates that the aim of education is to equip and empower citizens with values, competences, skills, and knowledge required to play their role effectively in the society which cannot be achieved with the library. It admits that nothing could be more damaging to an educational institution than to neglect its library as quality education is impossible without a quality library. It admitted that lack of information literacy, internet search skills, poor perception of libraries among others are the reasons for the poor utilisation of library resources. The paper recommends that relevant information literacy and internet search skills be acquired, and user education programmes provided to library users at all levels of education.

Keywords: 21st Century Library, Education, Advancement and Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential tool for human development, an instrument of change, an indispensable part of human life and a source of empowerment. The aim of the 21st century education is to equip individuals with necessary competencies, values, skills, and knowledge required for all round growth. It is important to note that the human mind is made up of great treasures but to extract the best from it, quality education is needed. Quality education requires the library as no educational system can adequately survive without it. Arjun et al. (2010) observed that education without library is like a body without soul, a vehicle without an engine and a building merely a collection of bricks without cement. In the understanding of Okiy (2006), the library is central to the provision of the right type of information resources that empowers the educational institutions to produce highly resourceful people to impact positively on national development. Education is faint-hearted without the library. This implies that the library is the heart of education; hence, education perishes at the disappearance of the library as it is a reservoir of authentic information.

The dynamic nature of today's library is crucial as it helps to widen the knowledge of both the teacher and the learner. For any nation to meet up with the global needs and demand in the educational sector, such a nation must swing with the 21st century library as it makes available all authentic information resources in diverse formats required to meet up with global changes and standards. To successfully unmask the role of the library in bridging educational challenges which is the golden idea of this paper, the following will be discussed:

- Concept of library;
- Concept of education;
- Functions of the library;

- The present state of the library;
- The 21st century library bridging the challenges of education;
- Reasons for poor utilisation of library resources; and
- Conclusion and suggestions

2. CONCEPT OF LIBRARY

The term library emanated from the Latin word “*liber*” which means book. Though it has been defined differently by different schools of thought but the most interesting thing about the various definitions is that it centers on an area set apart to contain books and non-book resources for the purpose of information dissemination. The library is not a mere collection of books; it is an assembler of knowledge in assorted formats. It gives us insight into the accumulated wisdom of the past and present which helps us decipher and predict the future. The library is a glossary of knowledge which is carefully organised and stored for information dissemination by a skilled personnel. Buttressing on the above stated Obi (2013), affirmed that the library is a selected collection of books and non-book materials organised and stored for the dissemination of information by well-qualified personnel. It is a compendium of books and other information materials in assorted formats for the purpose of promoting education. It is a vehicle through which information materials that augments education can be obtained.

3. CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

Education is one of the most essential investments citizens can get from their nation. It is a systematic process of inculcating knowledge, values, skills, and sound morals into the members of the society to contribute positively towards the growth of the society. It helps in developing the potentials of individuals in the society, the more educated individuals in a society, the better the society will be. According to Achuonye (2004), education is the total processes of human learning by which knowledge are acquired, valuable skills developed, and faculties trained.

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE LIBRARY

The important implications of the existence of the library in the advancement of education can be summarised as follows:

- (i) The library provides information materials required for the academic programmes of the parent institution;
- (ii) It helps to create and strengthen reading habits in adult and children from an early age;
- (iii) The library provides information resources for recreation and self-development of users;
- (iv) A library provides study accommodation in a variety of useful locations;
- (v) It provides adequate security for educational materials;
- (vi) The library also cooperates with other libraries for improved library services;
- (vii) The library provides specialised information service to the wider community.

5. THE PRESENT STATE OF THE LIBRARY

The library is indeed a growing organism as propounded by S. R. Ranganathan. The library has metamorphosed from the traditional ways of rendering services. Prior to the 21st century, library activities were carried out manually with human hands alone but today the library is automated, electronic, digital as well as virtual. The library is now without walls or boundaries. The 21st century library operates twenty-four hours seven days a week. It can be accessed any day, anytime from any location (Okwu & Oporum, 2022) Students or researchers can have their

desired information downloaded into their personal computers without having to move an inch from their comfort zone. The 21st century library contains up-to-date information required to satisfy the information needs of students. Corroborating this, Omehia (2018) insisted that the 21st century researchers or scholars cannot do without the library because of the vast literature and research reports on the internet. It is difficult for any student or researcher to make tangible contribution to knowledge without adequate access to the library of today. The library is no longer a centre of dusty books but a centre of great creativity of learning.

6. THE 21ST CENTURY LIBRARY BRIDGING THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION

No educational system can grow more than its library. This implies that the library plays a crucial role in the development of education at all levels, be it primary, secondary, and tertiary. The key purpose of establishment the library is to support education. The library is not an ordinary store house but a rich source from which knowledge springs to irrigate the field of education. The library is an indispensable ingredient in bridging the problems of the 21st century education. It makes available and accessible all information resources required to support teaching and learning activities.

Some of the major problems of educational development are pointed out by Adeyinka (1992) which includes: mass failure of students in public examinations and poor reading culture, which is attributed to lack of use of the library. Speaking on the importance of the library in education, Shukla et al. (2013) mentioned that the library is a shrine where all the remnants of the earliest saints, full of true virtue are preserved and are very essential to education. The answer to the unanswered queries of students and researchers are already stored in the library. Buttressing on the above stated, Omeluzor et al. (2013) opined that if one needs knowledge on a variety of topics, let him visit the library, with the help of the librarian he will be introduced to books on the topics he can study and learn. The library also serves as a support system to users that cannot acquire necessary information resources by creating quality access to quality resources in diverse formats. Education is dead without the library; nothing could be more damaging to an educational institution than to neglect its library. Interestingly, the library plays a major role in university accreditation. During accreditation, accrediting bodies would over accredit a department because of the information materials made available and accessible by the library. Adegoke et al. (2014) admitted that libraries in several higher institutions have either earned the institutions accreditation or made them fail. This is to say that education remains incomplete without the library. Arjun et al. (2010) speaking on the report of the Library Committee of University Grants Commission in 1957 headed by S. R. Ranganathan which dealt with in details the role of the library in educational development especially in the field of higher education, stated thus:

- (i) The library is the heart of education;
- (ii) Methods and fashion in education change from generation to generation but each generation uses the library as a means of comprehending its items, hence the library remains the great conservator of learning;
- (iii) A quality education is imposition without a quality library; and
- (iv) A library is a vital organ for proper exploitation of our intellectual resources and ideas which supports education.

