

HARNESSING THE INFORMATION SERVICES IN LIBRARIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The recent political changes and development in Nigeria have given birth to a new dawn in the political order. The emergence of political parties and the governance of the people have warranted that democrats as well as the electorate be provided with popular civic information resources to function optimally in their capacities. This in turn has emphasized the need for documentation of the political evolution in Nigeria. This paper examined the role of libraries in this trend and also in the provision of free access to all information resources for political enlightenment and use of all citizens. It also unraveled the need to introduce civic education to the various levels of educational strata in Nigeria. It suggested ways by which civic education can be made available to the Nigerian citizens using libraries.

Keywords: Civic education, Political education, Democratization, Libraries, Information Resources.

INTRODUCTION

The library is a service and information centre where the sum total or even most of human civilization and development in print and non-print media is stocked and organized systematically for the use of all the citizens in the course of their quest for information, knowledge, learning, teaching, research, recreation and entertainment. The recent political changes and development in Nigeria have given birth to a new dawn in the political order. The emergence of political parties and the governance of the people have warranted that democrats as well as electorate be given information resources to function optimally in their capacities. Informed decision-making is an ingredient for those in power. The electorate also need information in electioneering processes particularly to know the direction that their leaders are facing especially with respect to true democracy

and political promises. There is the need for documentation of the political evolution in Nigeria.

With respect to age, sex, social or marital status every citizen needs grooming in the politics of the land either by going to formal school or through self-education. The political evolutions need to be recorded and passed from generation to generation in order to expand the horizon of the electorate formally or otherwise.

The library's role of making materials available ranks among the most important contributions ever made to human culture and technology. Libraries have long shared materials that enable idea, knowledge and experience to be passed from generation to generation. Without this line of communication, cultural and technological developments would not be as advanced as they are (World Book Encyclopedia, 1977; p 210).

LIBRARIES AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

Democratization is the process of forming a government in which the sovereign power resides in the people and is exercised either directly by them or officers elected by them. It is a state or community in which the government is vested in the people as a whole (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). The governance of any society cannot be divorced from its citizens and the type of citizens a society is made up of will produce its type of governance.

It is important for any society to educate or train its citizens especially in the political order. This of course should begin from the primary school life spanning through all the educational set-ups. Associated with educational institutions of learning at any level is the library. For the purpose of civic responsibilities, the various types of libraries in these educational institutions should be equipped with information resources and materials including those for social and political processes. This is with the view of intimating the citizens with the picture of what the governance was, what it is now and what it is likely to be and the standard to be maintained as being suitable for the people of the land. This should be well documented and made available to libraries for use.

LIBRARIES AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

The process of getting libraries involved in democratization should start from the first nine (9) years of the UBE programme, that is, the primary (6 years) and the junior secondary (3 years) schools as three years will be spent in the senior secondary school and four years in the University. Statistics (The World's Youth, 2006) have shown that most school pupils may not go beyond the UBE of six years in the primary and three years in the junior secondary levels. As noted by Adebayo (2002), one of the many objectives of UBE programme launched in Sokoto in September 1999 (an off-shoot of the UPE launched in 1976) in the Implementation Guidelines is to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. This is why the opportunity must be made available by the government within the schools by providing for civic education in their curricula, and the teaching and earning a credit in it too must be compulsory. Eze (1999) listed some functions of information in the following lines:

1. To correctly inform citizens about socio-economic political issues, and about government programmes and policies, in order to create maximum awareness and understanding that will eradicate distrust, doubts, rumours, biases, suspicions and apathy;
2. To generate mutual understanding between government and the governed;
3. To generate the proper image of the government, the people and institutions in the country;
4. Through effective information process, better understanding is achieved. This helps to reduce any communication gap between the people and the government and promote peace, stability and national progress; and,
5. To generate public opinions and sensitize people's reaction to issues that affect their lives.

For information to perform these functions, the library is central. This is to say that the process of getting libraries involved in democratization should start from the lower rungs of the educational ladder. This is supported by Key (1961) who affirmed that "the young people should be

equipped to cope with a world certain to be different, certain to be dynamic rather than static". Thus

"...Libraries should be equipped to cope with supplementing the textbooks and the teachers' notes (and to) provide necessary materials for civic education without which youth education remains deficient" (Nnaji, 1986; p.61).

