

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INFORMATION POLICY IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY ERA

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ABSTRACT

The attainment of societal goals is dependent on access to information and knowledge. This paper therefore seeks to assess the roles librarians can play in implementing information policies that will integrate the Nigerian society fully into the global knowledge-driven economy. Using the current literature, the paper describes information as a commodity for intellectual exchange that effects positive transformational change. It defines information policy as a set of legislation guiding the ethical use of information to attain societal goals. The roles librarians play are embedded in the information life cycle itself from creation to use, ensuring that ethical use of information is guaranteed across all sectors of our social life, from individual to organisational level. However, attaining these goals is affected by drawbacks such as non-recognition of the roles that librarians play by the government and organisational leadership, poor information infrastructure, inadequate training of librarians, poor monitoring of implementation among others. The paper recommends the establishment of standard libraries and critical information infrastructure, training of librarians, establishment of community libraries and sensitisation of the public on the importance and contents of information policies to their socioeconomic activities.

Keywords: Libraries, Information Policy, Knowledge Economy, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

As social animals, the human race breeds societies that thrive on communication. And proper communication is only effected with the appropriate use of information. From time immemorial, communication of information has always been the bedrock of human transformation. The sustenance of culture, preservation of heritage and the survival of man have always been hinged upon adequate communication of data, messages, ideas, knowledge, etc, which is reflected in the concept of information society, in this present modern era.

Unlike in the past where oil, agricultural produce and the steam industrial engine have driven global economies, the present era is largely a knowledge-driven economy where the possession of, access to, and use of information have enhanced competitive advantage for the individual, organisations, groups and nations. The concept of knowledge economy is no longer a novel concept. It is part of the components recognised in the 4th Industrial revolution where the fusion of physical, digital and biological intelligence is driving development on a global scale.

Information, which is seen as a commodity for intellectual exchange, is important to human development in many areas. As such, social institutions like libraries and information centres have been saddled with the responsibility of making it available to achieve the socio-economic goals of man since the ancient era. Therefore, in this present information society, it occupies a central space in the information landscape. The value that information provides, and the proliferation of information media in the present era have necessitated the need to have written guidelines and roadmaps identifying and describing how information can be appropriately and efficiently used to attain man's goals. It is therefore pertinent that this paper assesses, from literature and projections, the roles that libraries can play in implementing information policy in the society.

Libraries: Definition, Types, and Functions

Libraries are some of the most vital information and knowledge-based systems that have sustained man for centuries, in terms of delivery of information services. Libraries are considered as organized collections of information resources in different branches of knowledge for consultation and use in order to acquire knowledge and remain current in the society (Adebisi, 2013). A library is a collection of sources of information and similar resources made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing; it provides physical or digital access to materials

and may be a physical building or room or a virtual space or both (Enyi, & Tsegba, 2021). A library is a collection of written, printed and other graphic materials including films, slides, phonographic record, tapes etc, housed in organized order, and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of needs of users for information, knowledge, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment (Ezekwe & Muokebe, 2012).

There are different types of libraries targeting different groups of users and different purposes. They include school libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, special libraries, private libraries, and national libraries. School libraries provide the instructional materials in pre-nursery, nursery, primary and secondary schools to support educational activities among teachers and learners. Just like school libraries, academic libraries also support teaching and learning activities, but in tertiary educational institutions like colleges, polytechnics and universities. Their main targets are the members of the academic communities to advance and expand the frontiers of man's knowledge in the areas of research and development. Special libraries are specifically established to address the information needs of the members of an organisation while the public libraries ensures the inclusion of members of the society without any form of commercial pressure or social restriction. The National Library is the apex library of any sovereign geographical entity, preserving the culture and intellectual output of the citizens of the nation and about the nation.

