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Demystifying the Roles of Libraries and Librarians in Fostering Political Stability in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative review of the roles of libraries and librarians in fostering political stability in Nigeria. The objective is to demonstrate the indispensable place of libraries and librarians in fostering political stability in Nigeria. The paper highlights the basic clarifications of the major concepts in the review with emphasis on the concepts of libraries and political stability. The nexus between libraries and political stability was established in the study. Also, provision of access to information and knowledge, promotion of open science and scholarship, combatting the spread of fake news and consumption, community engagement and resilience, preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge etc. were among the roles of libraries and librarians discussed. It was concluded that information access and use by the citizens remains the cardinal principles for entrenching good governance, peace, and security of life and property. The need to declare state of emergency on the state and condition of public libraries across the States and local government areas in Nigeria is highly recommended. This declaration will energize all the levels of government including the NGOs to intervene in remodelling the public library services in Nigeria.

Keywords: Libraries, Librarians, Roles, Political Stability

Introduction

Every nation needs political stability to drive and achieve its national growth and development. It has therefore been considered as an important precondition and foundation blocks for achieving national development and sustainable democracy. Today, it can be rightly argued that, Nigeria is swimming in the ocean of political instability. In recent times, factors such as political and social upheavals, ethnic and religious crises, banditry and kidnappings, terrorism and insurgency; corruption and ignorance etc. have taken centre stage in our national life thereby making it difficult or near impossible for Nigeria to drive and achieve its National Goals as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution as amended. The problem of political instability has since independence remain the major obstacle to the growth and development of Nigeria, (Enyiaka, et al, 2018).

In order to address this problem, Nyerere as far back as 1963 cited in Mohammed (2010) argued that “the antidote to disunity and instability consists of deliberate steps towards fostering a feeling of nationhood”. The big issue here is how do we go about fostering a feeling of nationhood to the majority of citizens? It is my personal conviction that this is the fundamental mission libraries at all levels seek to accomplish in every society. Libraries, all over the world, by their nature, intent and purposes are established “to inculcate in the minds of citizens the spirit of honesty, discipline, love of one’s country and above all positive attitude towards good

neighbourliness, transparency and accountability”, (Umar, 2018). They also embraced the social responsibility to offer services that bridge social, political and economic barriers and make special efforts to extend their information services to marginalized people, (Krolak, 2006).

In a similar mode, Okiy (2005) averred that “the library provides political education and awareness to the populace with the aim of empowering them for greater political participation. By implication, when citizens are not properly informed, they will become information poor and eventually they will become dangerously and unconsciously ignorant. Thus, the manifestations of such ignorance undoubtedly is the driver of the political instability being witnessed in many parts of Nigeria. This paper therefore attempts to demystify the roles of libraries and librarians in fostering political stability in Nigeria. In specific terms, the objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. Understand the basic concepts of Libraries; Librarians and Political Stability.
2. Establish the nexus between Libraries and Political Stability
3. Highlights the roles of Libraries and Librarians in fostering political stability
4. Identify the challenges and proffer recommendations

Understanding the Basic Concepts

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher finds it expedient to provide some definitions and explanations of the following concepts for ease of comprehension and clarifications. The concepts are: Demystifying; Libraries; Librarians and Political stability.

Concept of Libraries

Prior to defining the concept of library, it is pertinent to first provide a dictionary meaning of the word “Demystifying”. Demystifying according to Merriam Webster online dictionary is “to eliminate the mystifying features of something”. Put simply, demystifying is to rid of mystery or to give more clarification and make it easier to understand. In essence, the researcher introduced this word in his work in order to attempt to unravel some misconceptions, misunderstandings and wrong perception of people about what libraries and Librarians can do for national development.

What is a Library?

It is no altruism that quite a number of perspectives and definitions have been put forward by several scholars on the concept of library especially in this modern times. This divergence of views was due to the simple fact that a library is a living institution, it’s never static but keeps changing and responding to the ever changing information needs of the community it serves. We shall attempt to highlight very few of them. To start with, it is pertinent to introduce a quote by Norman Cousins in the ALA Bulletin as quoted in Allison (2013). He provides some wisdom for librarians struggling with the changing concept of a library:

The library is not a shrine for the worship of books. It is not a temple where literary incense must be burned or where one’s devotion to the bound book is expressed in ritual. A library, to modify the famous metaphor of Socrates, should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas – a place where history comes to life.