It is worthy of note that the school system plays a significant role in the political order. Education can have an impact on the individual towards participation in politics. It is not probable that the level of education has a relationship with the sense of citizen duty, the sense of politics and political participation (Nnaji, 1986). When a child is exposed during the period of educational training to civic education, it may be clear that he will have a sense of duty to vote or in the least be aware of the political process and the role he has to play in such circumstance. The library is one of the vital organs of the school systems that are geared towards achieving this role.

LIBRARIES AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE TERTIARY INSTITUTION

The need for active participation of students of tertiary institutions in the democratization process cannot be overemphasized. Being involved in the politics of our time is a duty for these people. Since voting exercise, voters and those voted for have an effect on the life of the people, it is important to be well informed in this area. It has been found out that "by the available measures, persons with college education, show themselves to be markedly more active in politics than persons whose education has been restricted to just grade schools" (Key 1961) or secondary level. In Nigeria, things are changing toward this direction even where a greater population is not literate. The evidence of Anyanwu (1999) showed that the educational profile of the two highest "Houses" is quite encouraging. For example among the Senate are holders of West African School Certificate (WASC) (6.6%). National Diploma (OND) (8.5%) and Higher National Diploma (HND) (12.1%). Others are Bachelor Degree, (B.A, B.Sc) (34%), Master Degree (M.A, M.Sc, MLS, etc) (20.6%) while those who fall into the holders of MD, Ph.D and D.Sc are 7.6%. The educational profile of the House of Representatives showed that they hold different

certificates and degrees like WASC (9.4%), OND (12.0), HND (16.3%), B.A, B.Sc (39.4%). Other degrees held by them include M.A, MSc, (17.7%) and MD, Ph.D and D.Sc (5.1%).

Although the role of Universities and other institutions of higher learning may be basically the same across the nations of the world, their historical development and social conditions may vary. But one fact remains that the major function of higher education is in general terms to produce highly skilled labour for the occupational structure and this includes a body of potential recruits for positions of authority and leadership and a much larger body of administrative, intellectual, professional, scientific and technical specialists. Thus civic education should be included in the curriculum of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria under the aegis of general studies. This also should be made a compulsory course for students. Although this is in operation in a few tertiary institutions, it should extend to all of them.

LIBRARIES AND POLITICAL EDUCATION AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Public libraries are usually of immense benefits to the general public, hence they are regarded as the people's university. These libraries should therefore tailor their materials and activities along remedial education, vocational guidance, liberal education and also, important still is civic education to enable the individual to fit rightly into his or her community and understand the upheaval in the world he or she lives (Fayose, n.d.) The children, youths, adults and the general public should be aware of the political process. The public librarians should participate even more actively by creating democratization awareness, dissemination of civic education, if possible in the native language of the community they serve. Opubor (1980) noted that "one of the major areas of action in the political process in Nigeria, involves creating more avenues for popular participation through creating more avenues for public communication". One of these avenues is the public library.

Adimorah (1978) asserted that.

"In the African set-up, majority of the rural public are illiterates with low reading skill and little experience in the use of libraries. They are thus far removed from reliable information source. They depend on

what they are told by their semiliterate neighbour. Public libraries can provide a civic and specialized information service which would include non-print, personal and individualized and referral services" (p. 38).

He explained that a civic information crew be saddled with the responsibility of disseminating the civic information through mass communication media, outreach work which could involve organizing talks, meetings, use of local posters, fliers and others. Whatever methodology is employed in the civic information dissemination process, one thing is clear, that the public library occupies a position that has no substitute in this great responsibility as far as the general public and democratization process is concerned. Thus in a democratic society, public participation in the political process is a function of public access to communication (and information) both as consumers and initiators of messages (Opubor, 1980).

THE LIBRARIES AND THE VARIOUS DECISION MAKERS

The ladder of political education right from the lowest to the highest level terminates into the peak of decision making. Professionals in many fields in the world depend on information materials in libraries and even the Internet for information they need in their work. For example, before a lawyer goes to court for a legal case, he or she may spend hours in a law library in order to search for relevant matters to prepare arguments. Doctors as well use medical libraries to gather information they need in order to treat unusual or complicated cases. Many business executives find various library materials to be of great value in their own fields. It is known that specialists in various fields must rely on information to reach decisions. For this to happen, they must be familiar with the results or findings of previous works and investigations before they embark on new programmes. The politicians and especially the ones that carry the mantle of leadership cannot do less. Anyanwu (1999) stressed that

"Although the primary functions of the legislature are to make laws, it must keep itself informed of the needs of the society and the way in which the laws it enacts are executed. The legislative process would be incomplete if all that legislatures had to do was to examine bills placed before them without going any further (p. 50).

