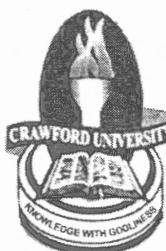


CRAWFORD JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

▪ Quality Education: A Veritable Tool For Sustainable National Economic Development Oludimu, O. L.,	1
▪ Establishment Of Community Banks As A Mark Of Public Stewardship And Accountability In Nigeria : A Retrospective Analysis Oluwakayode, E. F and A.O Otekunrin	14
▪ Sunflower Project At Crawford University, 2008 - 2013: A Synopsis Oludimu, Olufemi and Rachel Alabi	31
▪ An Empirical Investigation Into The Trend of Tax Evasion By Self-Employed Cyber Café Operators In Ekiti State, Nigeria Oluwakayode, E.F., A.A Ogunmakin and A.O Otekunrin	39
▪ The Nigerian Military As A Transformative Social Force: Contradictions And Latency Agara, Tunde and Oluwemii O. Fayomi	73
▪ Promoting Grass Root Democracy At The Local Government Levy: Adeola, G.L and E.A Fatoyinbo	95
▪ Democratic Governance And Human Development Sustainability In Nigeria Egharevba, E. Matthew And Chiazor A.Idowu	111
▪ Skill Acquisition as Affected by Demographic Variables in Nigeria's Public Service Staff Development Centres: Amire, C.M	149
▪ Adult Education And Lifelong Learning: The Indispensability Of Libraries Christopher Nkiko	159
▪ Adequacy of Human Capacity and Capacity-building efforts in selected Public Service Staff Development Centres in Nigeria Amire, C.M	166
▪ Creative Approach To Promoting Academic Excellence In The Post Primary Education Sector in Nigeria Odunuga, M.O & A.O Okedele	182
▪ Cooperative Credit, Farmers Investment Behaviour and Farm Output Performance : A Case Study in Ogun State Akerele, Ezekiel	196
▪ Globalisation - An Intricate Phenomenon Oreoluwa Adebogun	213



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Adult Education And Lifelong Learning: The Indispensability Of Libraries

By

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Abstract

The paper considers the widespread recognition that learning is not merely confined to the different stages that are associated with the early periods of life but rather spans through life. It emphasizes the importance of the library to adult education, noting that the quality and credibility of adult education as well as lifelong learning opportunities in a country is determined by the robustness of library services available in that country. The paper further highlights the point that public libraries in Nigeria are severely flawed as agencies of education and social development as they virtually non-existed in the rural and urban marginal areas. Even in the few urban centres where they exist, their services are undermined by poor funding and obsolete as well as inadequate stocks. The paper thus notes that this has great repercussion for adult learning in the country since a quality library service is pivotal to any meaningful adult education and lifelong learning programs.. It concludes that in order to be effective and act as a catalyst to quality education, especially for adult learners, the public library must evolve to mirror vitality of good library service and sustain the interest of its users.

Keywords: Adult Learning, Adult Education, Library, Information Literacy, Knowledge, Information.

Introduction

In a complex knowledge-based society, there is heightened recognition that education and learning cannot be confined to early stages in people's lives, but rather spans through life. Sarah Heasman (2000) citing Lydon Johnson (1965) declares that education is the answer for all our national problems, governments around the globe promote lifelong learning as a strategy to overcome unemployment, alleviate economic

imbalances, lower crime rates, remedy racial prejudice, and spread democratic principles.

IWISE (2007) conceives adult education as instructional and related support services for adults whose inability to speak, read and write effectively impairs their ability to function on the job or society generally. To achieve their goals and develop their knowledge and potential therefore, they are in need of programmes to help raise their level of education and self sufficiency. This is where the important role of the library in meeting the needs of the adult learner becomes indispensable in contemporary times.

The Library, Adult Education And Learning Resources

Library is an organized collection of published books and periodicals, other reading materials and audio-visual materials and services of staff to provide and interpret such materials as are required to meet the informational, research, educational or recreational needs of the users. (UNESCO, 1994). It is a collection of records of human culture in different languages and formats. Libraries may be categorized according to their objectives, contents and patterns of service. The library develops in people good reading skills and encourages long-term learning habits through listening, reading and viewing a wide variety of learning resources (Fayose, 2001). The quality and credibility of adult education as well as lifelong learning opportunities in a country is determined by the robustness of library services available in the country. Libraries thus form a vital part of the world's system of communication and education, with specific emphases on collecting, organizing, storing, and disseminating information in all aspects of knowledge seeking through diverse formats. These formats include; books, journals, magazines, newspapers, audio tapes, video tapes, computers, maps, pictures, CD-ROM, internet resources and online databases.

Library As A Catalyst For Adult Education

There are people who for one reason or the other drop out of school at various stages, but continue to study on their own to pass different examinations. Many of them also succeed in reaching the top

and they make their contributions to the highest level manpower requirements of the nation (Nkiko, 2005). For this category of people, the library is their 'university'. It provides opportunity for life-long learning. The library exists to provide adequate support for teaching, learning and research. It provides learners with the necessary platform to concretize issues raised in the classroom through deeper consultation and reading of various texts. One of the objectives of adult education is to enrich the intellectual and learning capacity of the students, albeit those who are in the adult stage of life. This involves increase in or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, values, feelings, attitudes and the capacity to reflect. The library facilitates effective leaning which leads to change, development and the desire to learn more. With the phenomenal growth in knowledge, and the modern condition of rapid change, it is realized that it is no longer possible to give to people during their school years the information and knowledge required throughout their life-time; there is the need to update skills and keep up with new knowledge in their fields. It is the library that makes this possible.