Also, corroborating the above assertion, Mohammed (2017) conceived libraries and information centers as veritable portals of organized information useful for coping with varieties of information needs, expectations and challenges. He further buttressed that:

Libraries remain strategic platforms for reading and relaxation in safe and serene environment, individual study and consultation; formal and informal peer group study; internet access and use (web browsing and e-mailing); meeting and socialization; academic and non-academic support services such as teaching and learning ... and finding solutions to touring exhibitions and displays; films and slide shows; debate and discourse; social, cultural and political networking and integration etc.

From the above conceptions, it is apparently clear that libraries since time immemorial can be regarded as multidimensional institution and multipurpose facilities with a strong attachment to serving the needs of their users by way of dispensing information and knowledge at the right time, in the right format and at the right place. It provides all inclusive safe and friendly environment and a unique forum for social networking, book clubs and reading groups, (ALA, 2021). Also, libraries prize honest information- not propaganda- and a diversity of voices allowing users to select and evaluate, (Byrne, 2000). Corroborating this fact, Atkinson (2001) asserted that the purpose of libraries is to provide citizens with the intellectual resources to persuade their fellow citizens to accept particular perspectives, adopt particular values and take particular action. By so doing, citizens will have no cause to engage in actions inimical to the unity and progress of their country. Regrettably, libraries as invaluable as they have been in nation building, their news and development have not been palatable at all in Nigeria as evidenced by deliberate neglect and elimination of school, public and national libraries.

Who is a Librarian?

Defining who a librarian is will directly be linked to the evolving nature, dimensions and functions of the library in this modern times. Traditionally, a librarian is solely conceived as an individual who keeps books and other information resources. However, Ekpoloromo (2024) argued that today's librarians are integral to the functioning of libraries as vital hubs of knowledge, innovation and community engagement. Arising from this perspective, librarian can best be described as a seasoned information resource manager, communication expert, instructor, an advocate of knowledge access, community mobilizer, data expert, publisher and information and communication technology specialist.

Also, librarians work in various organizations and institutions including public, academic, school and special libraries. In order to cope with emerging challenges characterized by advances in information and communication technologies, librarians have recognized and proactively adapted by seeking to acquire the ICT skills needed for them to deliver modern library services to their user communities. This is evident considering the massive restructuring of curriculum of Library and Information Science schools in Nigeria.

Concept of Political Stability

It is obvious that political stability appeared to be one of the most crucial issues facing Nigeria as a nation. However, defining political stability has proved somewhat very difficult and problematic. This is perhaps due to divergence of opinions, perspectives and understandings amongst scholars and political scientists. According to Sottilota (2013) political stability can be broadly defined as the nonexistence or absence of regular attacks on lives and property, widespread violence and civil conflict within the boundaries of a country. He added that it can also be defined as the consistent rule of one particular regime. It can also be said to be a condition of the absence in the polity of negative social features such as: communal violence, rural or religious insurgence, urban riots, coup d'état, civil war, disagreements on sources of living and power (Raji & Wahab, 2016). Elsewhere, Briggs (2020) notes that political stability

is an indication of government's ability to grapple with the many problems it encounters in carrying out its multiple and complex responsibilities to the satisfaction of the generality of its citizens. Thus, absence of the above conditions and situations inevitable leads to political instability.

From the foregoing definitions, political stability can be conceived to denote a system in which a nation is driven by greater sense of patriotism; unity of purpose; consciousness; good governance; rule of law and above all sound and qualitative education. At this juncture, it is pertinent to note that political stability is never an absolute concept; neither it is a linear equation nor fixed but a flexible concept. This is in recognition of the fact many nations including Nigeria have in one way or the other experienced some kinds of political instabilities. Further to the above definitions, it is undeniable to state that Nigeria cannot lay claim to be politically stabled. It is on record that since independence, Nigeria is still grappling with myriads of signs and symptoms of political instability which ranges from incessant cases of armed banditry and kidnappings; Boko haram insurgency and terrorism; Fulani Herdsmen crises; IPOB and Yoruba nation agitations; poverty and unemployment etc. However, it will be incorrect to suggest that Nigeria as a nation has done nothing to address these instabilities all these years. Regrettably, despite the adoption of a number of mechanisms and strategies ranging from Education, Federalism, National Youth Service Corps, Federal character, Constitutionalism, and the establishment of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, no corresponding impact has been seen in its democracy, (Ene et al, 2013). Then, one wonders why such investments failed. This, in the opinion of the researcher could be largely due to government's inability to invest heavily on education and libraries at all levels. On this note, Umar (2018) maintained that:

if successive governments and the present have invested the huge quantum of monies used for promotional strategy into the rebuilding, and equipping Nigerian Libraries at all levels be it National; Academic; Public; School and Special libraries, in such a way that appropriate infrastructures, facilities, resources/services are procured, made available and accessible for the citizenry, Nigeria would have been long ago a united, prosperous, discipline, information rich and peaceful nation.