Moreover, the library continues to be an essential agency to the educational system because of the bulk resources it contains which supports educational advancement. The library therefore provides the infrastructure on which the

educational system can be transformed. For Adegoke et al. (2014), people can acquire education from institutions such as schools, professional agencies, museums and so forth, but all these institutions still point to the library for sustainability and stability. To destroy an educational system, set its library on fire, no meaningful learning can take place in any educational system without the library. A well-equipped library positions an educational institution for excellence. The library remains an integral part of education as it makes available necessary tools needed to satisfy the educational and recreational needs of students.

Remarkably, the library remains the central and most vital equipment of any recognised educational institution. This is because as a resource, it occupies a chief and primary place serving the functions of teaching, learning and research in the creation of new knowledge. It must be emphasised that the library provides opportunities to address the scarcity of teaching and research materials by creating access to huge volumes of information on the internet (Okwu & Oporum, 2022). It is true that some of the challenges faced by teachers, students as well as researchers in the educational system have been attributed to poor utilisation of library resources.

7. REASONS FOR POOR UTILISATION OF LIBRARY RESOURCES

There are several reasons that hinder the proper utilisation of the enormous information resources in the library but not limited to these alone, which include:

7.1 Lack of Information Literacy

Information literacy entails the skill to pinpoint when an information is needed, where to locate the needed information, how to assess and use the received information. In reflection to the above, Champlain College (2016) affirmed that information literacy refers to the ability to recognise when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and effectively use this information. The goal of the library is to satisfy the varying information needs of its patrons. Information materials are acquired to meet these needs and organised so that they can be accessible to the users who have different interests. For libraries to meet up with efficient service delivery especially in making students and other users to easily locate, retrieve and use the needed information resources, certain tools are employed. These tools are referred as information retrieval tools. They are apparatus that assist the library user to locate, retrieve and use desired information material. These tools include; bibliographies, abstracts, indexes as well as Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Some information seekers lack the knowledge required to consult these tools which hamper their utilisation of the enormous information resources stored in the library.

7.2 Poor Attitude of Library Staff

The library personnel is a vital instrument in the library. Hence, the success or failure of the library depends to a large extent on the library staff. The library as a service oriented organisation cannot deliver effectively if the attitude of staff is unethical. Some library staff appear very unfriendly and unapproachable to users in some cases which in turn affects the utilisation of resources on the side of users. Also, as a result of Techno-phobia as well as apathy, most library staff does not see the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the library as an option. They still prefer the manual way of rendering services which is time consuming and could affect the time of the user. According to Omehia (2018), attitude and acceptance of the new information technology by library staff is

worrisome. It remains interestingly true that most of the time the library staff do not know how to use the available ICT facilities.

7.3 Lack of Internet Searching Skills

As a result of the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the library, most libraries have keyed their resources online. Works of knowledge held on the library shelves are now domicile on the Internet, which requires certain skills to be accessed properly. Internet Search Skills help users navigate, discover and retrieve their desired information online. However, some library users lack the requisite skills needed to search the internet.

7.4 Poor Perception of the Importance of the Library

Due to the low perception of the importance of the library in the society, most students have nurtured the belief that they can do without the library. In some cases, at the primary and secondary school levels little or no attempt is made to help pupils and students realise the ideal value of libraries. This has resulted to poor utilisation of the library by students ranging from elementary schools to tertiary institutions.

7.5 Poor Reading Culture

Reading is a strategic activity meant to improve the knowledge of students not only in academic matters but in other areas of life. Reading is a maker of men, indeed children's mind develops faster as they learn reading. Reading breeds knowledge which in turn produces success. Reading gives the child an opportunity to rub mind with greater minds. Truly, reading culture is not without benefits, to the student it brings about improved vocabulary, memory development, discipline, creativity and at the national level it promotes educational growth and development of the country. Observation has shown that there is decline in the positive reading culture of students with the influx of smart phones into the country. In agreement with the above, Obi (2013) affirmed that it is very sad to note that reading culture has deteriorated in the society. This deterioration could be attributed to poor utilisation of the library. Students with poor reading culture find it very difficult to consult the resources in the library or even visit the library.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of every educational system is to equip every individual with skills and knowledge required to carry out their role in the society, the library as an information agency attempts to promote this objective by providing information resources needed for the proper functioning of the educational system. True education requires true library. Hence, the library as an institution must be given its rightful position for true education to emerge. There is a great need for the establishment of well-equipped libraries at all levels of education as the library houses all information resources (be it print, non-print, electronic, audio-visual) needed to enhance education.

To get the best out of the library for the promotion of education, the following suggestions were made:

- (i) No institution of learning should be established without a library;
- (ii) The library should be stocked with books and other necessary information material needed to produce highly resourceful teachers and students;
- (iii) Teachers, students, and researchers should acquire relevant information literacy and internet search skills to enable them utilise the enormous information resources contained in the library;

- (iv) User education programmes should be provided to users of the library at all levels; and
- (v) The library staff must be willing to always guide and direct library users.

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