

POVERTY AND EDUCATION: THE EFFECT ON PRESERVATION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS IN BUILT-UP ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the effect of poverty in the preservation of library materials. The roles of education in ameliorating poverty as well as the relationships between libraries and development are examined. The problems which inhibit the preservation of library materials are considered and if unaddressed could hinder the role of libraries in educational advancement. Recommendations and conclusion are advanced to enhance the preservation of libraries and library materials as veritable tools for educational development and subsequently poverty alleviation.

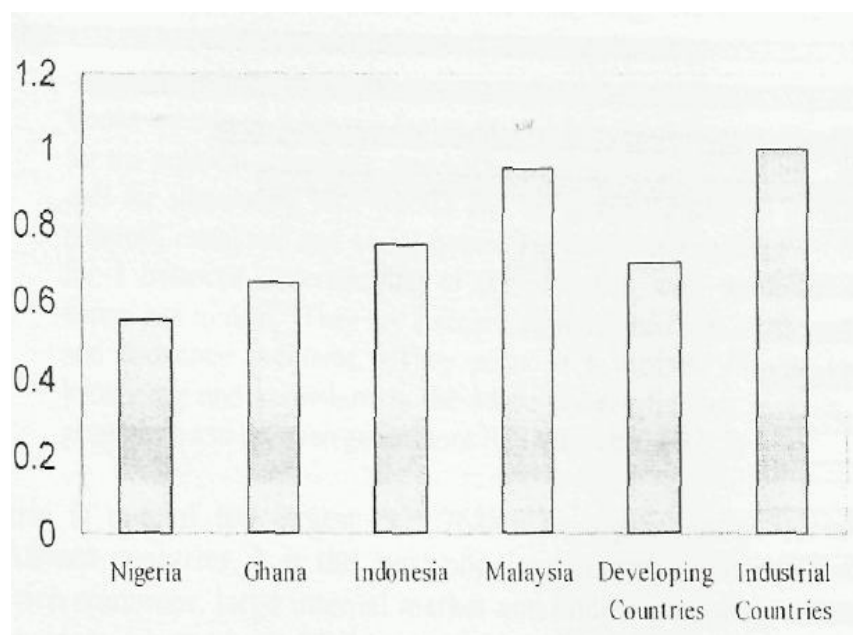
Introduction

Poverty can be viewed as an economic condition in which people lack sufficient income to obtain certain minimal levels of health services, food, housing, clothing and education generally recognised as necessary to ensure an adequate standard of living. What is considered adequate, however, depends on the average standard of living in a particular society. Poverty can be relative or absolute. Relative poverty is that experienced by those whose income falls considerably below the average for their particular society while absolute poverty is that experienced by those who do not have enough food to remain healthy. However, estimating poverty on an income basis may not measure essential elements that also contribute to a health¹ life as people without access to education or health services should be considered poor even if they have adequate food. Individuals who have a lower-than-average ability to earn income, for whatever reason, are likely to be poor and lack of educational opportunity is another cause of poverty. Much of the world's poverty is due to a low level of economic development. China and India are examples of heavily populated, developing nations where, despite substantial recent industrialisation, poverty can be said to be rampant. Poverty is closely associated with crime: most of the poor are not criminals and many criminals are not poor, but people from environments dominated by poverty are more likely to commit crimes and be associated with other social problems, such as mental illness and alcoholism.

The overall quality of life of the average Nigerian as measured by United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) is low when compared with countries like Ghana, Indonesia, Malaysia and Venezuela. For example, in 1993, Nigeria's HDI was 0.40 compared to 0.48 for Ghana, 0.68 for Indonesia and an average of 0.60 for developing countries country as shown in Figure I.

Figure 1: Human Development Index (1993).

Source: UNDP Human Development Report [1996]-

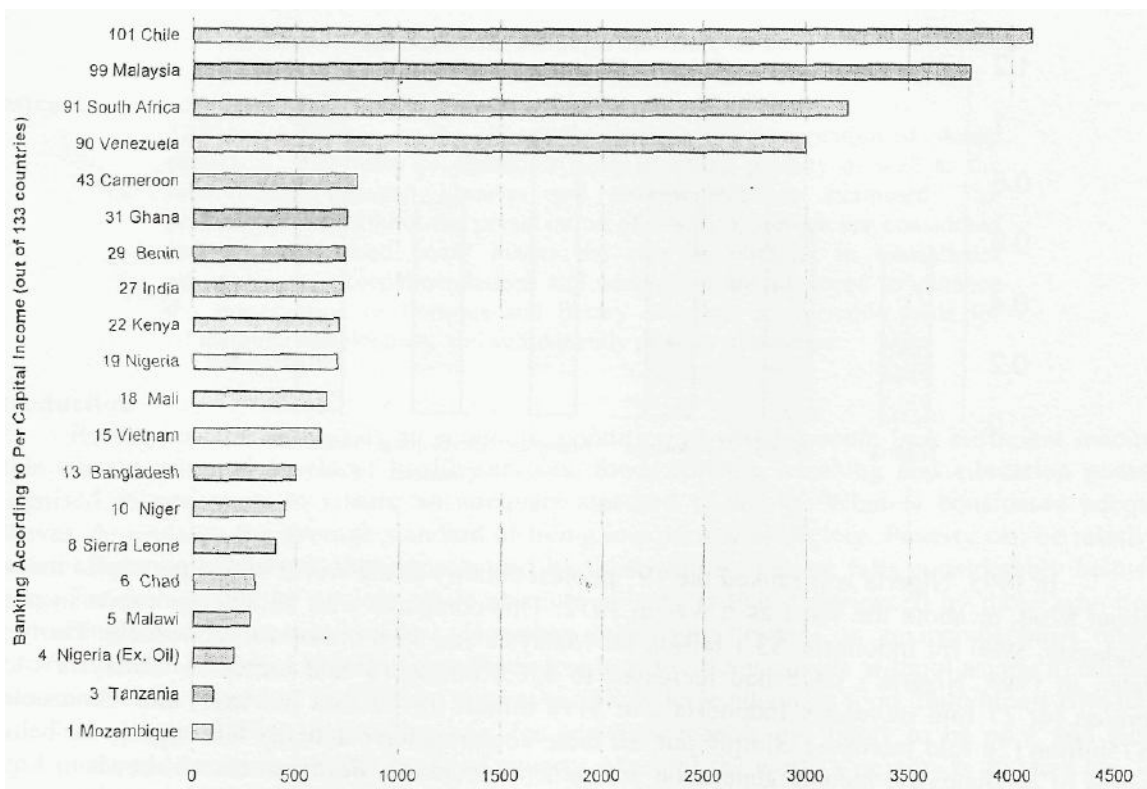


In 1995, Nigeria was ranked the 19th poorest country in the world with a per capita income of about \$260, or about the same as it was in 1972. This compares with \$3,890 per capita income for Malaysia, \$980 for Indonesia, \$3.1 billion for Malaysia and \$9.8 billion for Venezuela. Thirty years later, in 1995, Nigeria's GDP had increased to \$26.8 billion (3 fold increase), Malaysia's to \$85 billion (or 27 fold increase), Indonesia's to \$198 billion (or 52 fold increase) and Venezuela's to \$75 billion (20 fold increase). Simply put, all these countries have actually left Nigeria far behind in terms of productivity, income generation and general economic development as shown in Figure 2 below.

The 2004 Human Development Index released recently by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicated that African countries ranked at the bottom in the 'quality- of-life index', in life expectancy, literacy and education levels, per capita income and health care. In particular, Nigeria ranked 151 out of 177 in human developments. Uganda was placed 147, Burkina Faso 176 and Niger 177 just to mention a few (*Vanguard*, July 16, 2004). The United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 looked at issues of poverty distribution worldwide and set targets for 2015 that included reducing by half the number of people living on less than US\$1 a day, providing safe drinking water for 50 per cent of people deprived of such access, primary education for all children, and reversing the spread of diseases such as malaria and AIDS. For 2020 a significant improvement in the circumstances of slum inhabitants and a

Figure 2: World Ranking: Nigeria compared with other countries (1 995).

Source: Vision 2010 Main Report, 1997.



greater access to modern technologies for poorer nations was also envisaged.

Education and Development

This section attempts to look at the need to invest more on education, particularly in the establishment of libraries as "nerve-centres" of educational institutions; equipping and sustaining the libraries with varied library materials, with the intent to eradicating poverty, by empowering the citizenry in Nigeria.

No one familiar with the history of books and libraries on the one hand and that of civilisation on the other can fail to appreciate the correlation between the two. So striking is this relationship that it had prompted Johnson and Harist (1976) to ask if man's cultural advance comes as a result of knowledge preserved in books or does his cultural advances produce libraries as a by-product? At the end of a historical survey spanning antiquity to the 1970's the above authors came to the conclusion that neither cultural progress nor the library necessarily comes first. Each is at one and the same time to a large extent the cause and the result of the other. Admittedly, man's civilisation had to reach a certain level before it could produce writing, which eventually produced books, reading and ultimately led to the building of libraries. From that point on, books and libraries became the most powerful factor in man's cultural, scientific, material and even spiritual advancement. The premise for this assertion is to be found in the available evidence that those nations that have had access to reading books have made far greater progress than

their counterparts lacking such opportunity.

