CONTINUING EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT
The paper discusses the role of the library in continuing education in any society such as Nigeria. Continuing education is described as a life-long education that can be acquired formally and non-formally. Some need it to make up for earlier deficiencies through remedial education; some for updating their knowledge through workshops, seminars and in-service training. The library is one of the pivots that support continuing education and can be used as a community education centre where the mass of rural dwellers can be educated to help themselves. Such education will be aimed at uplifting the socio-economic and political development of the people. Developed countries like the U.S.A., Britain and the former Soviet Union have used their libraries to run continuing education programmes and so, libraries in Nigeria and other developing countries if given the support can equally contribute to the realization of the objectives of continuing education.

INTRODUCTION
There is a generally believed statement that "Education ends in the grave." This saying presupposes that education is a life-long process which can be acquired formally and non-formally. Education has been recognized as a potent instrument for bringing about socio-economic and political development of any country, and for any country to make appreciable progress in all areas of human endeavour, the citizens of such a country must be educated. Education, however has some supportive institutions, one of which is the library. The mistake is often made, that only the literates need, and use the library, but this is not so, as the illiterates as well, have a lot to learn from the library. In developed countries, the library has become more of a resource centre combining several activities. Though the situation is different here in Nigeria, but that is not to say
that the library in Nigeria has not been playing any role in continuing education. This paper is therefore aimed at highlighting how the library can assist continuing education in Nigeria.

THE CONCEPT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

Continuing Education is a relatively new concept in education. The concept emerged during the second half of this century as a result of technological advancement. Thus, keeping pace with the rate of accumulated knowledge was, becoming impossible, and for anybody to keep abreast of knowledge, he must continue to improve himself either through formal or non-formal training. It was this realization, therefore, that brought about the concept of continuing education. The concept has been described by many educators in various ways. Cropley (1980) defines it as a process of accomplishing personal, social and professional development throughout the life-span of individuals and their collectives. Age is no barrier to education, and indeed, it has been confirmed that the capacity for education increases with age. Continuing education has also been described as an activity that is never terminal, but an open-ended process that can never be definitely completed, and that the need and capacity for education not only continue through the individual's life but also increase with his maturity (Shorey, 1983). Evolving technological development has impressed it on us that our knowledge of the past is no longer adequate to meet the challenges of the present, hence the education received several years back may need to be updated to suit the present. To cope with these changes, continuing education offers a good opportunity. Moreover, Woods (1982) defines it as an attempt aimed at remedying the efficiencies of man which are multiplied daily because of advancement in every aspect of human endeavour. Who then are the beneficiaries of continuing education? It is virtually everybody, youths who want to make up for an earlier deficiency in their education, literate adults in employment who want to improve and update their knowledge, and also rural dwellers, by improving their vocational skills to enhance better socio-economic and political development.

OBJECTIVES OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

Alford (1988) identifies the objectives of continuing education as follows:

1. further education courses within the participants' ordinary field of work.
2. retraining courses for new job requirement in another occupation at the same
level of responsibility.

3. acquiring new skills for different vocations.

Having discussed the concept of continuing education, its objectives and the beneficiaries, we can now turn to one of the supportive institutions that make the realization of these objectives possible. That institution is the library.

THE LIBRARY

The library has been defined by the Encyclopedia Americana (1970) as a collection of books, and other forms of records, housed, organized and interpreted to meet the broad and varying needs of people for information, knowledge, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment. There are different types of libraries in Nigeria as one can find in any other country, and these libraries support continuing education in varying degrees. An Academic library serves the lecturers, students and other members of the academic community. Its facilities are not only meant for the regular students but also the sandwich and part-time students. A special library serves a crop of clientele with intense concentration of work within a particular field, while a Public library serves readers whose educational backgrounds are as varied as their occupations and ages. To all the various library users, the library becomes a valuable companion, a leading laboratory where hidden facts and knowledge can be dug out.

Albertus (1970) says the library began to be involved in the education of individuals in society in Britain in the first half of the 19th century, when the Subscription Libraries of the Mechanics Institute provided library services for the working class - clerks, craftsmen and small shop keepers. The Mechanic Institution and other institutions that preceded it offered facilities to the working class to improve not only on their general education, but also their skills and productivity. The success of the Mechanic Institute led to the Public Library Act of 1850 in Britain which authorized the establishment of Public libraries to educate the people. In Nigeria, the history of library development is a recent one that began after the independence in 1960, with the establishment of the National Library in 1963.