The Nexus between Libraries and Political Stability

The nexus between libraries and political stability can best be understood when one attempts to juxtapose the goals of education in Nigeria, vis-à-vis the strategies for the realization of these goals. The National Policy of Education 1983, by FGN (2014) captures the goals of education in Nigeria to include the following: Development of the individual into a morally sound , patriotic and effective citizen; total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world; provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education within and outside the formal school system; inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity and development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

In order to achieve these beautiful and laudable goals, the policy document further provides amongst others that: all tiers of government shall promote the establishment and support of reading clubs in schools, community libraries and other such resources that will enhance effective learning. Now, the big question begging for answer is why and how did Nigeria slip into this mess in spite of the above-mentioned policy framework? By and large, it is crystal clear that quality and sound education remains the cardinal instrument in building stable, united

and prosperous nation. On the other hand, libraries all over the world remain the major determinant of a qualitative education at all levels of our educational systems. Obviously, education and libraries are the two most important factors that can create such a democratic consciousness of social and political responsibility in every citizen. It can therefore be right to deduce that without establishment of and support to library and information services at all levels, the Nigerian nation is unlikely to make any appreciable and quantifiable progress in realizing its national educational goals as stipulated in the national policy on education. This ugly development and its attendant consequences can indeed be argued as the explanations behind the occurrence and reoccurrence of so many instabilities such as communal and religious crises; state of anarchy; rising cases of armed banditry and kidnapping; other forms of brutality and inhumanness; failure of constitutionalism and rule of law; corruption and unemployment etc. in Nigeria. Libraries are therefore, essentially established in order to educate, enlighten, inform and liberate the citizens from such a state of dangerous ignorance due to largely poverty of ideas which in turn leads to political instability. [Enyiaka et al \(2018\)](#) noted that “the earlier we have better-informed electorates, the closer we get to political stability”.

Commenting further, Stephen Harpen, the Canadian opposition leaders as cited in [Inokuba \(2014\)](#) notes that “information is the life blood of a democracy, without adequate access to information about government policies, programmes, citizens and parliamentarians cannot make informed decisions and incompetent or corrupt government can be hidden under a cloak of secrecy”. Also, Aboyade as cited in [Okuy \(2005\)](#) corroborates that, the provision of information through libraries has been shown to be a major factor because of its potential for giving new knowledge, raising consciousness, strengthening links and achieving the integration of disparate social groups. It is an important means of mobilizing people for socio-economic and political development. By and large, if one look at the above discussions, it becomes evidently clear that libraries as avenues through which information and knowledge is being generated and disseminated to citizens of all ages have been a key player in fostering political stability, good governance and overall national development. Expectedly, provision of timely and accurate information can provide the citizen the opportunity to seek and ask for the power it deserves in a democratic environment, ([Mpoitsis & Koutsupias, 2014](#)).

The roles of Libraries and Librarians in Achieving Political Stability

Libraries as service institution have a pivotal role to play in achieving political stability in Nigeria. This is true because information is conceived to be the catalyst for socio political and economic development of every country. Consequently, the roles of libraries and librarians in achieving political stability in Nigeria are highlighted as follows:

Provision of Access to Information and Knowledge

Generally, libraries are fundamentally created to be responsive avenues whereby citizens’ information needs are taken into cognizance in their design and delivery of various information products and services. The ultimate goal is to ensure and guarantee that library and information services are smarter in such a way that the diverse information needs of citizens are met or exceeded. To achieve this goal, librarians must be seen to continually sense the feelings, aspirations, desires and needs of citizens and subsequently respond to them immediately by creating a conducive information environment/space where appropriate and quality types of information, knowledge and technologies are assembled and accessible for use. For instance, [Alex-Nmecha \(2017\)](#) stated that the library makes information available during the electioneering campaigns and accommodates those who want know more about politics, assist in bridging the gap between the poor, and the less privileged who could not afford

newspapers, magazines etc. to read and get educated about what is happening in the society. Also, [Idogbe and Philip \(2020\)](#) corroborate that libraries play a key role in making information available to enhance political consciousness and participation in Nigeria, access to information enables the citizenry to make informed judgments regarding government performance.

