

Five Decades of Nigerian University Libraries: A Review

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This paper reviews the growth of Nigerian university libraries from 1948 when the first university institution was established in the country up to 1998. Issues relating to their governance, funding, physical facilities, staffing, services and application of IT are reviewed through the literature. The paper concludes that there has been considerable quantitative growth in the number of university libraries over this period. The qualitative aspects relating to funding,

stock, physical facilities and application of IT, however, leave much to be desired owing to the economic downturn the country has experienced in the last two decades. The paper recommends that the university sector, and by implication their libraries, should be better funded. Access to foreign exchange for timely acquisition of books and journals is considered very important as over 80% of the tertiary level book needs of the country are met by imported literature.

Introduction

University librarianship and libraries in Nigeria turned fifty in November 1998. This occasion was marked with pomp and pageantry by Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan, which was founded in 1948 as an affiliate college of the University of London. From 1948 to date, university education in Nigeria has taken giant strides far beyond the wildest imagination of the founding fathers. From one university institution in 1948, Nigeria at the end of November 1998, had thirty-seven extant universities scattered all over the country and more have since been established.

The university library is an important component of any university institution. Consequently, no university can lay claim to academic excellence without a good library to back up its teaching, research and public service mandates. Nigerian university libraries have over the last fifty years been a major component of the university scene. Also, university librarianship has been the most vibrant sector of the library and information profession in the country. Academic libraries are the most developed in terms of funding, staffing, stock and services.

In view of this development, it is the aim of this paper to review critically the progress of university librarianship and libraries in Nigeria in the last fifty years and to project into the next millennium their likely role in the educational, economic and social development of the country. This will be done through a review of the literature of Nigerian university librarianship. This literature was the most extensive as compared to those of the other types of libraries in the country.

Historical background

The area today known as Nigeria came about as a result of the merger in 1914 of the then separately governed British Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria by Lord Frederick Lugard (White 1981). Before the advent of the British colonial government, the culture of the southern part of Nigeria was largely oral. The northern part of the country on the other hand, had before the advent of the Europeans, had some exposure to Arabic writings and culture as a result of the spread of Islam in the West African sub-region.

University education came into the country following the report of the Elliot and Asquith

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Commissions set up in 1944 and 1945 respectively by the British colonial government to look into the higher educational needs of the Anglophone West African colonies (Elliot 1944; Asquith 1945). As a result of the recommendations of these two commissions, two University Colleges were set up in 1948 in Nigeria and Ghana, the two leading British anglophone countries in West Africa. One of them was the University College, Ibadan, an affiliate college of the University of London until 1962 when it became autonomous as the University of Ibadan.

The University College, Ibadan remained the only university in Nigeria until 1960 when the University of Nigeria, Nsukka owned by the defunct Eastern Regional Government of Nigeria, came into existence. Following the recommendations of the Ashby Commission in 1962, three more universities were established in the country (Ashby 1962). They were the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria owned by the defunct government of Northern Nigeria, the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) with the defunct government of Western Nigeria as its proprietor and the federally owned University of Lagos. Following the end of Nigeria's thirty-month fratricidal civil war in 1970 and the oil boom that followed, the federal government took over the three existing regionally owned universities and the Midwest Institute of Technology, which later became the University of Benin. Today, this group of universities constitutes Nigeria's first generation universities (Agboola 1993).

To satisfy the clamour for the establishment of universities in all twelve states, into which Nigeria was administratively divided in the wake of Nigeria's civil war of 1967–1970, the federal government established seven more universities in 1975. They were located at Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Kano, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Sokoto to cater for the manpower needs of the expanding economy. This group of universities is collectively referred to as the second-generation Nigerian universities (Ifidon 1995).

The third wave of university establishment in Nigeria came in 1980 when the new civilian administration in the country established in one fell swoop seven Federal Universities of Technology (FUTs) in Abeokuta, Akure, Bauchi, Makurdi, Minna, Owerri and Yola. In line with the provisions of the new federal constitution which placed

education on the concurrent list, some state governments in the country also established seven universities of their own during this period.

Not to be outdone, private bodies also went into the fray and within a period of four years, established twenty-six universities of their own. However, all twenty-six private universities were scrapped with the second coming of the military in 1984. Also, four of the newly established Federal Universities of Technology were merged with older universities until 1988 when two of them re-emerged as technological universities and the other two as agricultural universities. This group of universities established between 1980 and 1998 are collectively referred to as the third generation universities (Agboola 1993).

All thirty-seven universities in existence in November 1998 when university education in Nigeria turned fifty, as required by law, have libraries headed by University Librarians designated as principal officers of the universities. The remaining sections of this paper critically reviews the progress made by Nigerian university libraries over the last fifty years by examining their governance, funding, physical facilities, staffing, services and application of information technology. This is done with a view to highlighting the problems they face and the challenges ahead of them in the new millennium.

Governance

Governance of Nigerian university libraries can be examined from the perspectives of external, internal and departmental administration. External governance of Nigerian universities is largely the responsibility of the National Universities Commission (NUC), which acts as a buffer between the federal government and the universities themselves. This body is responsible for the funding of federal universities and the issuing of guidelines for the running and establishment of new universities (National Universities Commission 1989). Recently, it has tightened its grip on the quality of university education in the country by setting minimum standards for courses offered by the universities (National Universities Commission 1991).

The influence of the National Universities Commission on library services in Nigerian universities is largely in the area of funding. Until

recently, the commission stipulated that universities should fund their libraries at a level equal to between 5% and 8% of their recurring expenditures. Unfortunately over the years, this has been observed more in the breach by most universities, particularly the state-funded ones over which the Commission has no financial control.

The newly introduced accreditation of courses by the NUC involves visits to university libraries, among other teaching facilities in the universities, to determine the qualitative and quantitative aspects of their book and journal collections (Ifidon 1995; National Universities Commission 1991). This requirement has forced university administrators to take library development more seriously. It has now become customary in most Nigerian universities for money to be released on ad hoc basis for the development of book and journal collections whenever accreditation visits are imminent.

The concern of the NUC for adequately stocked university libraries was further demonstrated between 1990 and 1995 when it played a very prominent role in ensuring that university libraries benefited tremendously from the US\$120 million World Bank University Sector Adjustment Loan (Tamuno 1998). More information about this facility is provided in the section on stocking of the libraries.

Internal governance of Nigerian university libraries revolves around the University Librarian who is the principal officer responsible for the day-to-day running of the library. For formulation of library policies, Library Committees exist in Nigerian universities with the vice-chancellor or his nominee, usually the Deputy vice-chancellor, as the Chairman. Such committees could either be that of Council or Senate as the case may be (Ifidon 1985b). The Library Committees serve in an advisory capacity and not in an executive one. Also, university libraries are represented on the faculty or college boards so that they can monitor developments in the curriculum and make adequate provision for the book and journal requirements in their acquisitions programmes.

Departmental governance of Nigerian university libraries is largely along traditional lines. It includes such traditional library departments as general administration, collection development, technical services, readers' services, research and bibliographic services, reprographic services, me-

dia services, etc (Ifidon SE. 1985b). A recent feature in some university libraries that have automated some of their services is the Automation Unit staffed by librarians and computer experts. The idea of subject specialisation was experimented with by some Nigerian university libraries in the early 1960s and 1970s (Ogundipe 1983; Orimoloye 1988; Onyeshi 1974). This apparently is no longer in vogue as the affected libraries have since returned to the traditional functional arrangement.

Funding

Over the last five decades, governments have been the sole sponsors of university education in Nigeria. Federally sponsored universities are funded through the National Universities Commission while their state-owned counterparts receive theirs directly through the state ministries of education or the Governors' Offices. Exceptions to this rule are the three Universities of Agriculture which are directly funded by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture but are subject to academic regulations by the NUC.

Nigerian university libraries are mainly funded from the recurring expenditures of the individual universities. To ensure that they are not short-changed, the NUC at one time stipulated that between 5 and 8% of the recurring funds of the universities should go to the libraries. As a result of the generally poor funding of universities, this has not been observed. Recently, this standing instruction was improved on through the institution of a 10% library development fund (LDF) deducted directly from the recurring allocations of federal universities and remitted separately to the federal universities for the sole purpose of library maintenance. University Librarians are signatories to this account while the National Universities Commission reserves the right to withhold subsequent library development funds if the previously released funds are not accounted for by the universities (National Universities Commission 1985).

Funding of Nigerian universities and their libraries was not much of a problem until the Nigerian economy ran into problems in the early 1980s as a result of the world oil glut and poor internal management of resources. This led to a drastic devaluation of the local currency, the

Naira, to the extent that from the parity of exchange it enjoyed with the US dollar in 1980, it now exchanges at the rate of over one hundred Naira to the dollar. Over the years, government funding of universities and their libraries did not take this inflationary trend into consideration. This situation has drastically affected the growth of library collections in Nigerian universities both in terms of quality and quantity.