Nwokocha and Horsefall (2020) state that libraries are gateways to knowledge, and are responsible for disseminating the idea of sustainability. They have traditionally existed to collect and organise, make access to knowledge more democratic, and preserve the record of ideas for future generations (Nwosu, Osuchukwu, Obuezie, & Kanu, 2020). According to Otike, Bouaamri, Barát and Kiszl (2021), libraries have always been considered as a vital and integral organ in a society; they are established to meet the information needs of learners, researchers and other users in the community. To the pupils' libraries are a source of information and also an avenue of developing and inculcating a reading culture, to students, it enhances effective teaching and learning, to the researchers it is a road map to conducting research, discovery and publications, while to the local community, it offers an ample environment for community outreach programmes, engagement and awareness on local and international issues affecting them.

The role of libraries and librarianship in socio-economic development is a monumental one because the major commodity of libraries and librarians is reliable and accurate information, which

has been identified and acknowledged as the most fundamental resource for informed decision-making by individuals, institutions and organization and even states (Ayandokun, & Onyemachi, 2017). Sadiku, Olarongbe, and Tsafe (2018) explain that no state progresses without providing free public library services to its citizens because access to educational, socio-political and any other form of information is critical for allowing the citizens to contribute and express their feelings and efficiently monitor and hold the public servants to account. They further argue that access to information is vital for the educational, economic, socio-political and religious empowerment of citizens. In concordance with the above statements Nwokocha (2018), iterates that the library is one of the pillars of both ancient civilization and modern societal development.

According to Mnzava and Katabalwa (2017) libraries have been noted to support community development in various areas such as education, economy, research and health. Experiences show that libraries act as a bridge of information between information providers such as the government, organizations and institutions, and then, the people. The library is one of the pillars of both ancient civilization and modern societal development. This is done by supporting education, enlightenment, innovation, critical thinking and preservation of culture as made available in human recorded knowledge and activities (Nwokocha, 2018).

Conceptual Definition of Information

Information is considered the oil that greases the society, a veritable tool and resource for result-oriented planning, decision-making and implementation among individuals, organizations, governments and the global society (Jimoh, 2011). Information is the commodity for development; a processed data to which meaning may be attached; useful for planning, decision making and reduction of uncertainty (Oluwaseyi, Akanni, & Busuyi, 2017). The role that information plays in the exchange of ideas and knowledge sharing has kept societies thriving for ages. New ideas are communicated in order to effect positive change through the use of information. Hence, information is considered a vital tool for sustainable development.

According to Baraman (2011), information is data that has been transformed into a meaningful and useful form for specific human beings and the meaning that humans assign to data by means of the known conventions used in its representations. It is an asset to any nation, an integral part to all living organisms and bedrock of national development (Obi & Mmejimm, 2019). The position occupied by information gives those who possess it competitive advantage

over others, either at individual, communal, national or global level. That is why it is reflected in the advancement levels and gaps among the information and knowledge-driven societies and those on the lower level of the strata.

Information Policy: Overview

Colloquially, information policy provides an umbrella term for all laws, regulations, and doctrinal positions that deal with information, communication, and culture. Information policy is comprised of laws, regulations, and doctrinal positions – and other decision making and practices with society-wide constitutive effects – involving information creation, processing, flows, access, and use (Braman, 2011). According to Maxwell (2003) information policy is a social political, regulation, economic and technological decision related to the role of information in society. Pajaro and Betancourt (2007) on the other hand offers a broader definition by asserting that information policy is a guideline for planned actions to ascertain access to universal information to carry out social, economic and political activities in the course to achieve the nation development goal.

Information policies streamline the key elements for open access to information and its maintenance (Obi & Mmejim, 2019). They further explain that the value of information policy in society depends on how persistently it is spread and understood throughout society, and upon the institutions (formal, informal, public and private) for implementing and expanding her horizon. This argument portrays that information policy's efficiency depends on its implementation.