If the goal of all nations, including Nigeria, is to raise the level of economic, social, cultural and political development of the people through education, then these national objectives can be achieved with the assistance of the library. How can the library do this? The library can do this through a number of ways. The first thing that must be done is the provision of a network of libraries to cover both the urban and rural areas. The need is perhaps greater in the rural areas, where the formal school system is often weaker. This provision should be
taken, seriously by the National and State Governments knowing fully well that Nigeria has a large rural population that needs to be educated. In such rural areas, learner resource centres of various types are indispensable so as to make teaching and learning easier, faster and more permanent. Developed countries have utilized these resource centres in both formal and non-formal learning, and so if libraries in Nigeria must really assist in bringing about a speedy transformation of the rural populace many people should have access to them.

In Nigeria the most effective role the library can play in continuing education is that of helping the people to help themselves, for the library, especially Public one should be used as a community education centre, with facilities for the effective use of audio-visual aids, for the staging of exhibitions, and for other types of cultural and educational activities. Well-planned educational displays and exhibits present information quickly and convincingly. They develop the interest of those who see them, influence their attitudes, increase their knowledge, and stimulate their actions. Librarians can provide pictorial lessons in the vernacular languages spoken in the areas to cater for local artisans, and traders while important messages and documents are translated into local languages to educate the masses. Public, libraries, in particular, promote continuing education by enriching cultural heritage as repositories of the wisdom of mankind. Ogunseye (1981) claims that they collect and disseminate the songs, written materials, and oral works of their immediate environment. Among the collection that a public library will have are printed and manuscript materials related to local interests like cultural events, religious, and social festivals. By using such materials, users are not only opportuned to take a historical look at the heroic deeds of past generations, but are also able to have access to the documented personal experiences of past notable community leaders. Through such experience, users can be inspired, and be able to solve their own problems. The library also cooperates with local and International Organizations and Agencies such as the United Nations Organization (UNO), World Health Organization (WHO), and so on, to bring enlightenment and create awareness in the people as to their rights and responsibilities. Such cooperation has led to the promotion of one theme or topic as 'Health for all by the year 2000'; The right of the child to education' and so on. These themes can be translated into local languages with illustrations in posters. As an active force in community life, the library can be involved in ensuring better living conditions for the citizens through health, and family education. Under the Mass Literacy Programmes launched by both the Federal and State Governments as an attempt to improve the education of the people, the library has not been passive; rather, it has tried to sustain the interest of the graduates of Mass Literacy Programmes with reading materials.
which will enable them to continue educating and enlightening themselves.

Another way through which the library can support continuing education is by extension services. Library extension services have been described by Burgess (1977) as services designed to provide continuing education in recreation and cultural development for adults in all types of libraries. Such services include lectures, discussions, film shows and a host of other activities that are traditionally held outside the library. From group discussions, enlightenment will be spread to users. Film shows, displays, drama and concerts have the advantage of imparting knowledge through visual and practical demonstration which will improve the education of users. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has described education as an inalienable right of every human being and encouraged member countries to provide their citizens with education. In line with UNESCO directives, the library has embarked on extension services to a category of users such as those in rural areas, old peoples’ homes, prison inmates and invalids. Such people are served by mobile libraries. Nigeria has not fully developed this aspect of library services unlike what obtains in the developed countries. Some years back, States like Lagos and former Bendel used to have mobile libraries as an extension of their Public Library Services, but these have since packed up. Efforts should be made throughout the states to provide these services so that the potential users can really benefit from them. The fact that library services can be made available to this category of users shows that even under inhibition, man can still learn to improve himself. Suitable library materials made available to prison inmates can lead to a judicious use of their leisure, and also help to sustain their interest in the use of the library after serving their terms.

Continuing Education is made possible through remedial and correspondence education for Secondary School dropouts and graduates, and working adults as well. This group of people have at one time had the opportunity of formal education, but they now want to make up for their deficiencies by enrolling in such remedial programmes. In most cities in Nigeria today, a lot of our youths attend remedial classes organised by both individuals and institutions to cater for their educational needs, while the adults either enrol as Part-time, sandwich or correspondence students of tertiary institutions. There are also workers in employment who want to keep abreast of new development and knowledge in their fields of scholarship and professional competence. The assistance that these groups of people will need from the library will be in the provision of appropriate materials. If we must maintain our National objectives of establishing Nigeria as a developed nation of equal opportunities for all, the libraries must be equipped adequately to make education serve the people and
close the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Students of the Open University and Correspondence Programmes have the opportunity of having university education extended to them through home studies. Students of these programmes depend mainly on individualized learning which a library can provide through supplementary textbooks, reference materials, and current periodicals. It is only the library that can provide such a wide range of materials that will make such learning possible. A library's lending facilities will be of assistance to the students, most of who are workers. Since they can take some of the library materials home on loan, they will be able to make maximum use of them. Also, the library provides a conducive atmosphere for learning as opposed to home conditions which do not allow adequate concentration. A public library, by nature, is opened to all and does not discriminate against any user, no matter the age, educational background, sex or interest. Whatever programmes or lectures that have been aired or sent through correspondence, these students will still have to do more findings from the library through analysis and synthesis of various views and opinions to supplement their lecturer's notes. Thus, the library, to students of the distance learning system, serves as a liaison between them and their teachers.