Physical facilities

Apart from the first generation universities which came about as a result of the recommendations of fact-finding commissions and deliberate long-term planning, all other Nigerian universities in the second and third generation categories are products of ad hoc political decisions on the part of their sponsors. So far, no Nigerian university has begun in a permanent site. In most cases, they were hurriedly conceived and ordered to start immediately. Consequently, they all, without exception, started from temporary sites taken over from secondary schools and other pre-university institutions. This has largely affected the speed of their acquisition of physical facilities befitting the library, laboratories and lectures. So far, only 15 out of the 37 university libraries in the country are occupying purpose-built libraries.

Nigeria's premier university library, the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan, moved into its permanent library building in 1954, seven years after it was established (Tamuno 1988). The other four universities established in the 1960s occupied their permanent buildings on average three years after their inauguration (Orimoloye 1988; Nwoye 1988; Mahmud 1988). Of the eight second generation universities established in the 1970s, only five of them have got permanent library buildings after a quarter of a century into their existence (Agboola 1993). The picture is much worse with the third generation universities established in the 1980s. Of the 24 of them, only six now occupy permanent library buildings.

Prior to 1977, there were no locally agreed building standards for Nigerian libraries. Libraries built before then borrowed largely from American and European standards. The publication of *Standards Guide for Universities* by the National Universities Commission provided the first of-

ficially accepted standards for university libraries among others (National Universities Commission 1977). The first serious attempt to discuss building standards for Nigerian libraries was made in 1980 when the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) sponsored a "*Seminar on Tropical Library Architecture*" at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The seminar afforded librarians the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals in the building industry on how best to plan tropical libraries.

Library buildings of the first generation universities were landmark buildings both in terms of space and grandeur. The library buildings of the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University (formerly University of Ife) and Ahmadu Bello University are good examples. However, rapid expansion in university admission over the years has warranted the construction of extensions to these buildings. Of the eight third generation universities, the library buildings of the University of Calabar and that of the University of Jos, though yet to be completed, stand out as very grand in terms of space as described by Kwasitsu (1987) and Nwafor (1981). Among the significant landmark library buildings in the third generation universities are those of the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (Agboola 1993), the University of Agriculture, Makurdi and Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi (Nwali 1990; Antwi 1992).

Staffing and status

As in 1948 when the first Nigerian university institution was established, there were no indigenous librarians to assume the mantle of leadership in the library. Consequently, the founding University Librarians of the five first generation universities were expatriates from Australia and the United Kingdom. Notable among them was the late John Harris who is rightly regarded as the father of not just Nigerian university librarianship, but the father of librarianship in Nigeria (Aguolu 1979; Bankole 1988).

With the establishment of an Institute of Librarianship at the University of Ibadan in 1962, local training of librarians to staff all types of libraries in the country began in earnest. From just one library school in 1962, Nigeria now has ten library schools in university institutions in differ-

ent parts of the country. The leading ones among them are the library schools at the University of Ibadan and the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Nzotta 1984). Among them, they have trained a large pool of indigenous librarians for the country. A number of polytechnics also offer library studies at the diploma level for middle-level manpower. Today, expatriate librarians are the exception rather than the rule in Nigerian libraries. University libraries remain, however, the largest employers of librarians in the country.

Librarians in Nigeria's premier university were accorded academic status by virtue of the act establishing the university. Unfortunately, the revised University of Ibadan Act of 1962 that replaced the 1948 act was rather ambiguous on this issue (Mahmud 1983). This problem was further exacerbated with the establishment of more universities in the 1960s and 1970s whose laws were not so clear on this issue. Consequently, some of the professional literature of the 1970s and 1980s dealt very extensively on the issue of the status of librarians in Nigerian universities. Studies carried out by Oluwakuyide (1971), Osundina (1972), Onyeshi (1974), Salisu (1983) and Olanlokun (1982) are good examples.

By 1990, however, the problem appeared to have been resolved as a survey carried out by Ogunrombi (1991) showed that virtually all Nigerian university libraries had accorded their librarians academic status with parity in ranking with the teaching staff. Existing grey areas in the status of librarians were further cleared by virtue of the 1993 agreement signed between the Nigerian government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which specifically classed librarians as academic staff entitled to the same special allowances as their teaching counterparts. Arising from this academic status is the requirement by some Nigerian universities that librarians should publish the same number of papers as their teaching counterparts to earn their promotions.

Another development in the status of Nigerian academic librarians is the recently introduced non-tenure appointment for University Librarians. Before the promulgation of the *Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Decree of 1993*, University Librarians enjoyed tenured appointment which ensured that they remained on the job until the retirement age of 65. The new decree made the

position non-tenure by stipulating that University Librarians are to be appointed for five years in the first instance and may be re-appointed for another term of five years and no more at the pleasure of the university governing councils. This has already come into effect in all federal universities. The likely effects of this development on policy continuity, leadership motivation and orderly succession in Nigerian university libraries have been explored in a study recently carried out by Okoye (1998).

