

FUNDING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

This paper looks at the funding of academic libraries in terms of provision of information sources, especially serial publications. It spells out the importance of serial publications in academic libraries, as no serious research work can be done without consulting serial materials. It further argues that if academic libraries are adequately funded, they would in turn provide information sources and services that would enhance the production of intellectually sound graduates by their institutions. The implication of this caliber of graduates in the labour force is high productivity that makes for nation building.

Introduction

A library is essentially a service-oriented institution, which serves the needs of its varied clientele. It is a repository of print and non-print materials, and this enables it to preserve information. One of the major functions of a library is education. It educates its users by providing in the broadest sense materials, and makes such materials available to them. According to Lyness (1974) of all readers making use of the local collection, those engaged in education, either as teachers or students are in the majority. He emphasized that if the library is fulfilling that function, it is to the library that all enquiries, including newcomers to the field, will naturally turn.

Academic libraries, on the other hand, are libraries established in institutions of higher learning, such as Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc. As libraries serving academic community, academic libraries have the objective of providing and organizing information materials suitable for teaching, learning, research and publication. To fulfill this objective, the libraries must be adequately funded.

Funding Academic Libraries

The academic library is the nerve center of any tertiary institution. As a resource center it occupies the central and primary place because it performs all the functions of the parent institution- teaching, learning and research. If the library must perform its vital role of teaching, learning and research effectively and efficiently, it must be adequately funded. Adequate funding enables the library to provide information sources and services needed to meet the information needs of users.

Experience has shown that our academic libraries are not adequately funded. This problem of poor funding is not new to us, rather, it has persisted for a long time. As a matter of fact, funding has been a perennial constraint to all types of libraries. Many writers have expressed concern over the poor state of our academic libraries. The situation became so pathetic that Bozimo (1983) noted that Nigeria, like in most countries in Africa, has one of the World's poorest library facilities. Okiy (1998) also stressed that the situation in Nigerian University libraries has been that of inability to provide the basic requirements for effective discharge of their duties. In the same vein, Ifidon (1999) remarked that obviously many academic libraries in Nigerian Universities are not adequately prepared for these challenges. Ehigiator (2000) equally observed that some state University Libraries are stocked with outdated and worn-out collections. He also added that some state Universities in the past five years have not subscribed to local and especially foreign journals, let alone acquiring information technology.

The effect of inadequate financial support to our academic libraries is drastic. It has resulted to deterioration in the quality and quantity of library materials, facilities and services. The consequence of this is that existing resources and facilities are over stretched, thereby making it difficult for them to effectively meet the information needs of users. The situation is worse in state owned tertiary institutions. For the institutions owned by the Federal Government, it releases funds from time to time to boost their library activities, though these may not be enough when compared with the growing population of these institutions. An example of such fund was the World Bank credit facility of 120 million U.S Dollar to support the libraries of Federal Universities from 1991

Information Sources: Serials

No library can perform its functions efficiently without the availability of information sources. One of the major sources of information in academic library is serial publication. Serial publications, which are indispensable for information and research, play a vital role in fulfilling the objectives of academic libraries.

Harrod (1990) defined serial publication as “any publication issued in successive parts, appearing at intervals, usually regular ones, and as a rule, intended to be continued indefinitely. The term includes periodicals, newspapers, annuals, numbered monographic series and the proceedings, transactions and memoirs of societies”.

Serials are said to be the nerve-centre of any academic library and they constitute the life support of any academic pursuit. Osei-Bonsu (1984) describes them as the backbone of any special, academic or research library. Davinson (1978) considering the relevance of serials asks “why are serials so important that their purchase and maintenance in libraries account for high proportion of financial and labour resources?”. Broadus (1973) seems to answer this question by pointing out that popular journals, with their reasonable up-to-date facts in articles of any length preferred by many readers, have been a recognizable force for education. In his own view Woodward (1991) considers serials as constituting a major part of all academic libraries collection, and typically account for more than half of their expenditure on library materials. According to him, for many academic research staff, the serials to which the library subscribes are the most important and useful elements of its stock.

Serials publications are media for disseminating new knowledge or new interpretation of knowledge. According to Aina and Mabowonku (1996) scholarly journals occupy a pre-eminent position in extending the frontiers of knowledge and they are the principal medium for disseminating new knowledge. Expressing a similar view Nwagha (1980) said that the advancement of science depends to a large extent on the accumulation of past findings, and every scientist builds on the knowledge of other scientists.

Since available literature has shown that serials are indispensable in academic libraries, one expects that their provision should be given greater attention or priority. By nature, they appear regularly and in successive parts. This is why it is expected that their provision in libraries should be on regular basis so that no issue is missed. It appears that this is almost impossible.

Many factors are responsible for the inadequate and irregular provision of serials in academic libraries. Foremost among them is lack of fund. Many serial librarians have confirmed that insufficient funding has hindered them from subscribing to many serials. Sometimes, there is shortfall in budgetary allocation. When this happens, the library will not be able to purchase all the titles it used to purchase, hence cancellation is inevitable. With insufficient fund, the library is not able to subscribe to new serial titles.

Nwagha (1980); Spiller (1991); and Faluwoye (1995) strongly agreed that financial constraint has impeded the availability of journals especially in developing countries.

Where finance is some how available subscription becomes difficult because of foreign exchange transaction, thereby making acquisition almost impossible. This is peculiar to libraries in developing countries.