Modern technology has led to an accumulation of information, and this has called for better handling skills of such information. Research and information seeking constitutes an aspect of continuing education, and so scientists, researchers and information seekers depend very largely on the use of the library. Researchers and information seekers can be assisted by compiling bibliographies and lists of relevant literature available for their specific requests. To facilitate easier and faster use of this information, library operations are being automated. In Nigeria, the initiative to automate library operations began with the Special libraries, and which has had some rub-off effects on the academic libraries, many of which have attempted it at different times but sadly enough, the public libraries which deal with more, and varied users are yet to embark on this. Library automation has a number of advantages, one of which is the relative ease with which routine operations hitherto done manually are carried out with computers. It is highly desirable that our public libraries should be automated so that they will be able to offer better services to users. People use the library for different purposes; sonic to prepare for examinations, research, information, and others for recreation, lo all these users, the library remains an invaluable partner.

A library will support the leisure or recreational reading of its clientele through the use of its materials such as foreign and local magazines which cover a wide range of interests, newspapers in English and the local languages. Story books and other light materials that are adequate for relaxation. Nigerians have
not imbibed the culture of reading for pleasure, which is a more relaxed way of becoming enlightened. An adult who is interested in leisure reading is not inhibited by any institutional time-table, he can begin when he likes, determines his own curriculum, ammend it according to his developing interest, proceed at his own pace and continue for as long as the study seems justifiable.

Thus, the library through leisure use, provides stimulus in every aspect of many activities to support continuing education.

Moreover, mere provision of libraries will not be enough but the librarians themselves must reach out to the people by embarking on public enlightenment services to make the people aware of their right to use the library, and what the library can do to help improve their education. Libraries can be provided and be under-used if people are not aware of their role. At present there is a dearth of libraries to serve the rural populace, and this calls for a more concerted effort on the part of the various State Library Boards to extend their services to the rural areas so that the Nigerian community could be made better through education. When people have fully become aware of the role of the library, then the librarian has a more important role to play by ensuring that appropriate materials that will sustain the interest of the readers are made available. Such materials could be simplified and translated versions of important government programmes, latest in the local news, and on the foreign scene. The present economic situation in the country may not allow the establishment of a library in every community by either the State or Local Governments, but if this could be done, it will help in enlightening the rural dwellers. In the alternative, wealthy members of the various communities, associations and clubs should be encouraged to donate library buildings to their communities. Examples abound in some communities where libraries have been donated and members of such communities, are benefitting tremendously from the services of such libraries. Members of such communities will use their libraries to ask for one information or another, and this should be encouraged. Once the awareness has dawned on them that the library can help solve some of their problems, they will use them.

CONCLUSION

From the discussions so far, it will be appreciated that libraries in Nigeria are indispensable elements in the life of the Nigerian Community. They provide information essential for the socio-economic development, assist research efforts, and provide support to those engaged in individualized learning. A number of surveys have been earned out to evaluate the performance of library in "life-long education. One of such was undertaken by Okedara (1982). His conclusion shows that libraries have contributed immensely, and suggests areas
where improvements can be made. In countries like the United States of America, Britain and the former Soviet Union, the library has not only been providing the necessary support to continuing education and other educational agencies, but it has also been involved in organizing continuing education programmes as well. It is advisable that Nigerian libraries should take a cue from this and become more involved in educating the masses. Library services to the people of any locality can only be effectively rendered by the indigenes of such areas who understand their own people better and have the confidence of their fellow citizens. Innovative and effective programmes have to be adopted in the rural areas for the benefit of the poor and the culturally deprived. For as long as people desire to acquire knowledge, and improve their being, the library will remain relevant in continuing education. It is hoped that the Nigerian public will continue to appreciate the role of a library as a vital and indispensable requisite for the improvement of the whole society.

REFERENCES: