

Promoting Reading for Achieving Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Literate Society: A Case for Innovative Library Environment in Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper discusses the important of promoting reading as a catalyst for achieving lifelong learning and sustainable literate society.

Design/Methodology/Approach: conceptual values and explanatory effort was made to review relevant and related literature on reading, innovative libraries environment -space, physical outlook, services, facilities, and conducts as bedrock for knowledge and literates society to strive. The paper also pinpoints the connections of lifelong learning and sustainable literate society. Challenges encountered by libraries to promote reading were discussed and recommendations were proffered within the framework of Nigeria.

Findings: The world has moved from millennium development goal (MDG) to sustainable development goal (SDG) with target to attain more sustainable development. In all parameters, without achieving sustainable or lifelong learning and literacy, achieving quality education will be a mileage as all other developmental index are revolves within the attained standard of education. This paper found out that reading promotes reading community (a healthy community) -a community where education and its developmental accomplices strives. As such reading has to be promoted, and all promoting agent like libraries are to innovate its environment to play a viable role in attaining sustainable and lifelong learning and literate society.

Practical Implication: long ago library has been known as reading-leaning-literates-education promoting institution. As the world is advancing towards sophisticated and more complex technologies, it became important that libraries are positioned innovatively and technologically to provides its known services. As failure to take lead in reading promotion by innovations will endangered global agenda in attaining lifelong learning and sustainable literate society. Therefore, hindering quality and qualitative education and its developmental accompanied. This simply means libraries should be positioned in such that it will explores technology and massive information in the space in serving peoples for efficacy, easy, and greater access to information and learning resources for attainment of sustainable learning and literates society.

Originality/Value: It is recommended that library should innovate its environment –building, physical space, facilities, service, and staff, for them, to take lead in provision of adequate information resources for the advancement of the sustainable learning and literate society.

Keywords: Reading, Lifelong Learning, Innovative Library, Environment, Literacy Society

Paper type: Conceptual

Introduction

Reading is very important in the life of any society as it helps to discover hidden knowledge and improve on existing knowledge. The level at which any society develop technologically, culturally, socio-politically, and civility can be traced to the level they consume written words. Reading is academic life of a populace; a foundation upon which other academic skills are built because information acquired through reading helps to bridge the gap between literacy and ignorance. Etim (2008) opined that reading is a corner stone of learning; it is the ability to

glean meaning from printed symbols. Reading makes way for a better understanding of one's own experiences and it can be an exciting voyage to self-discovery (Eyre, 2005). It's also means the most effective process of conscious learning which affects the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitude, beliefs and actions of the reader. Reading is an essential tool for lifelong learning and is important for everyone to develop the rudiments of reading and the culture of reading always so as to survive in life (Igbokwe, Obidike & Ezeji, 2012). Frequent reading is related to the

development of sophisticated language implore word analysis skills, and fluency in significant amounts of voluntary reading, are associated with greater interest and skills development (International Reading Association, 2000). To a greater degree, reading enforce higher levels of literacy in communities, which entails flow-on effects that can influence cultural and political change, economic opportunity and environmental sustainability. Informed citizens who have opportunities for lifelong learning, will build strong, sustainable and environmentally sound communities.

This simply implies that, a reading populace is a literate populace; a populace with skill-set and technological abilities. A society that invents and innovates technology, harnesses agriculture, attain civil attitude, and was able to translate information into knowledge, uses the knowledge to generate income, and also, capable to shape and prepare for future uncertainties. In other words, reading needs to be promoted, secured, and sustained by all concerned, especially the libraries and librarians –the stand-point, nucleus or hub for reading materials of any society.

In this regard, libraries in the public, private and school sectors should provide an extensive global information network staffed by information professionals, community spaces (physical and virtual), and a resource base to support reading, in to build and sustain literacy society. Librarians should act as reflective practitioners of research and effective promoters of literacy and reading and Libraries need to be an integral component of any initiative to build a global sustainable future. Libraries contain an extensive range of resources to cater for all literacy levels and information needs, and assist citizens with information seeking, interpretation and understanding. As an organize institution for “community” information services based on an underlying philosophy of equity of access to information to the public, they provide opportunities for access to technology, opportunities for education and further learning.

Reading, Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Literacy Society: Concepts and Values

Reading is a cognitive way of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. Reading is a means of language acquisition, communication, and of sharing information and ideas. Like all languages, it is a complex

structures; higher levels of comprehension interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader’s prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated. It is an intensive process in which the eye quickly moves to assimilate text (Wikipedia n.d). Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information (Anderson, 1985). Reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among: (1) the reader's existing knowledge; (2) the information suggested by the text being read; and (3) the context of the reading situation (Wixson, Peters, Weber & Roeber, 1987).