To foster political stability in Nigeria, libraries and librarians must prioritize access to information for all citizens through the exploitation of social networking sites and institutional repositories. These platforms will help motivate and attract the attention of citizens to access and use information and knowledge for their self-development and nation building. As the digital world continues to evolve, libraries help ensure that people can access the information they need – regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers, ([American Library Association, 2021](#)). It is therefore instructive to state that as citizens have become so attracted and attached to social networking sites, then, libraries should endeavor to establish their active presence on these sites such as Facebook, Instagram, twitter, YouTube, telegrams and WhatsApp.

Promotion of Open Science and Scholarship

Undoubtedly, libraries have been at the core of science and scholarship advancement for centuries. Today, the concept of open science model has evolved and therefore “it has become very expedient for the academic libraries to understand the nature and scope open science in order to adapt and expand their services to a new research and educational paradigms, ([Tzanova, 2020](#)). More importantly, with the arrival of the digital age, the need for open science has become louder for all sectors of society ([Grand et al., 2016](#)). Open Science is often described as a multifaceted notion encompassing open access to publications, open research data, open-source software, open collaboration, open peer review, open notebooks, open educational resources, open monographs, citizen science, or research crowdfunding ([Foster, 2017](#)) in order to remove barriers in the sharing of scientific research output and raw data.

The proliferation of open science initiatives is also shown by the emergence of an increasing number of open access resources: full-text and factual (Open DOAR, ScienceOpen, CORE, PubMed Central, arXiv, BioMed Central, DOAJ, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Bentham Open, PLOS, Hindawi, Springer Open, Science Direct, NISCAIR, DOAB, CyberLeninka, Socionet archive, ... etc. ([Redkina, 2021](#)). It can therefore be rightly argued that, the open science and scholarship movement is disrupting the traditional information and knowledge production ecosystems. Thus, it is imperative that librarians exploit this opportunity and take the lead to promote unhindered access to different types of information and knowledge in different formats, various types of data seamless connectivity to various publishing vendors and industries on the global scale.

In the same vein, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has recognized open access as a key issue on its information agenda, as evidenced by the work of librarians in ICT infrastructure development, service delivery, and capacity building through information literacy and security programs, ([IFLA, 2015](#)). Interestingly, academic libraries in Nigeria, have keyed into the open science initiatives by ensuring that their information resources and services (books, journals, proceedings, conference/seminar papers etc.) are open through their institutional repositories and websites.

Combatting Fake News Consumption

Fake news is a serious menace to democratic societies as they disrupt citizens consciousness to rationally think of what is write and what is wrong in the political environment. This is because fake news portends a serious threat to information ecosystems, as truth is no longer

related to authority, expertise or facts but to interpretation, perception, emotions and sentiments, (Cooke, 2018). In today's information age, the rapid proliferation of misinformation poses a significant challenge to democratic institutions, undermining the principles of trust, transparency, and accountability that underpin a democratic society, (Cooke, 2018). However, libraries are generally perceived as an important player against the spread and consumption of fake news phenomenon. Young et al., (2021) averred that “public libraries have often been seen as potential defenders against the spread of misinformation”.

Regrettably, the speed at which fake news travels over the Internet and social media outlets have compelled library and information professionals to aggressively engage in teaching citizens to become information literate. To address the menace of fake news, citizens must acquire skills for evaluating information, the skills for separating information that is credible enough to be useful from that which is not, (Barclay, 2018). Current literature indicates that libraries mainly focus on information literacy instruction as a means to combat misinformation (Revez & Corujo, 2021).

Also, De Paor and Heravi (2020) emphasize that public libraries are well-positioned in society for delivering training programs regarding misinformation, while at the same time gaining the trust of the communities they serve. Young et al. (2021) assert that aside from effective programming (e.g., community workshops educating people on how to spot sources of false information), public libraries could benefit from the development of tools meant to aid in keeping librarians up-to-date on relevant misinformation. They further contend that teaching the students information literacy and using various evaluation criteria (such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA), 2017 infographic on how to spot fake news, CRAAP and RADAR) as well as directing users to authentic sources of information via LibGuides and websites could be one of the solutions.

