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**RELEVANCE OF LIBRARIANSHIP TO THE SOCIETY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The paper basically examines the relevance of librarianship in the society, and it also looked into the evolution of librarianship. The paper dwelled on the society and the need for libraries in the society. Emphases were also made on the role of the libraries to promote knowledge. Historical research method was adopted for the study. The challenges of librarianship were alighted and solution to the identified problems was made.*

**Introduction**

Man's quest for knowledge has led to the creation and accumulation of tremendous amount of information. This quest for knowledge knows no bounds and limits and is never satisfied it has continued since the dawn of civilization to the modern age. This hard-earned knowledge and information is valuable for the entire mankind and therefore liable to be preserved. With the invention of paper man has been able to convey this knowledge to others by writing books. Thousands of manuscripts have been written by the wise men of the earlier times but many of them were destroyed due to the lack of proper means of preservation. The library as an organization is charged with the responsibility of preserving this recorded knowledge.

In a traditional sense, a library is a large collection of book and can be referred to as the place in which the collection is housed. Today, the term can refer to any collection, including digital sources, resources, and services. The collections can be of print, audio, and visual materials in numerous formats, including maps, prints, non-prints, records, and tapes are kept for reading, reference, or lending. In a digital sense, a library may be more than a building that houses a collection of books and other materials as the Internet has opened up an avalanche of online and electronic resources for accessing documents on

various fields of interest. In another view, Islam (2004) describes library as a learned institution equipped with treasures of knowledge maintained, organized and managed by trained personnel to educate the children, men and women continuously and assist in their self-improvement through an effective and prompt dissemination of information embodied in the resources.

Libraries according to Siddiqui (2007) are established for the systematic collection, preservation and dissemination of knowledge and information. It is very important to preserve and maintain the valuable knowledge and information contained in the books and documents because we want to preserve our knowledge and wisdom for the coming generations. By preserving the documents in a library this knowledge can be made available to others so that they can benefit from it. Establishment of libraries is not a new concept, the oldest library dates to around 2700 years ago in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh which shows how long ago the concept of leaving a piece of your wisdom behind started being formed into the organized collection to preserve the work. With the invention of printing press, it became easier to preserve the knowledge in the form of printed documents. This led to the generation of a large number of books.

The need for the preservation and dissemination of information led to the establishment of more and more libraries. Thus libraries acquired a great importance in the civilized society for education and research. Libraries play a vital role in the development of any society by enhancing the cause of education research. They cater for the information needs of thousands of people. The development of Science and Technology in the last two centuries has led to an information explosion. Rapid changes have taken place at greater pace. In order to meet the growing needs of users, the library system has been greatly improved and upgraded to meet the new challenges. The services offered by libraries have also undergone a great change.

With the advent of new technologies in the field of computers and communication, revolutionary changes have taken place in the field of Library and Information Science. The shape of traditional libraries containing a large number of printed documents is the process of being transformed to paperless libraries containing a large number of digitized documents. The facilities offered by networking have not left libraries untouched. Modern libraries are not only digitized but networked also. This has led to the creation of virtual libraries i.e. libraries without walls through which the user has access to information at anytime, anywhere in the world by using the modern tools of communications, such as computers and internet facilities. Users demand is ever increasing and putting a great pressure on the librarians. Therefore there is an imperative need for the modernization of libraries in order to keep pace with the modern times. The new challenges in the field of library and information science can be met by adopting the process of digitization and networking. In the present age the Libraries have to face many problems due to the limitations of time and space. User satisfaction is the main objective of a good library.

It cannot be achieved without adopting the modern tools and techniques rendered available by the modern technologies available in the field of information and telecommunication. These developments have led to the creation of Digital and Virtual Libraries, which have great advantages over the traditional libraries. Therefore, digital libraries are becoming popular due to the advantages and facilities, which are offered by them to their users. Many writers have attempted to define a library without success but a more satisfactory definition of the library is the one given by UNESCO. According to UNESCO a library is an organized collection of published books, periodicals and of other reading and audiovisual materials, and the services of a staff able to provide and interpret such material as are required to information research, educational or recreational needs of the users.