Knowledge, the Knowledge Economy and Nigeria

Today, knowledge is seen as one of the most significant resources in any organization (Rad, Alizadeh, Miandashti, Fami, 2011). Knowledge extends beyond data and information. It also includes the judgment and experience needed to take action—to run a clinic, design a behavior change campaign, or serve a client. Knowledge extends beyond data and information. While some knowledge is written down, most consists of the practical know-how and intuition stored in people's heads. Like written knowledge, this “tacit” knowledge, too, can be managed to increase organizational performance (United States Agency International Development, 2004). While some knowledge is written down, most consists of the practical know-how and intuition stored in people's heads. Like written knowledge, this “tacit” knowledge, too, can be managed to increase

organizational performance (Maponya, 2004). Knowledge is a tactical resource that gives an organisation a viable advantage over its competitors if properly managed (Halawi, Aronson, and McCarthy, as cited in Eiriemiokhale, & Idiedo, 2020). The above definitions emphasise the place of knowledge in improving efficiency at individual and organisational levels.

The Knowledge economy, according to Pettinger (2017), is described as the sector of the economy which is increasingly based on knowledge-intensive activities, creating a greater reliance on intellectual capital rather than physical inputs. It has the following characteristics:

- Knowledge and information as key driver of productivity.
- Growth in high technology investment and industries.
- Growth in knowledge intensive service sectors such as education, communications and information.
- Knowledge is a non-finite resource. Capital gets used up but knowledge is not limited and can be shared without losing it. In fact, sharing can help boost overall knowledge.
- Growth in demand for higher skilled labour / University degrees.
- Increased importance of tacit knowledge – the skills and ability to implement codified knowledge.
- Innovation is driven by producers and users (for example, open source platforms/ customer feedback) rather than top-down linear systems.
- Knowledge spillovers from one industry to another
- Nature of knowledge economy, related to the process of globalisation and global diffusion of knowledge.
- Knowledge economy and high-tech industry raise scope for increased automation of production processes leading to rapid changes in the labour market.

Kolesnichenko, Radyukova, and Pakhomov (2019) identify *institutional structure*; an *innovative system*; *education and training*; *information infrastructure* as the basic elements of the knowledge economy. But there are obvious indications that a 200 million people with a budget for education below the UN/UNESCO benchmark has left much to be desired. It is clear from the above features and indices that Nigeria still has a long way to go in achieving sustainable development through a decent knowledge economy. For instance, in 2012, the knowledge economy index for Nigeria was 2.2. Knowledge economy index of Nigeria fell gradually from 2.53 in 1995 to 2.2 index in 2012 (Knoema, n.d).

In the 12th edition of the Global Innovation Index released in 2019, Nigeria ranked 114th, performing largely below development expectations (Adesoji, 2019). For a country with such a huge potential in human resources, that is a waste. Under business sophistication (knowledge workers, innovation and knowledge absorption) Nigeria ranks 85th in the world, Creative output (101st), Infrastructure (122nd), Human capital (119th), and Market Sophistication (88th), For the institutional categories that include political, regulatory and business environments, Nigeria ranks 114th.

The Roles of Libraries in the Implementation of Information Policy in the Knowledge Economy Era in Nigeria

Library is a compulsory component in designing the establishment of an information policy since it has the expertise as an information provider. Thus, developed countries always consider library as being central and an essential counterpart in information policy because only the library knows and understand what information to be provided to meet the needs of the government for developing the nation (Basri, Yusof, & Zin, 2012). The researchers further explain that only information professionals are capable to deliver their expertise in monitoring, regulating, shaping and implementing activities such as trans-border data flow, national information system, information expert and profession, information skill, content dissemination, laws related to books, collection policy, data usage and distribution, reading campaign, information retention, public access centre, knowledge sharing, national bibliography, repository library, acquisition of foreign publications, availability of information and books access. The professionalism and expertise that a librarian brings to the information landscape cannot be matched as long as the management of human recorded knowledge is concerned.

The library is a distinct institution that plays prominent role in shaping the knowledge society closely driven and guided by information policy. The architecture of information provision stems out from this institution as it has the expertise in acquiring, disseminating, organising and administrating information. Thus, library is not only collector but also as stewards safeguarding the nation's heritage which in turn assures equality of access for the citizens (Reding, 2005).