Collection development

The history of collection development in Nigerian university libraries could be divided into two phases. Phase one falls between 1948 and 1979 when the Nigerian economy was relatively buoyant and university libraries had virtually unrestricted access to foreign exchange for overseas purchase of books and subscription to journals. During this period, Nigerian university libraries grew very rapidly. This is exemplified by the libraries of the University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Nigeria and the Ahmadu Bello University which outgrew their library buildings within a few years of their establishment and had to put up new extensions to accommodate more books and students. The collections of these first generation universities now range between 500,000 and 800,000 volumes (Commonwealth Universities Yearbook 1997).

The second phase characterised by scarcity of resources for acquisition of books and journals began in the 1980s and it still continues. This came about as a result of a serious downturn in the Nigerian economy occasioned by unsteady crude oil prices and general mismanagement of the economy. Starting from 1980, books, like other items of merchandise, were placed under import licence and libraries had to scramble with businessmen to get the licence if they were to import books and journals. This regime continued until the mid-1980s. Gross devaluation of the local currency as a result of the International Monetary Fund inspired structural adjustment programme (SAP) further exacerbated this problem.

Since over 80% of the tertiary book needs of Nigerian universities is imported from Europe and America (Tamuno 1998), libraries found it difficult to bring in books and journals because of

their exorbitant prices relative to the local income level. Also, in view of the fact that this period coincided with the time universities started proliferating in Nigeria, the book collections of the libraries established during this period have largely remained in the region of 30,000 to 50,000 volumes almost two decades into their existence (Agboola 1993).

As a result of this development, the literature of collection development in Nigerian universities in the 1980s and 1990s is replete with lamentations of librarians on this unfortunate development. Examples of such writings include those by Ifidon (Ifidon BI. 1994), Olanlokun and Issah (1987), Ahiazu (1989), Douglas (1989), Ekoja (1995), Akobo (1992), Ifidon (1985a) and Balarabe (1992). Ekpenyong (1993) gave a very graphic illustration of the situation at the University of Ibadan, the country's premier university, where the acquisitions rate nose dived from 17,000 volumes during the 1976/77 session to 1,770 volumes in 1989.

To stem this difficult situation, the federal government in 1990 negotiated a World Bank Federal Universities Sector Adjustment Credit to inject some U.S. \$120 million into Nigerian federal universities in three instalments. The fund was for (a) the supply of library books, journals and equipment; (b) maintenance of broken down equipment and supply of new equipment; (c) staff development, and (d) recruitment of expatriate staff (Tamuno 1998). In recognition of the needs of the university libraries, 31% of the fund was earmarked for the supply of library materials and equipment.

Unfortunately, only the first instalment of the fund was drawn before the Nigerian political logjam of 1993 led to a premature conclusion. Notwithstanding, at the end of the exercise, the 20 universities that participated in the project (Tamuno 1998) had acquired some 178,978 volumes valued at US\$7.723 million. A similar project to be funded by the European Union for state-owned universities was also aborted because of the political situation in the country during the same period (Ifidon 1995).

Services

Services rendered by Nigerian university libraries include lending, reference, user education, inter-

library loans, short-term loans, bindery, photocopying, database and consultancy services. Home lending is common to virtually all Nigerian university libraries and the average number of books allowed to be borrowed for home use is four (Oke 1989). A few non-residential state-owned university libraries, however, do not allow their books to circulate partly for fear of losing them and also because of the small size of their collections relative to their student population.

User education has been a long-standing concern of Nigerian university libraries. Surveys carried out by Aguolu (1982, 1983), Unamah (1987) and Edem and Lawal (1996) gave detailed information about its problems and organisation in Nigerian university libraries. Currently, most Nigerian universities teach "library use" as a component of the "General Studies Programme". For any student to graduate from the university, it is compulsory to pass this credit course.

Currently, most Nigerian university libraries use manual charging systems for the circulation of their materials. Interest in automated charging systems has been evident since the early 1980s as surveys carried out by Alabi (1987a, 1987b), Muhammed (1987) and Womboh (1991) showed. However, with the recent adoption of the TINLIB library software by some federal universities, it is expected that very soon, there will be uniformity in automating circulation processes throughout the country.

Owing to the poor state of telecommunication in the country, inter-library loans among the universities has been left relatively undeveloped in spite of strenuous efforts made in the 1960s and 1970s to get it off the ground. To take advantage of the resources of other libraries, users have to go physically to such libraries to consult the materials. However, Nigerian university libraries cooperate by honouring requests for photocopies of journal articles.