Lifelong learning, according to the European Association for the Education of Adults (2006), include ‘all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, and social and/or employment-related perspective’. Lifelong learning is a concept that stresses the importance of learning throughout life. It encompasses the traditional-formal education system (schools, training institutions, -universities etc, and non-formal learning, and structured on-the-job training) and informal learning (skills learned from family members or people in the community). It advocates that the formal education system should recognize skills acquired outside the system (Blom & Sohnesen, 2005). This means that lifelong learning is learning activities that take place from cradle to grave as every stage of man is bundled with different challenges that call for actions and ideas.

According to Delors (1996) the concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education. It links up with another concept often put forward, that of a learning society, in which everything affords an opportunity of learning and fulfilling one’s potential. In short, ‘learning throughout life’ must take advantage of all the opportunities offered by society. The notion of the learning society underscores learning as an activity, rather than something tied to a specific place or an institutional setting. It emphasized the social context, purpose and character of learning and its existence both inside and outside educational

institutions. More importantly, the concept of the learning society highlights the exigency of learning occurring not only within, but also out of, and around, formal institutional settings (Cisco Systems, 2010).

Hutchins (1970) frame the learning society as a response to the ever-changing nature of the modern state and society and the correspondingly ability of institutional education to keep pace. Husén (1986) in revisiting the concept highlighted the need for a ‘fluidity’ of learning, in line with the free movement of knowledge required by the organizations and systems of global society (Hutchins, 1970; Husén, 1986). This explanation is a transmutation to how reading stir-up lifelong learning, and develops into a literate society.

Literate society is the society with abilities to read and interpret written words. It can be synonymously refers as educative society, literacy society, information society, or learn(ing) society. In some literal terms, it can describe as book society, civil, or technologically-cultured society. The narrative is that, people are equipping with survival skills or abilities through learning. In such, poverty is drastically reduced, health well being of the populace are greatly improved, job is been created, and environment been constantly giving due attention, and a transparent government naturally emerged. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) literate society is has transformed beyond traditional reading and writing to;

- Gain proficiency with tools of technology
- Develop relationships with others and confront and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

In assessing the transformational value of reading, lifelong learning, and sustainable literate society, Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006) states that;

The specific contents of literate society vary from setting to setting. For

example, in households, a stimulating literate environment would have an abundance of reading materials (e.g. books, magazines or newspapers) and/or communication and electronic media (e.g. radios, mobile phones, televisions or computers). In neighborhoods and communities, a rich literate environment would have numerous signs, posters and handbills, as well as literacy-promoting institutions such as schools, offices, courts, libraries, banks and training centers. And yet literate environments are more than places offering access to printed matter, written records, visual materials or advanced technologies; ideally, they should enable the free exchange of information and provide an array of opportunities for lifelong learning. Indeed, whether they are in households, neighborhoods, workplaces or communities, literate environments influence not only those directly exposed to them but also other members of the society.

Meaning of Library Environment

Nowadays the word environment is often being used by almost all people around us, on television and in newspapers. Everyone is speaking about the protection and preservation of environment. Global summits are being held regularly to discuss environmental issues. The mutual relationship among environment, social organizations and culture has been discussed in sociology, anthropology and geography. All this shows the increasing importance of environment. Besides, it is a fact that life is tied with the environment. Literally, environment is the sum total of conditions that surrounds us at a given point of time and space. It is comprised of the interacting systems of physical, biological and cultural elements which are interlinked both individually and collectively. Environment is the sum total of conditions in which an organism has to survive or maintain its life process. It influences the growth and development of living beings.

Library, be it national, public, academic, school, and/or special exists within the conformity of space, physical location (building), interactive system, and contents –services, facilities and products. This disposition entails what can be

best describing as Library environment. That is, the “totality” of an organized place in which some set of people work to provide and source information services that satisfy a needs. Library environment comprises the following features;

- ❖ The building
- ❖ Physical space
- ❖ Materials/facilities
- ❖ Services, and
- ❖ Staff

The Building: The structural design built with roof under-which library activities take place. It can also be a physical location for library services.

Physical Space: That is, the unoccupied interior atmosphere meant to connect in a segmented way. The spaces can be used for various purposes like offices, hall, rooms, passage, entrances, and stores. Physical space control the ventilation, lightening, and general outlook of the library interior. So, it is considerably that, space should be taking into cognizance while designing, planning, or building the library.

