PROMOTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH THROUGH ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA: A REFLECTION ON AUCHI POLYTECHNIC LIBRARY, AUCHI, EDO STATE

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Abstract

This study examined pragmatically the various strategies adopted by academic libraries in our institutions of higher learning to promote qualitative research to improve on the lots of the Nigerian people. Exponentially, the researcher adopted content analysis - examination of documented literature as basis for the sources of empirical information used for the study. Strategically too, the researcher reliably depended on his over fifteen (15) years practical work experience in the Polytechnic Library to gather information through oral evidence from some of the regular library patrons. Adequate funding, application of modern technology, employment of competent information professionals and inter-library cooperative ventures were found to be very useful in promoting qualitative research in academic libraries. The study concludes with plausible ways of overcoming the problems militating against libraries attempt to provide information in support of quality research in Nigeria.

Introduction

It is an established fact that all academic libraries are charged fundamentally with the provision of relevant and timely data for research activities of their parent institutions. This singular provision makes the academic institutions and research organizations to promote the socio-economic, political as well as the cultural values of the Nigerian, nation. In fact, the academic institutions are mainly established to perform a variety of functions to enhance the growth and development of their immediate environment and beyond. The functions have been identified to include:
(i) Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge,
(ii) Promotion of research to improve on the socio-technological base of the nation,
(iii) Provision of intellectual leadership
(iv) Promotion of socio-economic development,
(v) Manpower development and training, and
(vi) Promotion of inter-continental harmony and understanding.

To ascertain these, Ifidon (1985) excellently notes that the academic libraries are basically charged with the following responsibilities:
(i) The provision of information resources in support of the research needs of staff and students, (ii) Provision of materials to assist the library user in his own personal self-development, (iii) Cooperating with other tertiary institutions as well as other research organizations with a view to developing a network of academic library resources which are at the disposal of all students and teaching staff; and
(iv) Meeting the specialized information needs of the communities within which the institutions are located.

In this study, research means, finding acceptable solution to an identified problem. Problem could be individualistic, societal, institutional/organizational, depending on one’s perception. Basically, any identified problem calls for a solution in order to improve on the means of overcoming it. Instances abound. An individual’s inability to pass his SSCE examination becomes a problem which calls for a research in order to get the desired solution. A society faced with the problem of unemployment needs enabling information to overcome the social, but endemic problem. Also, institutions/organizations inability to produce/sell the anticipated produce need the desired information to put behind this unwarranted problem.

In the meantime, information has become an inestimable "resource of value" capable of being harvested just like cotton and coffee. Information is being regarded as "power" and a 'commodity' needed by all. It is also known as the ingredient for a good and quality research that ultimately helps to improve on any deplorable situation that may experience as constituting nuisance in any given endeavour.

Specifically, this study X-rayed the various strategies the academic libraries (institutions) can adopt to promote qualitative research with a view to enhancing the quality of life of the people and society at large. Correspondingly, Osumah (2007) identified these strategies that have been subsequently discussed in this study to include: (i) Adequate funding of academic libraries,
(ii) Provision of enabling accommodation/space,
(iii) Adequate staffing
(iv) Provision of veritable access to viable information sources
(v) Organisation of effective users' orientation/education programmes,
(vi) Establishment and the application of modern technology for acquisition and provision of research
information.

(vii) Establishment and the provision of inter-cooperative library ventures,
(viii) Indexing and abstracting services
(ix) The provision of current awareness services.

This has become imperative as information has become "exploded" due to the investigative activities presently evoked by social and scientific researchers globally. With globalization and Information Communication Technology, information ought to have been readily available to the researchers on a continuous and dependable basis. But experience has shown that most academic libraries provide this central input (information) below the desired expectations. Okeke (1993), aptly comments: that more than 40% of scientific information/manpower is wasted because the needed information is unavailable to the right person(s) (researchers) at the right time and at the right place.

It is against this background that the study looked at the level at which researches are being; carried out on the basis of the information provided by the academic libraries in the country, with special-reference to Auchi Polytechnic Library, Auchi, Edo State.

