



***Public  
Library  
Development***

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# **Role of Libraries in the Economic and Industrial Development**

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## **1. Introduction**

Libraries are the most important institutions that contribute to a nation's economic and industrial development. This paper focuses attention on the role of libraries in the progress of education, commerce, industry and science and technology. Education is one of the valuable sources of national wealth. This is why the education and training of the individual is considered in every development plan, and every development plan constitutes an essential means of stimulating economic and industrial development. Commerce and industry present challenges to the businessmen who have to prosecute their businesses in a competitive world where new inventions and complicated devices must be applied in the production and sale of their wares. Science and technology aid them in the attainment of these objectives. Unless educationists, businessmen, scientists and engineers can keep up with this fast-moving world, they and their countries have to act blindly or resign themselves to a situation in which they sedulously ape their fellow civilised men without being able to check on the veracity or falsity of what they are doing.

This study will first examine the role of libraries in these endeavours in technologically advanced countries. On the basis of that, Nigerian situation will be evaluated and suggestions for improvements will be given.

## **2. Situation in Developed Countries**

The phenomenal growth and explosion of information and knowledge especially since the nineteen sixties have posed a serious challenge to librarians. Often called the memory of

the human race; libraries have on their shelves the record of everything which man has thought, dreamed or invented. The value of libraries to our civilization is best exemplified by the fact that man, for all his inventive genius cannot recall all the items in his wife's shopping list from his house to the market. Librarians assemble all the knowledge and information resulting from man's endeavours and make them available to all who require that. This accumulated information can increase the skill and efficiency of man in all fields of activity. This is why the British people are maintaining well planned library services in such industrial and educational towns as Birmingham, London, Manchester and Scheffield. In the United States there are large public collections ranging from 30,000 volumes to 2 million volumes in Cincinnati, Cleaveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, New York, Pittsburgh, Washington and D.C.

### 2.1 Educational Development

One of the uses to which these library collections are put is to advance the work of the classroom and laboratory at all levels, to extend the horizons of knowledge and to contribute to educational growth. The planning of library services is one of the important aspects of educational planning within a nation's social and economic planning. *Education* does not mean the narrow concept of imparting book knowledge, rote learning and the acquisition of certificates. It means education in its broadest sense as the science which trains the mind, which produces well-informed men who possess culture and expert knowledge in some special field and which teaches men how to learn and how to solve problems throughout their life time. If this concept is accepted and applied, then the education and training of the individual should be considered seriously in every development plan. Development plan is one of the essential means of stimulating economic and industrial development and so education becomes one of the valuable sources of national wealth. But for a people to be educated, there has to be an effective educational system. An effective educational system requires a systematic use of reading. Reading requires books and if the

books are to bat the disposal of everyone there must be good library systems. If there are no libraries there cannot be good primary schools, effective secondary schools or efficient universities. It is not possible to encourage research, continuing education and adult education without libraries.

## 2.2. Scientific and Industrial Development

The library collections are the resources with which conventional reference and information services are provided to the industrial and scientific community.<sup>1</sup> Businessmen, engineers and industrialists cherish these services so much that only the smallest and poorest companies will not try to get as much information about its products or service as they can afford to buy. University, public and special libraries play great roles in this regard.

### 2.2.1. *Canada.*

In Canada, some provincial universities cooperate in a number of fields with the relevant departments of the province in the supply of information : in geology with the department of mining; in electrical engineering with the hydro-electric power commission of the province; in forestry with both the provincial and federal departments. It is clear that the position of the universities as centres of academic excellence for the province has influenced the role that they and their libraries play in the commercial and industrial life of the province. Similarly, the University of Alberta Library in Canada offers borrowing privileges, interlibrary loans, photocopying and reference services as well as information services to the scientific and industrial community outside the university.

### 2.2.2. *German Democratic Republic.*

Several libraries in the German Democratic Republic offer a variety of services to industry through their Information and Documentation Departments. Their comprehensive collections of patents is especially important in providing commer-

cial information for the industrial community. It is significant to note that in Bavaria, the general regulations which came into force on 30th November 1966 require the constituent State libraries including university libraries to lend their stock, to supply photocopies and to give oral and written information. No charges are levied on industrial establishments for these services except for photocopying or other unusual and special requests which involve supply of expensive materials.

### *2.2.3. United States*

In the United States, Boeing in Seattle depends much on the Technical Department of Seattle Public Library and that department attempts to anticipate information needs of factories as much as a Company library would do. Boeing officials credited the library with a large role in the success of the Company over the 30 years of public library service to the Company. In San Diego, the public library started in 1960 a special collection on the history of aviation, soliciting archival materials from aircraft industry in Southern California. In 1962, the George C. Marshall Space Flight Centre, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Huntsville, Alabama began to establish, with the army, a joint scientific information centre which is now a principal source of information on basic and applied research on development and testing of rockets. Closed circuit transmission and other optimum communication methods between its main library and the branches have been established. The centre is staffed by librarians, scientists and technical information specialists who analyse and evaluate the technical information received from all over the world to determine its application to their missions.