With the above definition, it can be deduced that librarianship is an encompassing profession touching the lives of its users in all fields of human Endeavour such as information, research, educational, social or recreational life. In another vain Aina (2003) a library is an institution that is responsible for the collection, processing and storage of recorded knowledge for the purpose of reading, study and consultation. According to Islam(2004) library is an instrument of self education, a means to knowledge and factual information, a centre of intellectual recreation, and a beacon of enlightenment that provides accumulated preserved knowledge of civilization which consequently enriches one's mental vision, and dignifies his habit behavior, character, taste, attitude, conduct, and outlook in life. The online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia describe the library as a place in which literacy and artistic materials, such as books, periodicals, news papers, pamphlets, prints, records, and tapes, are kept for reading, reference, or lending. In a digital sense, a library may be more than building that houses a collection of books and other materials as the internet has opened up an avalanche of online and electronic resources for accessing documents on various fields of interest.

### **Evolution of Librarianship**

The acts of the writing precede libraries. The need for human beings to transmit their thoughts and vision in an external medium to others and the preservation of culture brought about the idea of writing. The need to collect these writing for preservation so that they can be passed from one generation to the other could have been the harbinger of libraries. In describing the history of libraries Aina (2003) explained that it can be delimited into three, these comprises of Ancient time, medieval time, Modern Era. the ancient time was dated back to 6000 years and it was traced to the Sumerians (western Pakistan) who developed clay tablets in which cuneiform signs and characters were used to record the activities of the government, temples and business. the medieval times was championed by the activities of the Christianity. This era as its expansion depended upon wider knowledge of religious documents, hence libraries were usually in monasteries and cathedral. The priests were touch bearer of knowledge. The monks and bishop were responsible for the growth of library the parchment codex was the principal medium of recording knowledge as it replace papyrus. The parchment codex resembles the book of today as it was abound manuscript which had been folded into several parts and then sewn.

In the modern Era, therefore, the desire to have knowledge, and increase spread of education, couple with the invention of movable types by Johannes Gutenberg, accelerated the growth of libraries in Europe. Hand copying of manuscript was discontinued, as printing was done on paper with the movable types. Libraries were developed at exponential rate in the United State of America during this era, many private collections were developed which later metamorphosis to university libraries. for example, John Harvard's personal collection was initial collection of Harvard university library. In case of Africa the missionaries played a prominent role in the development of libraries, the Christian missionaries developed the system of writing in African language and encourage literacy, although oral traditions were prevalent in Africa at the time missionaries came into the continent, because of the absence of writing records, there was hardly any development of libraries. Though knowledge was preserved through the elders of communities who were used as repositories of knowledge on the culture of the community, this knowledge was transmitted from one generation to the other verbally, or in the form of rituals, ceremonies, etc.

The rapid development of libraries in Africa can be traced to the colonial era when Europeans colonized most part of Africa and implemented their culture and norms. One of the major important

legacies of the colonialist was the library. Ekpe (1979) in Aina (2003) he maintained that the establishment of libraries by the colonialist in Africa was purely economic. for example, the production and export of crops was emphasized during the colonial era for commercial purposes, thus, a number of research institute and departments were established with a view to advancing their production. The need to establish special libraries for these research institutions/departments, especially agricultural libraries, became the norms. In describing the historical development of libraries in Africa, the role of international organization cannot be under estimated, such international organization as Carnegie cooperation of New York, USA, The British Council and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The British Council was very prominent in the establishment of libraries in Anglophone Africa countries (1962) in Aina (2003) claimed that the British council was entrusted to assist in developing public libraries in Anglophone Africa. The UNESCO was responsible for organizing the famous UNESCO "seminar on the development of public libraries in Africa" held in Nigeria in 1953. The seminar covered a wide range of topics on libraries development.

Sixteen resolutions were made which were grouped under three categories. These were:

- Organizing public library on regional or national scale.
- Provision, selection and use of publication and audio-visual material in African Public Libraries.
- Professional training for public libraries services

The growth and importance of libraries brought about the evolution of the profession called librarianship. According to Aina (2004) libraries have existed for a long period, as far back as 6000 years ago. The beginning can be traced to the Sumerians now know as western Pakistan who developed the clay tablets in which cuneiform signs and character were used to record the activities of the government, temple and business. It will be noted that it was since the existence of librarianship as a profession it has been contributing to government and the social life of the people. The recorded knowledge in papers, used in ancient Egypt covered many subjects including Agriculture, government, poetry and medicine; all these were the contributions of librarianship to the society.

### **Different Types of Libraries**

We cannot discuss this topic without talking about the different types of libraries. According to Opara (2001) libraries may be categorized according to their objectives, content and patterns of services. Every type of library has objectives and these are derived from the objectives of its parent organization. The various types of libraries include public library, Academic library, special library, virtual library. Public library is a library established and maintained from public fund which means this type of library is community based and is supported from taxes and Levies from people in the community.