Put succinctly, the developing world need libraries to lift their citizens from the quagmire of underdevelopment since books are still the most effective tools for solving the problem of underdevelopment as eloquently elaborated by the following United States Agency for International Development declaration:

Books are one of the major factors in building the human resources required for the political, economic, and social development of a nation. They are a tool for stimulating both leaders and the general public in thinking about political, economic and social issues. They offer information which is vital for a balanced understanding of the processes with which an emerging nation has to deal. They are a record of action taken in dealing with social and economic problems. They serve as a medium for the transfer of knowledge and know-how in the education and training process, within a generation and between generations (USAID, 1612.69.P.3)

Nigeria is one of the largest (923,768km²) geographically, socially and culturally most diversified African countries. It is the most populous country of Africa and potentially one of the richest. The rich resources, large internal market and human potentials did not prevent Nigeria from being a low income country with GDP per capital declining from 1,000 US dollars in 1980 to about 250 dollars in 1990. The Nigerian educational system enjoyed generous support from the Federal Government of Nigeria in the 70's being the years of oil boom. It was during this period that several federal and state universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and colleges of technology, etc. in the country were established. The situation however changed towards the end of the decade, when the nation experienced sharp decline in oil revenue. The world oil crisis, poor agricultural development and internal civil war are usually cited as the main reasons for such an economic decline (Culture Link, 1996). Consequently, the nation faced grave economic and social problems as the nation adjusted to the development. Since all the educational institution depended heavily on the government for their finance, the economic down turn took its toll on these institutions, leading to the slow down development of education nationwide.

Libraries and Development in Nigeria

Library development in Nigeria has been tremendously affected by explosion in education in recent times resulting in libraries of all kinds ranging from school, college and polytechnic libraries. university libraries, ministry libraries, state/ public libraries and their branches, special libraries to the national library. From one National Development Plan to the other, sufficient consideration has been given to library development as the role of libraries in national development could be traced right from school libraries. The school library not only provides relevant information resources that shapes and moulds an individual for future leadership but also instills in him the cherished lifelong learning. Also, a proper instruction at school prepares the way for the use of larger libraries - public, university, special, etc., and it is a guarantee of a life-long education and enrichment. While the academic libraries provide varied and in-depth information resources that enable individuals pursue the specific field of study in which they wish to specialise in, public libraries attempt to meet a wide variety of readers' need and special libraries provide job related information, which will enable users execute their assigned job effectively and improve their skills.

This realisation of the importance of libraries has made many professional bodies and associations to establish their own libraries and information centres. Examples are the Nigerian Law School, with well-established libraries at Lagos, Enugu and Kano branches of the school. Similarly, the Nigerian Institute of Management (N.I.M) has a well-stocked library at its headquarters in Lagos. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Nigeria (I.C.A.N) library at Lagos is also fully automated.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that libraries have right from time aligned themselves with development. Regrettably, the fact is that librarians in Nigeria are managing in a recession period, a period of poverty and hyperinflation, a turbulent period full of uncertainties. The associated effect of poverty and its twin sister inflation, is portrayed in the low purchasing power of the library manager, shortage of money, staff and materials and inability to preserve library materials, such that deterioration of library materials has assumed alarming proportions in Nigeria in recent times. The surveys carried out by Unoniah (1985), Igbinosa (1989), and Alegbeleye (1999) show that a good number of library records are deteriorating.

Factors Inhibiting the Preservation of Library Materials

The focus of this section is to define and discuss the problems to book preservation and how the librarian can effectively and efficiently preserve library materials for posterity. Preservation is defined at least in a library context as the processes of keeping collections and the information they contain available for use for as long as they are needed. The threat preservation has to deal with is the fact that:

Library collections are made up of materials that are naturally subject to deterioration, caused or influenced by many things, including:

- The materials themselves, which are acidic papers, poor quality binding materials, unstable media such as cellulose nitrate and cellulose acetate, photographic films, PVC - based audiotapes;
 - The environmental conditions in which they are stored i.e. the heat, moisture, light and the pollutants they are exposed to;
 - Mould, insects, mice, and other pests that live on them or in them;
 - The abuses or just plain uses, of users and staff;
- Sudden disasters such as floods, water leaks, fire, building.

Alegbeleye (J993) quoting Mazikana (1993) confirmed in unequivocal terms that the preservation and conservation in Africa is in a dismal state for the following reasons:

Many of the building housing library and archival materials are grossly inappropriate as they were built a! a time when preservation and conservation was not an important issue; most of the library and archival buildings were not equipped with air conditioners that could stabilise the temperature and humidity of the storage areas. Many air conditioners where these were present were inoperable; less than half of the libraries surveyed perform any house-keeping tasks such as cleaning, shelving, dusting etc; the few libraries and archives with facilities For bindery and repair lack qualified staff and equipment that are in good working condition (Alegbeieye, 1993:1).