Information Literacy is at the root of life-long learning, and an information literate person is one who has the ability to recognize when information is needed and the skill to locate, evaluate and use effectively available information. The library through its numerous user education and bibliographic instructions inculcate in its users necessary competencies that enhance sense of inquiry, self-discovery, self-reliance and independence. This is the very essence of any form of education.

Reference librarians interpret questions, provide information to individual patrons and offer guidance in the use of the library and its resources. They are familiar with the various literatures of a variety of disciplines and are astute at discovering links among disciplines to fully answer questions or to help guide an individual's independent learning activities. To provide excellence in service to adult learners, they constantly renew their knowledge of resources available, update and organize such aids, bibliographies, indexes, abstracts and learning plans.

Preconditions For Effective Library Service To Adult Learners

In order to be effective and act as a catalyst to quality education, especially for adult learners, the public library must evolve to mirror

vitality of good library service and sustain the interest of its users. To achieve this, the following preconditions must exist.

Relevant And Enriching Collection

Libraries are essentially measured by the diversity, depth, recency and volume of its collection. The adequacy of the collection to support the information and knowledge needs of the users determines the extent of patronage it enjoys as well as accomplishing its roles as a resource centre capable of influencing learning outcomes.

Along with these, the average adult learner will be more comfortable in a library environment that is quite captivating and irresistible to its users. It must also be a serene, pleasant and comfortable environment for pleasure reading and relaxation.

Development Of Information Communication Technologies

A modern library poised to providing access to global information resources and widening the knowledge base of the users must have computers, functional internet facilities, online databases with electronic books and journals, audio-visual materials and educational documentaries. This platform will empower an adult learner to have access to other scholars and educational infrastructure across the globe. However, there must be a realization that technology is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It must be viewed as a vehicle to offer more efficient and effective delivery of current services and to add new services to help carry out the mission of the library.

Adequate Infrastructure

A library without regular electricity supply will breed frustration in both users and staff especially in an automated setting. There is the critical need to have standby generator to ensure constant power supply.

Friendly, Highly Motivated And Helpful Staff

The creation of a welcoming and supportive learning opportunity for adult learners requires the recruitment and retention of the services of high caliber professional librarians. Without the services of qualified librarians to provide the much needed technical services, such library could be compared to a hospital without physicians.

Adequate Retrieval Mechanism

Access to relevant information is a basic right to adult learners if

they are to cope well in their education and in society generally. The comprehensive arrangement of the materials on the shelves and provision of shelf guides, appropriate catalogues as well as other bibliographic aids are necessary to assist this category of users retrieve needed materials with ease devoid of frustration. All barriers to access available resources must be eliminated.

Public Libraries In Nigeria: How Far?

Public libraries were founded to serve as institutions for lifelong learning committed to all individuals, regardless of educational level, socio-economic status, or age. The fundamental characteristic of the public library serves to underscore its suitability as an integral part of the learning society. It is a free institution where the individual has open access to great quantities of information. It exists in great numbers, possesses the materials of knowledge, has a public service staff, and is a referral point to other resources within the educational network (Gould, 1978).

Public libraries in Nigeria are indeed severely flawed as agencies of education and social development. They are virtually non-existent in the rural and urban marginal areas and even in the few urban centres where they exist, their services are undermined by poor funding and obsolete as well as inadequate stocks. These constraints are thus the major impediments facing them in the discharge of their responsibilities as a vital component in the provision of uninhibited access to information and freedom of expression to the Nigerian public.

This all important institution created for enhancing adult education and lifelong learning is thus bedeviled by:

- low patronage
- almost total absence of current materials
- lack of adequate number of trained personnel
- inadequate funding

It needs be mentioned that except something drastic and more fundamental is done to revitalize this institution, poor reading culture would persist, and adult education either in the form of distance learning or correspondence colleges would remain a mere widow-dressing policy and a 'balloon' philosophy that can be punched easily anytime.

Strategies And Intervention

Adequate funding seems to be the most critical issue in revitalizing public libraries in Nigeria. Multi-national corporations should be made to invest in this sector of our educational life. Institutions like Shell, Chevron, Total, Julius Berger and other such big names must be made to see it as an inescapable corporate social responsibility to the Nigerian environment and its people.

Private-public partnership is another veritable option. There are quite a number of high spirited individuals and companies that would assist in the transformation of public libraries. It takes a consciousness and willingness to effect a change from government functionaries. It also takes recognition that this deficiency is a missing gap in our developmental process requiring urgent attention. The National Library of Nigeria should be in the fore-front of intensive advocacy to redesign and revive the public library system.

Many Nigerians are illiterate and live in rural areas. They are therefore incapacitated of benefiting from information, usually printed in English. There is need to repackage these information both in language intelligible to them and format to ensure that they are kept abreast of current issues and trends. A linkage between the extension workers and public library may be necessary to alleviate the information need of rural dwellers who are predominantly farmers. They should utilize other methods such as agricultural shows, posters, radio/television broadcasts, motion slides to disseminate information to rural dwellers. They also need to repackage relevant information produced by government ministries and departments, media organizations and disseminate such to users in a non-literate setting through displays, meetings, talks etc.

Conclusion

A quality library service is pivotal to any meaningful adult education and lifelong learning programs. Libraries provide the basis for developing reading skills, spirit of inquiry and independent discovery. The communication of information and ideas is a major concern of the library profession. Like the print and electronic media, libraries contain the collective memory and mind of society by virtue of their collections and services to that society. A good library can provide all walks of life with a more complete information on diverse disciplines.

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