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THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract
Libraries have been the companions of higher education for many centuries. Library in higher education is supposed to play a critical role in the teaching, research, and learning activities through selection, acquisition, organization, preservation, and given access to all sorts of relevant and current materials which include books and periodicals, manuscripts, rare documents, journals, maps, etc. needed by teachers and students. This paper therefore made an attempt to examine the state of higher education libraries and how they have been able to support the institutions to which they are attached. The academic library is a vital force at the heart of higher education. Yet, its future seems to be uncertain, hence the need to bring into limelight the challenges facing academic library in Africa and offer possible strategies for responding to them. It was discovered that higher education libraries in Africa have not been providing the expected services effectively and efficiently due to the severe economic challenges facing them such as inability to stock libraries with current and relevant information resources, under staffing among others. The study recommended that higher education library should be well funded in order to employ enough staff, acquire materials such as current journals, books, equipment, integrate the use of Information and Communication Technology to carry out their housekeeping operations and services in order to be more effective and efficient in the information delivery, global access to information, and also to easy retrieval of information.

Keywords: Higher education libraries, Academic libraries, Africa.

Introduction
Higher education generally refers to post-secondary education. According to Kavulya, 2004, it is schooling that takes place after high

school, which may be in the form of career training, continuing education, adult education, a two year Associate's Degree or a four-year bachelor's Degree. Higher education is an educational level that follows the completion of a school providing a secondary education such as high school and secondary school. It is a post-secondary school education. In many developed countries, a high proportion of the population is now entering higher education at some time in their lives. Higher education is important to national economies as an industry and as a training ground for personnel needed for the growth and development of the economy. Acquisition of higher education makes job easier to find, enhances promotions, and enables workers to earn decent wages and these often than not results in greater job satisfaction for employees. Education and library are two inseparable-indivisible concepts, because the existence of one is impossibility without the other. None of them is an end in itself; rather both of them together are a means to an ultimate end. Education is the result of acquired knowledge and the cumulation of observations and experiences, while a library is the fountain, source, protector and storehouse of that knowledge and experience.

Education cannot exist alone in the absence of library, and the library has no meaning if it cannot impart education. Education is an eye opener to a human being. It gives him perfect adequate knowledge, creates civic and rational sense, withdraws him from the subjection of low habits, selfish passions and ignoble pursuits, and thus educes him from abysmal darkness to limpid and perspicuous enlightenment. Library is an instrument of self-education, a means of knowledge and factual information, a centre of intellectual recreation, and a beacon of enlightenment that provides accumulated- preserved knowledge of civilization, which consequently enriches ones mental vision, and dignifies his habit, behaviour, character, taste, attitude, conduct and outlook on life. Library makes available all the records of knowledge of the past and present.

A well equipped library is a sine qua non for the intellectual, moral, and spiritual advancement and elevation of the people of a community. It is an indispensable element of the absolute well-being of the citizens and that of the nations at large. Education is acquired by people through certain institutions, schools, agencies, welfare bodies, museums, and organizations, and library is the most outstanding of

such institutions. These medium of education depend on library, which is the centre of wholesome education, and the quencher of thirst for concrete, fathomless, and ultimate knowledge. Library is a learned institution equipped with treasures of knowledge maintained, organised, and managed by personnel to educate the users.

Higher education library can be referred to as academic library. Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions. Academic library comprises school libraries, college libraries, and university libraries, whose main objective is to meet the academic needs of the particular institution for which it is created to serve. Libraries have been the companions of higher education for many centuries. They have been supporting the process of learning through the services they are rendering to their patrons. These include the selection, acquisition, organisation, storage and provision of access to materials such as books, manuscripts, rare documents, journals, maps etc. They also store and provide access to institutionally created materials which include graduate projects, theses and dissertations, technical reports, inaugural and faculty lectures etc.

Academic libraries provide services by making their collections available to their patrons through the services of librarians who are experts at finding and organizing information and at interpreting information needs. Libraries often provide a place of silence for studying and public facilities to have access to their electronic resources and the Internet. Rethinasami (2009) defines library with three fundamental functions which are; selection to create a collection, organization to enable access, and preservation for ongoing use. Libraries are places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources. The academic libraries in Africa are in economic crisis in particular in the context of deterioration in the higher education sector, Kavulya (2004).

According to Kavulya (2004), governments, many international and private agencies invest in higher education, in Africa. Despite the fact that university libraries have remained central to the academic activities, library and information services development have been generally perceived to be inadequate. Unless library and information services for higher education are adequately provided, the educational output will be retarded and the socio-economic development of the country will be endangered. It is therefore necessary to critically

appraise higher education libraries in Africa in order to proffer solutions to some of the challenges being faced in order to be effective, efficient, and relevant in the achievement of the overall goals of their institutions. The academic library is a vital force at the heart of higher education. Yet, its future seems to be uncertain, hence the need to bring into limelight the challenges facing the academic library and offer possible strategies for responding to them.