This means that the library is established to provide services to the community in return. It means the library is not only public owned but it is also open to use by every citizen who desires to use them for the development of the society. While academic library is a library attached to a higher institution of learning according to Library Glossary [1977] academic libraries are those of universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher learning. In other words, they are libraries established maintained and administered by a university or any other tertiary institution. This library caters for students, lecturers and researchers. It stands in the same relationship to the society as the memory of an individual by making available and accessible to its users information sources needed for teaching and students' independent study. It performs its functions through the conversation of knowledge for the society, transmission of this

knowledge for the nation's development and creation of knowledge for the upliftment of the societal development.

All libraries specialized to a certain extent but the special library presents peculiar characteristics such as its collection. The collections in this type of library are always tilted towards special subjects. In most special libraries, periodical, literature i.e. journals, magazines, conference proceedings, research reports, patents e.t.c are of paramount importance and may as well form the major part of its collection. The results of the research carried out in the library are later transferred to the community for technological, social and political development of the nation e.g. NISER, IITA Virtual library is another type of library and it is the convergence of telecommunication and computer technologies. It is the electronic integration of new services with the traditional library services. The aims of the virtual library, according to Hsiang et al (1997) include Support better research environment Create self-motivated educational environment Satisfy curiosity and life-long learning of the public. Offer unconstrained access to information worldwide. Therefore, they contribute to the development of the nation through the provision of useful, up to date and relevant information. The information provided by this library to the society has direct applicability to the day to day living of the people.

### **Roles of Libraries in the Society**

Society as defined by New Webster Dictionary [2004] is the state of living in organized groups or any number of people associated together geographically racially or otherwise within collective Interest. Therefore, Nigeria as a country is a society of people associated together geographically, racially and with common interest. This topic will be localized to this country as a society. The information society development demands to re-define the position and objectives of all the institutions which work with information, knowledge, and culture. The situation is changing and Libraries have been identified as one of the key elements for open access to information, which is crucial to democratic information and society development. Libraries are especially important now when the whole idea of education is stressing more and more independent learning and acting. All citizens must be able to find and use information. It is the key raw material - but it is a zero resource, if there are no access points to it and if documents are in chaotic order. Here we can see libraries enter the stage. The unique function of libraries is to acquire, organize, offer for use and preserve publicly available material irrespective of the form in which it is packaged (print, cassette, CD-ROM, network form) in such a way that, when it is needed, it can be found and put to use. No other institution carries out this long-term service than the library.

People are born with all sorts of different advantages. These advantages might include high intelligence, great wealth, a secure and loving family, a respect for education, nurturing teachers, a safe neighborhood, a chance to play, not being born genetically susceptible to substance abuse or mental illness, not witnessing violence, not being a victim of rape or abuse, etc. The way life works is that once you have a disadvantage, other disadvantages tends to come along with it. If you have a predilection to depression, that make you more likely to be an alcoholic. If you are unlucky, you become depressed and an alcoholic. If you are depressed and alcoholic, you are likely not to have a stable family, life, secure income, good education, etc., our society is not set up to help people who have a strike against them. If you lose your job, you can become depressed. You also lose your health insurance, so you can't get treatment for depression. Depression makes it harder to find a job.

Not having a job makes you more likely to become an alcoholic, or lose your family. So many

people are just a car repair away from being homeless. If their car breaks down, they can't get their job. They have so little resources that just that little change can tip them over. It is like standing on top of a giant ball of ice. As long as you are on top, you are fine. But begin slipping just a little, and pretty soon you are slipping faster and faster off the side. And the mantra you hear is "You have to decide to change", as if everything bad in your life is your choice. Libraries are one of the few things in the world that give even the worst-off people a chance to improve themselves. People can learn about depression, alcoholism, personal finances, how to find a job, fix their house. It isn't easy, and you still have to work hard. You have to know English, and you have to spend many hours at it. But a library at least offers a door. So it is one of the very few forces in the world that can help you climb back up if you slip, that doesn't help only the people who already have a lot going for them. Libraries treat every question, every need, and every person equally, with the same respect. You can learn why you can't seem to concentrate, why you feel so bad about yourself, why you can't get a job, without judging. It is an open book.