Conceptual expositions:

Research has been viewed in various ways, depending on ones perception and application of the term. Some said it is a problem oriented and problem-solving phenomenon. It is specifically designed to unravel knotty issues in human endeavours. Yet experts claimed that it is a studious inquiry; and a systematic investigation that is aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted laws or theories in the light of new facts. Obhotemhen (2002) sternly stated that research is a systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles or theories, resulting in prediction of events. It is a scientific method of solving problem. Research generates new idea, knowledge and technologies to deal with major unresolved problems. It provides information required for planning, monitoring of events among others. Research primarily identifies priority problem, designs and evaluates policies and programmes that will help to derive the greatest benefit using optimally the available resources, Margaret (2004). Basically, research has the following characteristics:

(i) It demands a clear statement of the problem and a purpose
(ii) It requires a plan so that a researcher is not just aimlessly "looking" for something in the hope that a solution would be found. The plan, is the study design, which will be specified in a proposal prior to implementation of the research.
(iii) It builds on existing data using both positive and negative findings;
(iv) New data is often collected as required and organized in such a way that they answer the original research question. All these have as input, information, without which a meaningful study (research) cannot be ascertained.

What then is information?

It is a commodity, a resource of value, capable of being exploited in the same manner as coffee, cotton, machinery, mineral resources and human resources that can be utilized to produce more goods for the consumption of the society, Pisagil (2003). Centrally, information is seen as the pragmatic ingredient for a meaningful research. It is quite pertinent to note that libraries remain the established institutions within their parent institution that gainfully, acquire, store, organize and disseminate timely and relevant information to promote all (he forms of researches easily discernible in the society. Simply put, information can also be regarded as data that can be interpreted and understood by the recipient of the message. It promotes effective study and research in all ramifications for those who possess it, Osumah (2007).

It is thus comprehensible to note that qualitative research refers aptly to the result of any research that can be maximally utilized to promote the comfort, development and upliftment of the human-race. Qualitative research determines the living standard of the people. It helps to establish the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the National Income of the nation. Institutionally, the quality of a university or polytechnic is reflected by the quality of its students' intellectual products. Theses and dissertations reflect an institution's ability to lead students into and support for, original work. Misbahu (2006) argued, that the creativity of the newest generation of scholars is being continuously expressed as they work to present their research results using the most form, structure, and content. While conforming to the basic requirements of their institutions, departments, disciplines, students (researchers) should develop and apply skills that will best prepare them for their future careers and lead to the most expressive, rendering possible of their discoveries and-ideas. Information, remain sacrosanct in promoting qualitative research. This is based on the information made readily available by the academic libraries. After all, these are charged with the responsibilities of providing information to their dynamic institutions - staff and students.

Methods adopted by Libraries to provide research information

Academic libraries as repositories of idea and knowledge are best equipped to provide information resources to promote the study and research programmes of their various institutions in Nigeria. The progress and prospects of any nation, depends on the quality of research carried out by the accredited institutions charged with such responsibilities. In Nigeria, tertiary institutions (Colleges of Education, Colleges of Technologies, Polytechnics and Mono technics and universities) play this
important and challenging role. Therefore, they work assiduously to carry out this onerous function based on the information resources at their disposal.

Predominantly, the libraries adopt the following strategies to resiliency provide the needed data and information in support of the study and research activities in the country. Osumah (2007) had identified and elucidated on these strategies to include;

(i) **Adequate Funding of Academic Libraries**

Traditionally, institutional libraries and organizations are grossly under-funded. Management often divert the statutory specified allocation to the libraries into other projects considered as priorities to the needs of the libraries. The academic libraries are left with nothing to acquire, store and disseminate information to the researchers. To obliterate this ugly situation, management should endeavour to provide libraries statutory allocations to enable them procure the necessary information materials to service the researchers information needs. It is the engine room of the institutions as it provides the necessary information on which the institutional research growth and development gravitates. Consequently, this will enhance the growth and development of the nation as research remains the basis for any development in the technological world,

(ii) **Provision of an Enabling Accommodation/Space**

It is a common knowledge that accommodation is an endemic problem of most academic libraries in Nigeria. This is in the face of the ever-growing students enrolment in recent times. The implication is that libraries are unable to cope with the information demand made on them by the sporadic growth of programmes and students population. In Auchi Polytechnic in particular, the problem of space has been very worrisome. It is therefore necessary to provide an enabling accommodation/space to house the resources so as to be able to promote excellent research academic.