Rising cost of serials is yet another canker worm eroding their provision in libraries. Cost of production may to a large extent be responsible for this upward trend in serial price. Flipping price of serials has resulted in cancellation of serial titles in many libraries. Olorunsola (1995) in his articles reviewed the difficulties encountered by Nigerian Universities as a result of inflation in the 80s. when many libraries had to suspend periodical subscriptions. This does not favour researchers who depend on serials for their work.

Over population is also another constraint. Students enrolment in our tertiary institutions far out-number existing structure, facilities and resources. The implication of this is that many hands will be scrambling for few resources. This has led to theft, mutilation and cutting off of some pages of serials.

Foreign publishing of journals has also been identified as constituting hindrance to serial availability in academic libraries. Alemna (1998) asserts that there is always the feeling among writers in West African sub-region that they will gain world-wide recognition and reputation when their papers are published outside the continent. He explains that there is also the feeling, especially in the

academic circles, that a research paper which has not been published by any of the publishing "giants" (usually foreign based) is cheap and inferior and of no consequence as far as promotion is concerned: that is, it is being assumed that a local journal or publisher cannot publish anything of intellectual worth.

Researching to find out reasons why local writers prefer foreign publishers, Alenina (1998) attributed this to high mortality rate of local journals and the fact that they have been accused of killing talents by the lackadaisical manner in which they assess papers sent for publishing, which sometimes results to loss of paper.

Sweeney (1997) also studied the current situation affecting academic publishing by looking at the economic, sociological and technological changes that have affected academic journals over the last 20 years; and considered the strategies that academic libraries have devised to cope with current cancellation crisis, such as electronic document delivery, resources sharing and electronic journals.

Information Technology and Information Services

American Library Association defined information technology as the application of computers and other technology to the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. We are in the era of information explosion, hence we have abundant information, and the problem now is how to harness and utilize information. Advocates proclaim that since we are now in information society, it is imperative for developing countries to adopt this new technology. It is argued that neglect of information technology in developing countries will increase the gap between the developed and developing world. Many people believe that this gap will be more difficult and expensive to close later. Even, the World Bank warns that if African countries cannot take advantage of the information revolution of technological change, they may be crushed by it.

In library operations, information technology has a lot of advantages. Henderson (1992) states that information technology provides the following advantages to users:

- Speedy and easy access to information.
- Remote access to users.
- Round-the-clock access to users.
- Access to unlimited information from different sources.
- Information flexibility to be used by any individual according to his or her requirements.
- Facilitation of reformatting and combining of data from different sources.

Information technology is expensive to acquire and maintain. The trend of inadequate funding of academic libraries also affects the acquisition of information technology. As such many academic libraries have not been automated. Academic libraries can not shy away from the new information technology if they must effectively serve their users. Some universities have made considerable efforts at computerizing some of their operations; such universities as Ibadan, Lagos. ABU (Zaria). etc. There are other academic libraries which are at the verge of being computerized, such as Alex Ekwueme Library, Federal Polytechnic, Oko.

Harrods (1997) defined information service as a service provided by, or for, a special library which draws attention to information possessed in the library or information department in anticipation of demand; this is done by providing a reference and information desk, preparation and circulation of news sheet and documented results of literature surveys, preparation of bibliographies, reading lists, indexes and abstracts, particulars of articles in current periodicals, creation of database through documentation of information which are anticipated would be of interest to potential users of the services.

Information services aims at satisfying the needs of all potential users and where necessary, be able to give the unsatisfied readers appropriate referral services to other established institutions where such information could be obtained. According to Nwakaohu (1999) information service sets out to identify, provide the use of documents or piece of information which could best help the user in his study, teaching or research. An information service may have to devise the appropriate package through which information is to be passed on.

No information service can function effectively without an organized collection of books and other materials. Thus, it requires adequate financial support, highly trained staff, etc. in order to be effective.

Implication for Productivity and Nation Building

Tertiary institutions are training grounds for prospective professionals in various fields. Adequate financial support to their libraries will have the following implications:

1. Provision of library materials. There will be enough library materials, like books, non book materials, audio-visual equipment, etc. that would make the would be professionals undergoing training to be vast and knowledgeable in their various fields.
2. Available infrastructural facilities will be maintained and new ones provided so that students and staff will teach and learn in a conducive and convenient environment.
3. Provision of information technology and information service, to facilitate teaching and learning.
4. Production of intellectually sound professionals who are experts in their fields.
5. When academically sound graduates join the labour force, their input will be high; and this will bring about development that makes for nation building.

Recommendations

In the light of the aforementioned implications, the following suggestions are made:

1. Government should adequately fund the libraries of tertiary institutions owned by both Federal and State Government.
2. Individuals, organizations or missions who have established private tertiary institutions, are called upon to fund their libraries properly.
3. Philanthropic individuals or organizations can help fund academic libraries by giving gifts and donations.
4. Money allotted to academic libraries should be judiciously used to purchase library resources.
5. Academic librarians should give priority, to the most pressing library needs in their purchase of library resources.

Conclusion

Since tertiary institutions are training grounds for potential professionals who will join the labour force on graduation and contribute their quota in nation building, their libraries should be properly equipped and prepared for this task.

The proprietors of these institutions, especially the government, should provide them enabling environment that consists of adequate funding, good accommodation, trained personnel, information sources, technology and services. When this is done, there will be high productivity that makes for nation building.

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