Aiegbeleye (1999) states poverty as a threat to the preservation of library materials. He observes that despite the consolation drawn from the economic analysis of the continent to the effect that it is not inherently poor, the truth is that many African governments are in debt. The Nigerian government has often been forced to sacrifice the well-being of their citizens including, of course, the preservation of cultural heritage to servicing debts brought about mostly through gross mismanagement of resources. Little wonder that Nigeria is fast becoming a book less continent. It may be conjectured that a continent that gives scant attention to the acquisition of books is likely to pay even much less to their preservation.

There is the absence of basic equipment like air-conditioners which is considered the most practical way of preservation. They control and check high temperatures and humidity (Egbor, 1980). Since this equipment is costly, most libraries in Nigeria, particularly the public libraries, secondary school libraries, teacher training libraries and generally, the small libraries try to do without air-conditioners. It is therefore only a few of university libraries, particularly the old ones like the Universities of Ibadan, Ife, Benin, Nsukka, Lagos, etc. that have installed air-conditioners as preservation measures. It is worth mentioning that most Nigerian libraries are situated in urban areas like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Enugu, etc. which are characterised by pollution and wastes from industries. This, therefore makes the air-conditioning of libraries more of a necessity than a luxury.

There is the absence of maintenance culture in nearly all library organisations. To this end, Ifidon (1987) remarks that even in the few libraries where air-conditioners have been installed, their performances, especially the central air-conditioning systems are not satisfactory. It is the absence of this maintenance culture that has made it impossible for these air-conditioners to be functional in most of our university libraries as in Kashim Ibrahim Library. Lagos. Benin, and Maiduguri library. Here air-conditioners are not able to function properly because of the unreliable power supply in the country. There are always power fluctuations, even complete power cuts for hours and sometimes for days, the resultant effect is that these air-conditioners get damaged. Closely allied to this is the scarcity of spare parts: when these equipment breaks down, repairs wait upwards of between 9-12 months before spare parts arrive from overseas. This situation is further worsened by the absence of enough qualified technicians to repair the equipment.

Other factors inhibiting the preservation of library materials include the nature of the economy. Alele-Williams (2004) states that Nigeria is endowed with vast and rich agricultural land and abundant solid minerals, which, if well harnessed and prudently managed, could radically transform the nation into an economic giant in Africa. Unfortunately, the economy is characterised by

dismal performance arising from mismanagement of its resources, corruption and ineptitude on the part of policy formulators and those who are charged with the implementation of the policies, especially in the public sector. Instead of accelerated growth and development, more than 50% of the Nigerian population has slipped below the poverty line. The three tiers of government appear to spend less of their recurrent and capita! budgets on the provision of basic social services such as health care, education and library/preservation services. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, it is this same public service which brings about development and growth in the economy.

Awala-Ale (2005) observes that although there are policies on the- acquisition of library materials, there were no written policies governing the preservation and conservation of library materials.. The study concludes that the policies and practices for preservation and conservation in Nigeria are underdeveloped in academic institutions, especially given the high rate of deteriorated materials.

Recommendations

Based on what has been presented in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

There is the need for increased government involvement in the funding of education, promoting the growth of libraries in our educational institutions and encouraging the preservation and conservation of library materials. A well articulated preventive maintenance scheme should be consciously developed to prevent or cut costs of maintenance. Besides, the high capital and recurrent outlay that go into maintenance of various library equipment, library equipment should be checked in order that they remain in constant productive use.

The acquisition and fitting in of hygrometers and thermometers should be encouraged as a means of keeping storage rooms at standard temperatures. In order to combat the problem of incessant power cuts, standby generators which are capable of carrying the load in at least the strategic parts if not the whole library should be acquired.

Emerging spending patterns and pressure from the society require new and sustained initiative by Nigerian libraries in order to generate considerable funds internally. There should be a steady exploitation of money yielding ventures such as consultancy, solicited donations and priced information services, which in time can raise internally generated revenue. Nigerian institutions of learning are therefore encouraged to do these as well as resource sharing of conservation and preservation techniques.

Nigerian educational institutions and their libraries are further encouraged to engage the services of management accountants with adequate exposure in management accountancy. University, college, polytechnic and school librarians should make use of the bursar or faculty members in the department of business studies with knowledge of financial management in their project planning and cost control schemes.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed education and development; libraries and development as well as factors inhibiting the conservation and preservation of library materials. Poverty has been viewed in the context of inadequate funding of libraries and library materials which is chiefly responsible for the continued poor state of conservation and preservation of library materials. From the above discussion, it is clear that Nigerian library have quite a number of problems of deterioration of records facing them. Nevertheless, Nigerian librarians could do their best to solve some of these problems if provided with funds.

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