## 2.3 Trade and Commerce

The Vancouver Public Library's Business Division was the official library of the British Columbia Chapter of the American Management Association, the Vancouver Real Estate Board and the local chapters of the Machine Accountants

Association and the Chartered Institute of Secretaries. A branch of the Alabama Public Library at Mobile called the International Trade Library is located in the International Trade Centre of the Alabama State Docks in the port of Mobile. The collection is one on international commerce. The library provides free translation services and has a language laboratory.

### *2.3.1. Great Britain.*

In Great Britain university libraries serve industry on an informal basis either independently or in co-operation with other local libraries. They could also serve as a member of an organised scheme based in one library - usually the largest public library - serve industries through industrial liaison centres. These centres are based mainly on Colleges of Technology although a few are located in universities. The Ministry of Technology bears the greater part of the cost of operating the centres. In a number of regions, particularly those which are heavily industrialised, groups of libraries have cooperated in offering services to industry. The range of facilities available from these organisations varies according to the resources which can be tapped and the financial support given by local government and industry. A few universities take part in such schemes as Hampshire Technical Research Industrial Commercial Service (HATRICS) of which University of Southampton is a member while the University of Nottingham is a member of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Technical Information Service (NANTIS). In addition to the lending of books and provision of photocopies, many of the schemes provide technical information services, translation services, current awareness services, training course for new assistants in special libraries and courses on new techniques in information work. Trinity College, Dublin in Eire has for some years employed an information librarian whose duty is specially to handle information work for government departments, industry and commerce. One can go on and on with more examples. It is true that some of these examples are no longer the case, but they serve as good illustrations of the role that libraries can play in the economic and industrial development of a country.

### **3. Nigerian Situation**

We have seen that the libraries play a very important role in the economic and industrial development of technologically advanced nations.

Now we have to examine the role of libraries in the economic and industrial development of Nigeria. As in the developed countries of the world, the prime key to the economic and industrial development of Nigeria rests with education. Extrapolating from the changes that are going on in Nigerian educational system one hesitates to forecast a noble role for libraries. A sound educational system should enable a student to question the authority of his lecturers; discourage rote learning and the reliance on single textbook and lecture note study and encourage outside reading which leads to the generation of independent ideas and the creation of a class of well-informed citizens who are a valuable source of national wealth. In a recent survey conducted by one of the Nigerian television stations it was discovered that 70 million people or 70 percent of the Nigeria's estimated 100 million people are illiterate. This means that only 30 percent of the population can read and write. In another random survey by this author, the readers in a selected number of libraries were classified by the materials that they were reading. The survey showed that 98 percent of the reading population were boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 22 who came to read either their own textbooks or library books related to their chosen subjects for prescribed examinations especially the General Certificate of Education, 1.5 percent were adults, mostly civil servants who came to find some information on such economic questions as currency conversion, 0.3 percent were lawyers and businessmen who also came to read up something about their fields of specialisation. The remaining 0.2 percent came to take out novels for home reading.

#### **3.1 Academic Libraries**

University libraries are the best developed libraries in Nigeria. But their primary responsibility is to the students and faculty and this causes them to limit or exclude entirely,

service to outsiders. However, a few of these libraries render information services to researchers, economists and industrialists. For example, the University of Maiduguri has joint research projects with the Lake Chad Research Institute and the Chad Basin Development Authority. Staff of the Research Institute and the Chad Basin Development Authority benefit from the resources of the University of Maiduguri library. The Economic Development Institute (EDI) which is an integral part of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) carry out applied research into Nigeria's development problems. While NISER focuses attention on long range problems of the Nigerian economy with particular reference to national plans, the EDI directs its research projects to finding solutions to specific problems such as unemployment in Nigeria, economic development, the public service in national economic planning and the structure of Nigeria's imports and its implications for national development. Similarly, the Human Resources Research Unit (HRRU) of the University of Lagos is also concerned with the social and economic conditions of Nigeria. The library resources of these Institutes and HRRU are adequately supplemented by the research collections of the libraries of Universities of Ibadan, Nigeria and Lagos. Apart from co-operation between some Nigerian universities and the industrial establishments for purposes of industrial attachments for students of engineering and technology, there is no evidence that the university libraries render information services to industries.

### 3.2 Public Libraries

The old concept of public libraries being separate cultural institutions which are established for traditional reasons and for national pride still persists in Nigeria. Because public libraries are regarded as luxuries there are very few well-equipped and functional public library systems. In most places where there are no such libraries, reading rooms and television viewing centres are set up by local governments. There are also cultural and diplomatic libraries such as British Council Libraries and American Cultural Centres.



Although these are agencies for the propagation of the culture and ideals of the countries which they represent, no matter how disguised the motives are, where they exist the local people do not see any further need for the establishment of a public library system.

### 3.3 Special Libraries

The situation is even more bizarre with special libraries. It is rather difficult to determine the profile of Nigeria's special libraries because the definition of the term is somewhat imprecise. Of the 65 special libraries which the National Library of Nigeria has listed, 47 form part of Federal and State Government Ministries. This means that most of the business, industrial and banking establishments in Nigeria do not have libraries.