The library and the librarians are best positioned among the various information professionals and sources, to help in the implementation of information policy because of the strict

information selection and acquisition process and philosophy of library services. Furthermore, the library engages in community analysis before its information dissemination process is planned and executed. This is because the library is usually established with missions beyond profiteering, unlike other sources of information, especially the mass, conventional and social media. The media bias and censorship that have enveloped media practitioners and altered the credibility, fairness and objective of the mass media have not affected the library sector. For instance, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) notes that even as lack of trust and accusations of partisanship keep trailing conventional media houses and their social media handles, libraries are one of the few institutions where trust has not declined. According to the Pew Research Center, 78% of U.S. adults believe that libraries help them find information that is trustworthy and reliable (Geiger, as cited in Sullivan, 2019). Therefore, the library is best positioned to help achieve a fair and just information policy implementation.

Comprehensively, since information policy can be at organisational and national levels, libraries existing as special libraries in organisations, as academic libraries in higher education institutions (HEI), as public libraries in sub-nationals, provinces and communities, as school libraries in basic, primary and secondary education levels. For instance, Unsworth (2014) explains that information policy is important to education and educators, whether the policy is about ongoing access to public information, digitization of books and the copyright interests that surround the activity or libraries' constant fight to protect the privacy of their patrons.

As private libraries in homes, as national libraries with respective branches across states, etc, libraries can play different roles targeted at different people in enshrining the different information policy that will advanced individual, organisational, communal and national development. Specific programmes that are germane to contemporary information society and the information policy such as information ethics and information literacy are core aspects of roles played by librarians to support the appropriate, fair and efficient use of information and lifelong learning of community members. Because the nature of information use in the library sector is based on the life cycle of information from conception, publishing, evaluation, selection, acquisition, organisation, preservation, conservation, retrieval, dissemination to use, the librarian's skills in all these key areas in the information life cycle offers them an edge to be core stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of information policy. The library will help implement

policies on information evaluation, selection, acquisition, organisation, preservation, conservation, retrieval, dissemination and ethical use. In support of the above assertions, Koganuramath (2012) emphasises that the present knowledge society understands the value and contributions of libraries, librarians and information scientists, particularly in the areas of organizing, preserving and providing access to information.

Challenges and Prospects of Implementation of Information Policy Using Libraries

Implementing information policy requires the contribution of several stakeholders. The librarian is one of the information professionals required to implement these policies. However, according to Anyira (2021), the numerous challenges posed to the attainment of the goals of information policy among libraries and librarians include:

- i. **Poor training of librarians:** Nigerian librarians are often trained in the delivery of basic library services. Apart from academic and special library administrators, other type of libraries like public and school do not provide the necessary training for their staff on information services delivery. It would be difficult to ask for such librarians to implement evolving information policy as part of their duties if they are oblivious of the existence of such policies and how to implement them while delivering their services.
- ii. **Poor funding of libraries:** The apparent physical status of Nigerian libraries leaves much to be desired in the 21st century information landscape. This has negatively impacted the acquisition of the requisite skills and competence to engage in the implementation of modern information policies.
- iii. **Lack of clarity on operational guidelines:** Several Nigerian libraries do not possess clearly stated guidelines on how to implement the different policies of government relating to the handling of information. As seen in most libraries, even the design does not provide ease for the physically challenged users to access the collection. There should be a guideline that describes how the library access is improved from time to time to accommodate all library users.
- iv. **Conflicts with other existing policies:** There are several policies on information handling. For instance, the Nigerian Communication Commission, under the Ministry of Communication and Digital Technology has policies guiding

information and communication technology use while the Ministry of Information ensures that the Freedom of Information Act is well implemented in libraries. There may be difficulty or overlapping rules when ethical and legal issues are raised in the use of ICTs to disseminate information that may not have any implication under the Freedom of Information Act.

- v. Lack of compliance monitoring: Regulatory agencies in Nigeria rarely carry out their monitoring of compliance duty in organisations. The library system is not an exception. The inability to do this leaves the implementation of information policies at the mercies of non-professionals or professionals who feel less obliged to properly implement the policies.
- vi. Lack of motivation or political will: The heads of libraries are required to ensure the implementation of information policies. Where there is laxity, the implementation of information policies in favour of users is usually at risk. This leads to inadequate information services delivery.