Role of Higher Education

Higher education generally refers to post-secondary education. In essence, it is any schooling that takes place after high school. Institutions of higher learning have the main responsibility for equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and skills required in positions of responsibility in government, business and profession. They also produce new knowledge through research and serve as conduits for the transfer, adaptation and dissemination of knowledge generated elsewhere in the world. According to World Bank (1994), higher education contributes to socio-economic development by equipping individuals with the means to improve their skills, knowledge and capability for productive work. It also enriches the political and cultural life of the community and strengthens the community's ability to productively use technology for social and economic development. Without a good training and research at a higher level, no society can ensure a level of development that matches the needs and expectations of its people.

According to Ifidon and Okoli (2002), universities are now being saddled with more functions which include pursuit, promotion, and dissemination of knowledge; provision of intellectual leadership; manpower development; promotion of social and economic modernisation; and promotion of intra- and inter-continental and international understanding.

The importance of higher education for growth and development of a nation is confirmed by Annan (2000) who asserted that higher education and research contribute to the eradication of poverty, to sustainable development and to progress towards reaching the internationally agreed development goals. UNESCO (2010), observed that the past decade provides evidence that higher education and research contribute to the eradication of poverty, to sustainable

development and to progress towards reaching the internationally agreed upon development goals.

The Role of Libraries in Higher Education

Higher education library is being referred to as academic library. Academic library is a library attached to a tertiary institution, and the measure of its excellence is determined by the extent to which its resources and services support the academic pursuits of the institution to which it is attached. Academic libraries include universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Libraries have been the companions of higher education for many centuries. They have been involved in the selection, acquisition, organization, preservation, and given access to all sorts of materials which include books and periodicals, manuscripts, rare documents, journals, maps, etc. that have supported the process of teaching, learning, research, and development learning.

Library in higher education is supposed to play a critical role in the teaching, research, and learning activities, through provision of relevant and current materials needed by teachers and students. Libraries from ages have been indispensable agents of information gathering, organizing, storing retrieval and dissemination. University scholars and some outside users depend on universities libraries for acquisition of knowledge (Fabunmi, 2004). Academic libraries are supposed to play a critical role in the teaching, research, and learning activities, through sharing expensive resources such as books and periodicals, films and videos, software and electronic databases, supporting instructional programs by responding to the requests of teachers and students, as well as preserving and organising artifacts and ideas. In addition to preservation, libraries ensure access to materials through indexes, catalogs, and other finding aids that allow learners to locate items appropriate to their needs.

Through collaborative efforts with faculty disciplines, the university library is expected not only to respond to trends in higher education affecting teaching, but also participate in shaping curricular innovations made necessary by changes in institutional needs. It is the duty of the library to ensure that information resources required in support of these innovations are identified and access is facilitated as part of a broadened process at the university. Higher education

libraries are partners in educating students, achieving their institutions' missions, and positioning libraries as leaders in assessment and continuous improvement on their campuses. Jackson and Hahn (1999) are of the view that an academic library is a place to support students' desire to feel connected to higher education's mission. Higher education library facilitates the identification and delivery of information regardless of format, in support of the universities' teaching, research and learning guided by an ongoing assessment of the information needs of its user community.

Libraries must demonstrate their value and document their contributions to overall institutional effectiveness and be prepared to address changes in higher education. Library is an instrument of education contributing to the intellectual development of the student.

At the university level, the library is a partner with the schools and departments of the university in meeting the teaching, research and learning commitments of the university. This role is embodied in four components: information transfer, partnership in teaching and livelong learning, partnership in research, and preservation of intellectual records.

According to Šušol (2009), the link between education and libraries is well defined and logically rooted in the fact that both educational institutions and libraries work with knowledge. The former spread knowledge, values, and beliefs through a system of schools, whereas the latter provide individuals with access to information resources in publicly accessible archives of knowledge. While Virkus and Metsar (2004) are of the opinion that academic library has traditionally been seen as the 'heart of the university' serving the academic community of its parent institution. At the university level, the library is a partner with the schools and departments of the university in meeting the teaching, research and learning commitments of the university. This role is embodied in four components: information transfer, partnership in teaching and livelong learning, partnership in research, and preservation of intellectual records. In other words, the university library facilitates the identification and delivery of information regardless of format, in support of the universities' teaching, research and learning guided by an ongoing assessment of the information needs of its user community.

As the role that higher education institutions play in lifelong learning becomes increasingly clear, so does the role of the library in helping individual acquire the skills of lifelong learning. Through partnership with other teaching faculty, the university library offers programmes of information literacy, which emphasises critical thinking skills, and addresses the use of information in a variety of formats and by so doing prepares university students for a lifelong learning. According to Aguolu (1983), university library is the most important organ in the institution. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depend largely upon the state of the health and excellence of its library.