### 3.4 Disregard of the role of Information

In view of the foregoing, apart from the minor role libraries play at present in the education and training of the citizens, it is difficult to determine the contributions libraries have made to the economic and industrial development of Nigeria. In the view of C.O. Ogunbanje the unqualified success of the country's economic and industrial development is retarded by residues of Nigeria's traditional cultures, tribal distrust and consequent fear of partnerships which is also due to the sheer love of solo efforts among Nigerian businessmen, ambivalent support given to indigenous enterprise by foreign private enterprise and the practice of government owning about 70 percent shares of enterprises.<sup>2</sup> The solutions which he offers include sundry tax reliefs to help capital accumulation, a freer immigration policy for expatriates, protective tariffs, import duty reliefs, government provisions of finance for lending operations and the development among Nigerian businessmen of partnerships and cooperatives to enable them to benefit from openings provided by government and foreign private enterprise. The final and most important solution to Nigeria's central economic problem, in Ogunbanjo's opinion is the multiplication of successful business geniuses and wizards

like Michael Ibru, A.O. Lawson, M.N. Ugochukwu, Michael Omolayole, the Dantatas and Alhaji Rabi'u. But neither the causes of Nigeria's economic and industrial malady nor the prescriptions as enumerated by Ogunbanjo are complete without the mention of the place of research development and libraries. But *The Guardian* seems to agree with Ogunbanjo when it stated: that...the management of our public corporations and parastatals is generally hamstrung by a number of factors, chief among which are the bureaucratic controls exercised by parent ministries, the lack of accountability on the part of their chief executives and the non involvement of workers in the management of these concerns.<sup>3</sup> Like Ogunbanjo, *The Guardian* does not think that libraries play any significant role in the economic and industrial development of Nigeria. All these show that people and Government are not aware of the role information has to play in a nation's development.

#### 4. The findings of the Study

This study was intended to examine the role of libraries in the economic and industrial development of Nigeria. Rather than describe an ideal situation of what that role should be; the paper first presented a picture of what it is in the technologically advanced countries. Against this background, the Nigerian situation was examined. Any survey of libraries can show that libraries collect and preserve the thoughts and achievements of man over the years and all further developments are to be based on these stores of information. Nigeria also has some large collections of recorded knowledge. With such wealthy resources, it is possible for the economists, industrialists, scientists and engineers to find the answer to many perplexing development problems. Libraries help to avoid unnecessary duplication in research and development fields. Someone may have already performed the same or similar experiment. So libraries help us to know that and save two precious commodities - naira and time.

All disciplines, education, commerce, industry and science and technology contribute significantly to the economic and

industrial development of a nation. The degree of success or failure of such development depends on the extent to which libraries and their resources are tapped. This is one of the secrets of success of the development programmes in the technologically advanced countries. An appreciation of this fact is still restricted to a negligible minority of the Nigerian populace.

However, the place of libraries, at least in the educational system is best appreciated in Nigeria. Academic libraries of Nigeria are best equipped and comparatively well-provided for.

The present unsatisfactory situation in the utilization of libraries and information in industries and other development spheres is attributable to a number of factors, chief among which are the lack of appreciation on the part of policy-makers of the role of libraries in Nigeria's infrastructure, the weak position of the Nigerian Library Association, and the lack of organisation and co-ordination of the material, human and financial resources.

### **5. Suggestions for Improvement**

Based on the above facts the following suggestions are offered for improving the situation.

- \* The legal basis should be secured for the Nigerian Library Association. A draft decree to regulate the profession was ready as far back as 1975. But still it was not enacted. It is on the legal status that subsequent achievements of the Association will rest.
- \* All library legislations should be made mandatory rather than permissive as they are at the moment.
- \* Nigerian librarians and the few available Nigerian library consultants such as LIBRISERVICE LIMITED should attempt to educate industrial and technological establishments as to what they stand to gain by establishing libraries and by utilizing the library resources to their research and development projects.
- \* The library section of the Federal and State Ministries of Education and Science and Technology should be so

strengthened as to be able to monitor the progress of libraries throughout the country.

- \* Each library should intensify its effort to render information services to commerce and industry. This certainly has implications for staff and cost but a humble beginning can be made and the result of such effort can be used to get more financial support.
- \* Cooperative ventures among libraries should be encouraged.
- \* Conscious efforts should be made to inculcate in children from their primary school days the habit of reading and of using libraries.

## 6. Conclusion

It is the efficient systems for acquisition, organisation and dissemination of information that is to support education, research, industry, trade and commerce and other spheres that contributed to the speedy developments in the West. In all fields of activities in the west we can find efficient library and information systems that specialize on the services to the concerned spheres. It is a lack of awareness of the importance of libraries and information services in various fields of activity that causes inefficiency and hampers development in Nigeria and most of the developing countries. It is high time for building up and improving library and information support systems in Nigeria and such countries without which development will lack speed and quality.

## References

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