From the foregoing discussion, it is essential that political leaders must be informed adequately about the people they govern, what is the way they were governed before and how they should be governed now and in future. The societies are not static so also are their needs.

The resources of yesterday may not be sufficient for the needs of today. This is exemplified by the explosive growth in population as Nigeria's comparative statistics revealed in pages of documented statistics. The complexities and sophistication of the society, the various diversities and cries among various ethnic configurations in and across the country indicate that there is the need for accurate information about the people of the land. Therefore, lawmakers should make laws relevant to the people they govern. The Committees of the National Assembly need current information on issues before them. Various information resources should be provided for them relevant to the charged responsibilities. For example, the Committee on Education should work with relevant information figures like the number of schools or institutions there are in each state and their human population. The population of teachers and learners if borne in mind while tackling educational issues will allow the leaders to make adequate provisions for the budget in terms of salaries, infrastructures, other essential materials and resources. Room could even be given to future projections. This also applies to health matters and other governmental functions and functionaries at the various levels.

In other words, those who aspire to leadership in democracy need information in order to take appropriate steps and show leadership concerns about the well-being and public health, enlightenment and education of the electorate. Also inclusive are economic development, quality of life and social equality.

People learn when they make comparisons. That being the case, to allow leadership to learn about states and governments and still understand the political processes and systems, we must juxtapose the states and governments with others of their kind in and around the world. This will allow leaders to identify their similarities and differences, their pitfalls and benefits and learn politically from history. These are documented in information resources all of which should be properly organized in libraries particularly those attached to the various levels of presidential system of government as practiced in Nigeria. Also, such libraries should shift from collection to access with relevant technologies.

Amekuede (2005) noted that the reason for provision of free access by libraries to their information resources is encapsulated in a simple fact that "providing access to information has become the principal goal and activity, and coping with technology and change are the major driving force of the emerging information age library".

In addition to the above, a judiciary that is shallow in the knowledge of the laws of the land is building the country on a shaky foundation, with building blocks that are already pulling apart since the day such foundation is laid. There is the need to also know the judicial matters around the globe for at least comparative purposes. The various leaders should not be ignorant but vast and deep rooted in the matters of the electorates that they are called to govern. In which case, their portfolios having been spelt out, they must have information about these and also be ready to acquire more knowledge concerning them.

The issue under discussion is dichotomized into two; while the leaders need information about the people, the latter also need information about how the leaders handle the affairs and matters that pertain to them. This is to say that the debates, proceedings, discussions and sessions held in the various "Houses" should be well documented and packaged for the present and future generations knowing fully that information sources are the bridges across generations. Many organs are known to disseminate information, but the most important system that is efficient in this aspect is the library.

The information gathered, stored and disseminated by libraries can be packaged in print and non-print formats. Recent advances in information and communication technologies have sped up the ease with which information can be obtained. So, libraries should find ways to best package information to make this readily accessible to our leaders and controllers of power as well as the electorate.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Formal political education is an area in which education, teachers and controllers of education need to awaken and make an impact on the learners so as to allow a child to come to a minimal knowledge or be informed of what it means to be a member of the Nigerian political system, and prepare them for adulthood of specialist and leadership. The time

has come that the Nigerian society should have well-informed, refined men and women, with accurate or exact acquaintance with their own societal norms, values, ideas, cultural needs and political climate and maintain an appraisal of the society and the trends within it. The leaders must not be high on power and low on information. Instead they must be high on power as well as on information.

Finally, for political continuity, growth, effective and efficient democratization process, documentation of the political order is necessary as well as proper dissemination of the contents of such documents cutting across the different facets and strata of the citizenry. Libraries should make the state of the political affairs known and assist people, including political leaders, to be awake to these civic loyalty and skills. Libraries are essential ingredients to an enduring democracy.

Communication channels between the government and the governed, administrative accountability and efficiency should be developed. A government cannot be termed popular if it has no popular information or the channel of acquiring it.

Democracy literacy is a process that enriches that quality of the general public to prevent being cajoled by sweet-tongued politicians. Libraries are thus occupying a unique position in the democratization process, which cannot be substituted with other means for its survival. Libraries can organize programmes that are enlightening in nature like discussion on radio, television, newspaper and other types of media. Such programmes can include library talks and debates in relation to democratization process and the building up of an informed society. The importance of documents, documentation, libraries, librarians and librarianship and getting the society well exposed and drilled towards the political emancipation of Nigeria cannot be overstressed. It then can be suggested that democratic literacy should be introduced into Nigerian Library Schools.

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