Application of IT

Serious application of information technology to library processes started in Nigerian university libraries in the early 1990s. Individual efforts at library automation such as the one by the University of Lagos, University of Ibadan and the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the mid 1970s

and 1980s failed largely because of lack of technical know-how relating to software development and maintenance of hardware (Alabi 1987a). Studies by Ehikhamenor (1990), Tamuno (Tamuno 1992) and Adeniran, Adigun and Okoh (1992), gave useful information on the early days of the application of IT in Nigerian university libraries.

The greatest impetus to library automation in Nigerian university libraries so far has come from the World Bank project mentioned earlier. The World Bank gave automation in the university libraries as one of its conditions of support. As a result, the National Universities Commission (NUC) presented one microcomputer and a four-user local area network version of the TINLIB (The Information Navigator) software to each of the 20 participating libraries in 1992. This was after an agreement had been reached between the NUC and the University Librarians that all federal universities (Ogunleye 1997) use common software.

Recent surveys carried out by Ogunleye (1997) and Idowu and Mabawonku (1999) showed that application of IT is gradually taking firm root in Nigerian university libraries. Virtually all the libraries have personal computers while others have added CD-ROM drives so as to take advantage of published databases in that format (Mosuro 1996). The University of Ibadan Library is so far the most advanced in the application of IT in the country. It has fully automated its cataloguing and circulation processes using the network version of the TINLIB software capable of driving 20 workstations. Some federal universities and one state university use the four-workstation network version of the same software mostly for cataloguing. As computers become cheaper and more librarians acquire computer literacy, it is hoped that more of the manual processes in Nigerian universities will be automated.

Conclusion and recommendations

Over the last five decades, the university library sector has been the most vibrant as far as library development in Nigeria is concerned. This group is followed by research libraries, some of which are affiliated with university institutions. The phenomenal growth in the number of university institutions in the country over the last three decades has greatly aided this development. As a

result, the largest concentration of well-qualified and experienced librarians and information scientists is found in university libraries.

The academic status conferred on librarians in Nigerian universities has further helped in the development of the profession. As academics, librarians are expected to publish to earn promotions. This has resulted in librarians engaging themselves in research and publication to the extent that apart from South Africa, Nigerian university librarians enjoy prominence in the professional literature as a review of *Library and Information Science Abstracts* shows.

However, the economic downturn in the country over the last two decades has had a negative effect on the quantitative and qualitative growth of the university libraries in terms of stock and services. As a result, apart from the five first generation university libraries and a few of their second generation counterparts, most of the younger university libraries have remained very small in terms of their stock and services. Some of them are also poorly housed and thus not able to provide the right atmosphere for serious study and research.

Application of information and telecommunication technologies to library processes has also not moved at the expected speed. This resulted from poor funding due to the economic downturn as well as the poor state of the energy and telecommunication infrastructures in the country. However, the recently concluded World Bank loan facility to the federal university sector has awakened interest in library automation in the university libraries. Unfortunately, only a handful of Nigerian universities are currently connected to the Internet.

To improve this unfortunate situation, it is recommended that Nigerian university libraries should be better funded than hitherto. The National Universities Commission has taken a right step in this direction by creating the Library Development Fund (LDF) which ensures that 10% of federal universities' recurring expenditures goes to the university libraries. Very strict monitoring of this fund is required if it is not to be misused as has been the case in the past.

In view of the fact that over 80% of the book needs of Nigerian university libraries is for imported stock, it is very important in the short run that access to foreign exchange for the purchase

of books and subscription to periodicals be eased for university libraries. This will ensure that they utilise effectively the local currency made available to them. In the long run, deliberate policy measures should be put in place by the government to develop a viable local publishing industry, particularly at the tertiary and scholarly levels.

Nigerian university libraries must take advantage of modern communication and information technologies to open up their contents. All Nigerian university libraries should be fully automated and linked to the Internet. This will enable them to communicate easily with one another and to share their resources. It will also open up to them the resources of libraries located outside the country. The National Universities Commission has taken a step in the right direction by encouraging all Nigerian universities to participate in its NUNet (Nigerian Universities Network Project). Unfortunately, it is taking an unduly long time to achieve this objective.

Finally, emphasis must be placed on the training and retraining of university library staff. The economic problems and political log jam in the country that turned Nigeria into a pariah state over the last two decades had denied Nigerian academics and librarians the opportunity of spending their sabbatical leave in foreign universities and libraries as they used to do in the past. This opportunity must be restored so that librarians in Nigerian universities may be exposed to the practices and new developments in other more advanced countries with a view to improving their own professional practices when they return home.

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