Beenham and Harrison (1990), define the main objectives of an academic library as; to serve the needs of the academic community, to provide reference materials at appropriate levels, to provide study areas for users, to provide a lending service appropriate to the different types of users and to provide an active information service. Wilson and Tauber (1980) assert that library plays a critical role in the realization of the major functions of an academic institution which are teaching, research and extension services because it is the heart beat of that institution. Library is one of the areas being accessed during accreditation exercise in higher institutions. The quality of the library holdings, the currency of information materials, among others are the criteria being used to attract full accreditation, interim and deny accreditation. There is no educational institution that can be accredited without a standard and well equipped library (Okogwu and Akidi, 2011). Library is the centre for teaching, learning and research activities, thus helping the higher institution to achieve its mission and vision.

Higher education libraries are seen as having a bigger role as engine of growth and development. The mission of a university in Africa can therefore be defined as to contribute to national development and the community through first long term and sustainable development policies, and secondly promoting social justice such as human rights, equity, democratic values, as well as the rights of children, minorities and disadvantaged groups. Chisita (2009) notes that the basic characteristic of a good academic library is its total identification with its institution because the measure of its excellence is determined by the extent to which its resources and services support the academic

pursuits of the institution.

According to Khanna (1987), a well stocked, well staffed and well organized library is definitely the sine qua non of a modern educational system. The basic function of an academic library is to provide education and this means that it should be used as a dynamic instrument for explaining and expanding the horizons of knowledge. It exists to feed and nourish the intellect of students and staff and also invite all those who enter its portals to fully participate its intellectual and cultural life.

The needs of the users of academic libraries are reflected by the courses offered and the academic research undertaken within those institutions. Anunobi and Okoye (2008) state that a well established library is critical for an academic institution as a convenient point for learning, teaching and research. Currently libraries are struggling to maintain their place as the central point of inquiry in an educational institution. Academic libraries are no longer restricted to the print activities like cataloguing , classification , circulation and other bibliographic services but they have extended their efforts to interdisciplinary concepts and information technology.

According to Kavulya (2004), the justification for investing in higher education libraries lies in the extent to which a linkage can be demonstrated between such an investment and improvement in quality, efficiency and achievement in university education. At the university, the library has been seen as an instrument of teaching alongside lecture and discussion methods and the librarian serves as a teacher, guiding the student in the ways of investigation and research by acquiring information materials to support every course in the curriculum and every research project of the faculty; organising them in a manner that permits easy access to their contents and also ensuring that such access is facilitated by giving users the necessary skills to retrieve the required information.

Challenges of Higher Education Libraries
Libraries in higher education are facing the following challenges:

Economic Challenges: Libraries in the academic institutions are not adequately stocked with relevant information resources due to the diminishing of funds allocated to library as a result of the global recession. This has great implications for teaching, learning, research

and development. According to Tise (2011), the economic situation in many developing countries is such that many libraries have not had the resources to purchase any books for the past five to ten years, inadequate journals subscriptions and limited access to electronic information, which has led to libraries being unable to adequately support teaching, learning and research activities in higher education. This is having a negative and damaging effect on training and research capacities. The main purpose of higher education libraries is to provide access to information to support the objectives of their parent institutions.

Africa's university libraries are under-resourced and underutilized, they are facing a crisis that, though seemingly quiet, has the potential to affect the continent's intellectual capital for decades to come (Cullen, 2004; Kavulya, 2006; and Raju, 2009). This trend is exacerbated by continuously declining budget levels adding to the inability of university libraries to satisfy the growing demand for education.

There are no basic information infrastructure, and poor policy implementation have been identified as some of the challenges facing academic libraries in Africa. Another challenge is the information explosion which has accelerated the demand for information in various forms and format. Many of the higher education libraries are not having the wherewithal to introduce the use of Information and Communication Technology to the libraries. There is a need to automate and digitize higher education libraries in order to be relevant in serving their users better in this era of information explosion.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that despite the importance of academic library in supporting the achievement of it's institutional goals, it has not been providing the expected services effectively and efficiently in Africa due to the severe economic challenges being faced, such as inability to stock libraries with current and relevant information resources, understaffing among others. Thus, establishing that it is necessary for higher education libraries to be well funded in order to remain relevant.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

1. Higher education library should be well funded in order to acquire materials such as current journals, books, equipment.
2. Maintenance of the library infrastructure should equally be carried out when and where it is necessary.
3. Adequate staff should be employed to man academic libraries.
4. Academic libraries should integrate the use of Information and Communication Technology to carry out their housekeeping operations and services in order to be more effective and efficient in the information delivery, global access to information, and also for easy retrieval of information.
5. Higher education libraries should form consortia in order to share resources both in the processing of information and delivering of information services.
6. Management of higher education should begin to recognize how essential libraries are to the achievement of institutional goals. There is the need to give libraries the recognition they deserve.

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