Materials/facilities: That is, the library holdings –the books, computers, shelves, furniture, tools, lightening etc. It can be described as the interior look of the library, and the content that attract library patronage. This also measures the extent of use of the library. Library materials and facilities should satisfy the users in proportion to the level of the patronage, which either promote reading or discourages it. This therefore, calls for frequent innovation and update, to keep the library playing its key roles for sustainable literate development of the society.

Services: The actions that facilitate access to library holdings. Library staff aid users to source and retrieve the information they seek.

Staff: The personnel or employees recruited to ensure functionality of the library. Library staff is of various categories and ranks, and unit of commands. It is at this level the library attain its organizational statues. As a human factor in the library environment they are responsible for the smooth running of the library.

A Case for Innovative Library Environment

Innovation is an act of fusing new idea into existing system. It is geared towards transforming traditional protocol into relevant modern needs. According to Irunegbo, Omorodion, and Igbokwe (2014), innovation is

the process of inventing or introducing new system for increase in functionality of and achievement of goal. It can also be a process of looking for opportunities beyond traditional boundaries. Nkechi, Rowlad, and Abubakar (2011) state that, innovation involves a shift from old ways of doing things to a new order, with the aim of creating positive impact and yielding desired results. Innovation depends on groups, or organizational creativity, culture, and systematic initiatives (Irunegbo, Omorodion, and Igbokwe, 2014).

As library of every forms endeavours to adapt to changes occasion from diffusion of ICTs into platform of information services, they are also challenged by relevant of its own institution to modern era that has fast witnessing uncontrollable rise of multiples access to information pool which present varieties of reading works for users. In this case, the technological induced innovation is very paramount for library as the key or pioneer promoter of reading, and therefore should be adopted. Also, library building should be re-design, re-structured and/or renovate to portray the aesthetic features of modern time. This is to make the external library environment inviting, and its interior attractive. The space should be well heightened to controls ventilation within the library internal environment. The materials/facilities should be up-to-date to reflect the 21st century standard. For instance, personal computers (PCs), and internet connectivity’s should be made available for each user. Effort should be made to ensure 24hrs services, user-centered services should be focused, and above all, well trained staff to man the whole process.

From the notion above, it is pertinent for library to innovate its operational mode (mission and vision) and environment -services, facilities, capacity (human and materials), and physical space within integrated frameworks to promote reading, lifelong learning, and sustainable literate society. Therefore library should be able to;

1. Becomes a place for end-to-end learning: consuming and digesting information, creating new knowledge, and producing and sharing new knowledge.
2. Ensures that multi-literacy are developed and promoted through access to print, digital and multimedia collections.

3. Encourages library staff and patrons continual collaboration to support and nurture confident literate peoples, encouraging and enabling deep thinking and creativity through reading.
4. Becomes a place for creating, developing and encouraging readers to develop a passion for books and reading across different formats.
5. Becomes a dynamic transformative learning centre that provides a welcoming, vibrant and culturally inclusive environment.
6. Create flexible reading space based on fluid design principles.
7. Create a place with space that includes print, e-resources, and multi-media, and provides access to a range of ICT hardware and software fully supported by robust ICT infrastructure.
8. Forms a place that is providing seamless access to information resources, apps, advice and support to the classrooms, home, public domains and mobile devices through 24/7hrs opening.
9. Establish as a place that create continuous learning/reading opportunities, promote inquiry and dialogue, encourage collaboration and team-learning, and establishes a system that will capture and share learning outcomes

“We believe that libraries are uniquely situated to promote literacy and reading. It is part of their mission and it is a mission of all types of libraries, from school and public to special, research, academic, and national. They may do so directly, but especially in partnership with other organization, through projects, publications and other co-operative endeavours” (Farmer & Stricevic, 2011).

Challenges of Innovating Library Environment to Promote Reading

There are several impediments militating against library function and services in Nigeria, especially as concerns innovation or introduction of new code of services. They include;

1. **Absent of Widely Accepted Standard on Library Practice:** Libraries of all types are practicing without standard checklist or quality assurance, thus, leading to proscriptic openings on operational mode. The result is being felt on archaic materials, outdated facilities, blunt environment, dilapidated furniture’s and inadequate and

unqualified staff playing host in most libraries.

2. **Inadequate Automated Library Environment:** Most libraries in Nigeria lack technological connections and uninspired to follow trends. Here, library environment are not ICTs complaint, ‘smart’, do not have current tools, lacks modern structures that reflect digital dispositions. A situation whereby PCs are not adequate or unavailable for reader, internet cloud or network points are also conspicuously unavailable to the readers, promoting reading for any purpose will be paled. Because today’s sustainable literacy society are optimally measured by ICT skills.