A library plays a very important role in promoting the progress of knowledge. There are many people who love reading. But they cannot afford to buy text books because the price of books is very high, so when one become a member of a library, he can borrow valuable books. A member can borrow two books at a time and he can keep it with him for two weeks. Libraries are particularly useful for poor children. Even those who are better off cannot afford to buy all the required materials for their studies. For instance, valuable books like Encyclopedias and large dictionaries cannot be purchased. Though to some extent, it is believed that with the abundance of information on the internet, the library might not be relevant.

Research has proved that too much reading online is very unhealthy for the eyes and the best way to engage in reading is going to the library where the environment is very calm and peaceful, and it helps concentration. Reading is indeed a great habit and it is best practiced in a library even today in the era of internet. It has been found through research that children and teenager who have a habit for reading regularly tend to do well in their IQ and eventually they become better human beings and are more successful in their jobs and carrier. Further reading is the only way to increase a person's vocabulary and helps him or her develop skill sets in language.

One of the most challenging issues today is the education of millions of those who could not attend the agencies of formal education; they form a large part of the population. These adults can still be converted into useful citizens if they can be educated. Library services are now being extended to the community even outside the four walls of the library building and this has been assisting in the area of adult education undoubtedly in the field of education, libraries find an extremely wide scope for activities performed in this sector.

The library is suited for this because if a well-preserved human thought constitutes a piece of information, disseminating this output will mean disseminating information. The fact that the library cooperates with the development of science, economy, culture and education indicates that through library, the information is provided to the society for sustainable development According to Aliyu (2008) the use of library is taught in our tertiary educational institutions for students to acquire knowledge and techniques in various skills in all facets of lives for effective and efficient performance and increase in production which is signal to national development. Culture is closely related to social life. It is passed from generation to generation either through personal contact or through recorded knowledge. Thus, the culture of the ages treasured and conserved in recorded documents, neither dies nor diminishes unless the recorded documents or their storehouse-libraries are destroyed.



Libraries have rendered a magnificent service to human race by establishing contact for the cultures. Libraries have been in existence since early times and these have served as a source of information from generation to generation. The human society has become more complex as a result of growing competition in all walks of life such as in education, unemployment, industrial disputes and urbanization. All these lead to a new culture; youths are on the revolt all over the world. At this juncture, libraries may help in creating consciousness and right thinking to adjust with the dynamic force of progressive culture. Therefore, the success of libraries as cultural agencies depends on the degree of enlightenment of the community and quality of the resources and services offered. Quality libraries and services are essential to making a nation aware of its cultural heritage.

According to Siddiqui (2007) Library advocates knowledge that strong Wisdom in libraries keeps us all in a better state. They also know that libraries are essential, life changing institutions. Libraries are essential institutions in a democratic society because they play a non-partisan role in providing the information that allows citizens to make informed decision on the choice of their leaders. Libraries are essential to the educational process because they support curricula, teaching information literacy, and foster critical thinking skills. Libraries are essential partners in creating educated communities because they provide opportunities for self-education, life-long learning, and self-improvement which is regarded as adult education in Nigeria.

Libraries are essential places of opportunity because they provide level playing field making the world of information available to anyone seeking it, unfortunately, not everyone understands or appreciate the value and importance of libraries. A goal of the campaign for Libraries is to disseminate messages about the value and importance of libraries. Do you know that another important area where Libraries save lives were in a 1991 study where physicians said that information provided by the library contributed to their ability to avoid patient mortality? The physicians also rated the information provided by the library more highly than that provided by other information sources such as diagnostic imaging, laboratory tests, and discussions with colleagues.

### **Challenges of Librarianship as a Profession**

The profession of librarianship is afflicted by multifarious challenges which are geo-political, sociological, information and Communication Technology (ICT). Only few of these are examined here, namely:

- i. Social misconception of the role of libraries in state and national development.
- ii. Absence of code of ethics for professional librarians and the implementation, where it exist.
- iii. Poor and inadequate control of professional education by regulatory agencies such as the National University Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE)
- iv. Controversy on the status of academic librarians
- v. High rate of unemployment and mis-understanding of concept of the professional engagement in organization, besides libraries.
- vi. The plight of higher National Diploma (HND) holders.
- vii. Poor Reading Culture in Nigeria Society
- viii Lack of Developed service orientation
- ix State of book publishing in the country, among other.
- X Poor financing of the libraries.



### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the relevance of librarianship to the Society in this 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be ignored in the sense that they have contributed to all facets of human endeavors and it has served as grease in the wheel of national upliftment and development. Therefore, librarianship is relevant to the society in terms of technological, social, economic, and political developments and will still continue to be relevant.

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