Another major challenge is the inadequate recognition of the roles of librarians in the information environment by information policy makers. For instance, several organisations in the public and private sector lack libraries and librarians to provide information services for their workers and clients. This lack of professional expertise and the information resources to implement information policies in private and public sector organisations has greatly affected the implementation of information policy in Nigeria. This is further affected by the problem of inadequate information infrastructure to operate with by the librarians. According to Piotrowski (2015), the lack of infrastructure in many African countries does not help the situation as far as knowledge economy is concerned. Despite a thicket of undersea cables that have been lying along the coast of Africa since 2009, an African Development Bank *Report Connecting Africa* report from 2013 points out that access to high-speed broadband for the average African citizen remains patchy at best (Butare, Adam, Okello, & Mulamula, 2013). This further expands the existing problems associated with the implementation of information policy by librarians in the present digital era, making it seem far-fetched for Nigeria to catch-up with other developed countries in the knowledge-driven era.

On the prospects that the library offers on the implementation of information policy, it is noted that the provision of opportunities to meet the basic learning needs of information professionals is a first step towards preparing library and information science schools in Nigeria for the emerging global society (Edegbo, 2011). This is hinged upon the position of Library and Information Science as a major discipline in the information environment saddled with the responsibility of providing the needed information and knowledge for achieving a sustainable development. The knowledge driven countries have been able to process convergence aimed at integrating conventional strategies and leveraging ICTs to mass produce and ‘commodify’ knowledge, information, solutions, innovative products and even their cultures for sale to the outside world (Agbata, 2016). Since librarians offer the needed information to drive sustainable development, and their major commodity is information, their training projects them as major stakeholders that can help in the maintenance of information policy from conceptualisation to use. Librarians are directly involved in the life cycle of documented and authentic, non-partisan and objective information that allows for the ethical use of information to attain societal goals.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The knowledge economy cannot operate in a vacuum because libraries, librarians and human recorded knowledge are based on access to and use of information to acquire knowledge. This dependence of knowledge on critical information infrastructure requires adequate legislations and roadmaps enshrined in written and known information policies that require proper implementation by stakeholders such as libraries and the librarians who manage them. Access to information and its ethical use create an efficient information environment for the economy. However, with challenges such as non-recognition of key stakeholders like librarians and libraries, the information landscape appears to be fraught with difficulty in supporting the attainment of the knowledge economy in Nigeria. As such, critical steps and meticulous actions must be taken to ensure that the implementation of information policies at the formal and informal sectors are executed in the midst of the challenges identified.

The following recommendations are hereby provided to address the challenges affecting the implementation of information policies by libraries:

- i. Provision of critical information infrastructure such as fast and reliable internet connectivity to improve the digital penetration of all members of the society and connect them to the global world. This will awaken them to global practices in the different areas of endeavours and help them envisage how to integrate such practices for local content development.
- ii. Establishment of standard libraries across all government ministries, departments, agencies and the private sector organisations. This will help provide the necessary framework and human resources to monitor the implementation of information policies in organisations. Librarians are knowledge managers. To attain the status of knowledge-driven economy, the place of libraries and librarians must be guaranteed by organisations in the public and private sectors.
- iii. Educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels are knowledge-driven communities. To attain the goals of the knowledge economy, libraries and librarians must be given the right recognition and resources to operate with in fulfilling the goals of information policy as it concerns the knowledge economy.
- iv. Training of librarians on the implementation of the various information policies at organisational and government levels. Apart from the general government policies on handling information, librarians must also be aware of organisational policies on information handling and how to implement them. This will help combat challenges like knowledge hoarding that has affected the capturing of tacit knowledge for continuity in organisations.
- v. Sensitisation of the general populace on the need for digital inclusion. This will help integrate a very large number of the society into the current information environment thereby enhancing human and social capital development and bridging the digital divide that has retarded the attainment of an evenly developed society. This can be achieved by,
- vi. Establishing community libraries to sensitise the populace on the need to be full participants in the information society and to be aware of ethical components and their rights and privileges in the information society, as guaranteed by the various information policies of government.

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