(iii) **Employment of Qualified Professional Staff**

Hitherto, academic libraries are grossly understaffed in terms of professional and non-professional staff. The few existing staff are thus unable to meet the information demand on them by the researchers. It is thus imperative that rich and experienced professional and other supporting staff should be immediately be recruited and given specialized training to organize and provide timely information to the researchers. This will help to boost the quality of information provided for research in the economy.

(iv) The Government policy on foreign exchange has not been very favourable to academic libraries. The academic libraries have thus been unable to acquire research information materials, especially in the areas of science and technology. Alternatively, libraries have to depend on our local and unreliable vendors and publishers inspite of all the attending odds. In some cases, the academic libraries have to depend on aids and donations from charitable organizations like the UNESCO, Book Aids International, the United Nation Information Service, FAO, and other philanthropists for their information services to their clientele. Recently, African Book Project and International Book Bank, all in USA have jointly assisted in acquisition of documents to promote research.

It is therefore necessary that academic libraries should make adequate arrangement to enable, access to viable information sources. Corroborating this, libraries should provide current awareness services based on individual research profiles. This will promote adequate research that will benefit the country and its developmental programmes. Presently, polytechnic and monotechnic libraries under the aegies of Committee of Monotechnic and Polytechnic Libraries in Nigeria (COMPLING) have formed a consortium to boost book acquisition and information provision to promote research activities in Nigeria technical education sector. This holds a promise for the growth and development of Nigeria nation.

(v) **Organisation of Effective Users' Orientation/Education**

Periodically, library orientation programmes for the newly admitted students are organized to educate them on how best the library can be explored for their study and research. Unfortunately, management does not really make it mandatory for all the newly admitted students to attend by putting in place punitive measures for defaulters. Added to this, is the fact that the time allocated for the orientation is practically not enough to teach the students the skills necessary to take advantage of the library resources. Worst still, is the fact that the NBTE has not done enough consultation to enable the course use of library in the polytechnic education syllabus. This has posed a lot of problems as the polytechnic community (students) are unable to make effective use of the library to enhance their research.

To obliterate this situation, management should work in conjunction with the NBTE to make mandatory the course use of library for all the newly admitted students into the polytechnic institutions in Nigeria. For the specialized groups (physically challenged), a special programme should be arranged to regularly inundate them with the skills of exploring the resources of the library for their research works. Other personal assistance and provisions to assist them should complement the orientation on the use of the library.
(vi) Establishment and Application of Modern Technology in the Provision of Research Information

There is the globalization of Information Technology (IT) in the world over. In fact, computers and other related Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being applied in the acquisition, storage and dissemination of information for study and research works. Recently, academic and research libraries are adopting computer-based systems in their information management and delivering to their patrons (researchers). To be oblivious of the traditional mundane methods of information acquisition, organisation and dissemination; academic libraries need to constantly train, and retrain their staff in modern methods of information handling so as to adequately provide for the expanding information needs of their users, in Auchi Polytechnic, plans are on a high gear to adopt the computerized system to manage information acquisition and delivery based on internet services to promote staff and students research. In fact, an e-library with BRAVE CONTENT (archive ebooks econtent) based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates is fast concluding arrangement to install a BRA virtual library in the polytechnic. The benefit of this, is that on installation, over 300,000 books on net will be available to all the registered patrons with the library. This, without doubt will promote tremendously research activities in the polytechnic and beyond. It is a welcome development.

(vii) Establishment and the Provision of Inter-Cooperative Library Ventures

It is a well known fact that no library or information centre can survive in isolation. There are obvious limitations in terms of finance, space, personnel, unavailability of the needed resources and non-application of modern technology by most academic libraries: Resources are thus insufficient for the maximum utilisation by those engaged in intensive research. To overcome this ugly situation, libraries have to establish and engage in inter-cooperative ventures. This simply refers to the provision of information resources not originally available in the parent library of the registered patrons. This, is undefined cooperative venture by librarians of academic institutions based on sheer understanding, reciprocity and friendship. It is facilitated by the use of letters of introduction to researchers who seek for information outside their immediate library environment. It is a function of the reference librarian, who ensures that the desired information is made available to researchers who are in dear need of it. Presently, the Polytechnic libraries under COMPLIN (Committee of Monotechnic and Polytechnic Librarians in Nigeria) are perfecting the act of resource-sharing in order to promote research among their sister institutions in Nigeria. They are recently endorsing plans to evolve cooperative resource acquisition with African Book Project and International Book Bank to adequately provide information to promote research in our institutions. All plans, they concluded, must be on a networking system to facilitate transactions.