3. **Poor State of Public Libraries:** Public libraries are one of the taxonomy of libraries that promote mass readership, to some extent it is classified as the contact-point for promoting mass literacy, deep learning, and lifelong education. In fact, no society in the world can boast of achieving lifelong learning, or attain state of sustainable literate society without boasting of functional public libraries that is keyed into its (society) educational system. But, it is unfortunate that in Nigeria, no state can boast of any statutory functional public library, thus, militating against reading, which in a long run negatively affecting effort to reach out citizens knowledge needs, thus, hampering lifelong learning and sustainable literate society.

4. **Absent of Community Library:** Most rural communities lack access to reading and learning resources, exposure to civility and information and developmental thirsty. In most case, they do not follow or comprehend government activities etc a sign for absent of a single platform community library. This hungry elements needs to be addressed to ensure stability and fruitfulness of sustainable effort to lifelong education. In a related opinion Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006) observes that, in many remote rural communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the circulation of newspapers, books, magazines or even posters is severely limited. School represent special settings – sometimes the only setting – in which books and written materials are (or should be) readily available, although

access to them among adults and out-of-school youth may be restricted, thus further impoverishing their literate level.

5. **Government Negligent to Library Statues:** The issue of derogatory regards to libraries services and its importance to society is very alarming by the government at all levels in Nigeria. No state in Nigeria can boast of functional National library branch, public library, school, and even academic libraries when compare to what is obtainable in advance countries. The outcome action is numerous -poor staffing, deteriorating building, irrelevant reading materials, lack of training, and absent of new ideas.
6. **Declining Educational Standard:** Inadequate qualified teachers, poor state of school libraries and classrooms, lack of laboratories, poor learning environment, dilapidated infrastructure, and lack of funding and capacity to accommodate the intending population are visible factors shrinking the quality of education in Nigeria. According to Wahab (n.d) there are inadequate teaching facilities, lack of laboratories and equipment for practical work, shortage of classrooms, and only a few qualified teachers to teach core subjects such as English and Mathematics, and the consistently poor performance of candidates in examinations conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) pointing out that it is a clear reflection of the deplorable state of the country's educational system.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, the following suggestions are made;

1. A widely accepted standard checklist/frameworks or policy needs to be formulated, compelling libraries and librarians to be practices within the frameworks. This will stir-up a modality that controls flows or quality of services being offered, and to an extent raise a benchmark by which frequent innovations will be competitive among the practicing libraries.
2. Libraries should see automated library environment beyond a rhetoric, concept or theory, rather, implementing it variables, which connote availability of internet connectivity, e-resources, digital services; an

extension to interactive information center. This if realized, will enable 24/7hrs information services to the people.

3. Public and community libraries should be given a facelift. Government at all level should key into this project integrating it with community learning centers as a basis to reach-out reading materials to the grassroots. As The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Publishers Association (IPA), the International Authors Forum (IAF) and the Reading & Writing Foundation (RWF) (IFLA-IPA-IAF-RWF) (2015) stated; all schools are crucial for literacy and early - and ongoing - intervention is key. But, it takes a village to raise a child and a reader, and given the limitations of schools, access to a library (both at home and in the community) is a fundamental indicator of success. For adults, having access to a public library is crucial when they look for an accessible, trusted and safe place to improve the literacy skills they did not attain during their formal education.
4. Education must be recognized as not just the first right of every citizen, but, as cornerstone to build the nation's capabilities, and sustainable development by government and stakeholders, and as such transforms all its (education) facet or components – building, labs, libraries, classrooms, play ground, curriculum, teachers and staff fund, management, and above all key into ICT learning platforms, in other to breed sustainable literate environment.

Conclusion

Any Journey that aims to achieve lifelong learning and sustainable literate society has to start with reading and writing, as well as, translating what has been read into practical life. In this case, reading forms the bedrock for learning. In effort to promote reading or mass literacy, the library –a reading hub is central, and has to play a significant role especially as concerns provision of reading materials, and creation of information awareness and sustainable literate environment. As a reading hub, it need to be constantly innovate, appraise and scan its environment (services, space, infrastructure, and materials, and staff) to always keep in touch with the modern day information service environment trends and reader feelings –

identifying their challenges, and proffering solutions to them. To do this, government, library promoters, and stakeholder have to see library as a rallying point to usher-in a readership, learning cum literate society. Therefore, effort should be made to ensure that, challenges hindering innovating library environment are curtailed.

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