Similarly, Rilwanu (2005), stated that over 14 universities in Nigeria are engaged in an on-line usage of EBSCOHOST in order to be integrated in aggregate databases to give the user a single point of web access to reach the full array of diverse and high quality information resources and also to be able to deliver the materials directly to the user’s desktop/p.c. This is primarily evolved in order to promote viable researches in the participating institutions.

(viii) Indexing and abstracting services

Time, is very limiting to researchers engaged in serious and demanding investigations. They need to go through numerous documents in search of the relevant information they need for study and research. To assist them in this tasking job, indexing and abstracting services need to be carried out by the academic libraries to reduce the time hitherto wasted in an endless search by researchers who need the information. Indexing and abstracting of documents have tremendously helped to harness information resources and have readily been made available to those engaged in research works.

(ix) Provision of current awareness services

In most academic libraries, patrons of the library are usually very interested in getting the desired information in furtherance of their research works. Specifically, Current Awareness, means the provision of contact between the right reader and the right book at the right time and in the right personal way. This personal contact makes users to become habitual users of the library information resources; rather than being casual users of the resources. This helps to promote individuals study and research.

It is very pertinent to state that the academic libraries are best able to provide information to assist research as the reference librarians should interpret the library resources to the understanding of the researchers. Therefore, the reference librarians must be vast in bibliographical sources; and more importantly, he should be computer-literate in order to be able to communicate effectively with the computer and other related information communication technologies.

Reference services in the academic libraries therefore entails:
(a) Provision of general information to users;
(b) Assisting in the use of the library card catalogue,
(c) Assistance in the use of reference materials.
(d) Providing inter-library loan services
(e) Compilation of bibliographies,
(f) Issuance of letter of introduction
(g) Organisation of library instruction/education,
(h) Display of new arrivals/titles to the knowledge of users,
(i) Indexing and abstracting services
(j) Standing in the gap between the researchers and the computerized facilities (especially for the traditional library users)
(k) Providing current awareness services to include:

* Scanning of the periodicals
* Index of research and researchers
* Compilation of technical bulletins
* Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)
* Book reservation; and
* Periodical clippings

**Attending problems**

It is however imperative to note that the academic libraries are beset with a lot of problems in their endeavours to promote study and the research activities of their parent institutions and the economy at large. These problems have been summarized by Osumah (2007) to include:

(i) Inadequate funding,
(ii) Problem of accommodation/space,
(iii) Inadequate staffing,
(iv) Inadequate access to viable information sources,
(v) Lack of effective users orientation/education,
(vi) Non-application of modern technology
(vii) Lack of well-defined library cooperative ventures,
(viii) Inadequate indexing and abstracting services, and
(ix) Absence of well established current awareness services among and between academic libraries in Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

(i) There is the urgent need to adequately fund the academic libraries by making the statutorily allocations available rather than being diverted to other areas,
(ii) There should be gainful employment of library staff who should be trained and retrained along the modern methods of managing information to the benefit of mankind,
(iii) Furthermore, efforts should be made to promote inter-library cooperative ventures. This should be based on computerized information systems which will make academic libraries to benefit from information exchanges as no library is self-sufficient in information acquisition and dissemination.

It is the belief of the author that if these recommendations are religiously applied, there will be tremendous improvement on what obtains how in our academic libraries, the Auchi Polytechnic Library in particular.

**Conclusion**

Research remains the basis for the socio-economic, political and cultural growth and development of any nation. It is constantly based on the available ingredients - data and information, which of course are the necessary inputs for a dependable research. The academic libraries, as the bases for this study, remain the veritable repositories that can readily provide the information which a qualitative research can be based. Notwithstanding, there abound a lot of limiting factors inhibiting the academic libraries from adequately providing the much needed information inspite of the various roles the libraries have resiliently performed to maintain their information provision function. Thus, it becomes imperative to recommend ways by which the identified problems can be overcome.

**References**


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