Community Engagement and Resilience

Today, libraries are conceived as spaces for community engagement and resilience. This development embodies a dynamic approach to serving the needs of diverse communities, thereby, fostering understandings, mutual relationships, peaceful coexistence, political stability and creating meaningful dialogue and interactions. Ashikuzzaman (2024) argued that in today's libraries community engagement encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and initiatives designed to involve citizens in library services and programs actively. He further emphasized that by actively listening to community feedbacks, collaborating with local organizations, and tailoring services to meet the unique needs of different groups, libraries can strengthen social cohesion, promote literacy and community challenges. As Kranich (2005) stated, “Working closely with a rich and diverse array of partners, libraries of all types must help rekindle civic engagement, promote greater citizen participation, and increase community problem solving and decision making”

With the increased rise in political hostilities and uncertainties in our various communities characterized by political party differences, religious intolerance, excessive hunger, poverty and ignorance, community engagement in libraries remains the viable and strategic investment in order to ensure and guarantee a safer, secured, healthy and politically stabled communities in Nigeria. To buttress this point, Goulding, (2009); Richter et al., (2019) stated that, on a daily basis, librarians meet a wide range of individual and social needs, including providing internet access and verified, curated, and trusted information; access to social services; spaces for nonprofits, businesses, and unhoused and underhoused populations; programs for toddlers, teens, adults, and the elderly; and individualized support services to patrons of all ages, incomes, and literacy levels. Libraries are thus in a position to make significant contributions

Lastly, libraries must be seen to continually engage their various user communities through well-coordinated activities such as “grassroot mobilization; participatory decision-making processes, volunteerism and partnerships with local organizations and institutions, (Ashikuzzaman, 2024). Regrettably, public libraries in Nigeria have been neglected in such a manner that they cannot function effectively and efficiently due to absence of relevant resources, facilities, equipment, technologies and skilful librarian and other supportive staff. This ugly scenario calls for urgent intervention by government and other stakeholders to resuscitate the state and condition of public libraries in Nigeria.

Preservation and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge

Another critical role libraries can play in achieving political stability in Nigeria is preservation and dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge (IK). IK simply connotes any knowledge which is created by the locals through their daily cultural activities and engagements. Indigenous knowledge encompasses the accumulated wisdom, practices, beliefs and traditional know-how developed and passed down through generations within indigenous communities (Baporikar, 2022; Lodhi and Mikulecky, 2010). According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) IK covers all fields of human endeavour including, but not limited to, agriculture, environment, pharmacology, health, trade and economics, and political systems. Regrettably, this wealth of knowledge faces an array of threats in the face of globalization and the rapid advancement of digital technologies, (Chigwada, 2024).

Libraries therefore should as a matter of policy exploit digital technologies as “gatekeepers of information and advocates of inclusive knowledge access” (Afful-Arthur et al., 2021) to collect, integrate, preserve and disseminate IK to various local communities they serve. By and large, digital repositories, online archives and innovative technologies can facilitate wider access to indigenous knowledge beyond geographical limitations (Hodder and Beckingham, 2022). Additionally, librarians should ensure that IK is wholly integrated into “rural information systems and services in order to give the locals a sense of belongings and ownership as well as serve as a motivating force that will bring back the rural people who feel that their local histories, cultures, and stories are not adequately and professionally represented, (Umar, 2020).

To this end, libraries can also, engage in building collaboration, alliances and partnerships with related professionals and associations as well as library advocacy in order to ensure information access and use for all thereby fostering political socialization and culture which will in turn guarantee political participation and stability in Nigeria.

Challenges

In trying to perform their essential roles as earlier stated above, Nigerian Libraries encounter some daunting challenges which directly or indirectly affected negatively the accomplishment of their roles to the citizens and the nation at large. Many of these challenges have been reported by researchers such as Krolak (2006); Elisha (2006); Aiyebilehin (2012); Umar et al., (2018). However, the researcher identified the following as the major challenges militating against the accomplishment of the role of libraries and librarians in fostering political stability in Nigeria. The challenges are:

- ✓ The dearth of public library services in Nigeria
- ✓ The near absence of School libraries in most primary and secondary schools in Nigeria
- ✓ The skillsets requirements of librarians is a major issue

- ✓ Lack of funding of libraries by governments at all levels
- ✓ Poor funding of Nigerian educational sector
- ✓ Non implementation of the National Policy on Education

Conclusion

Political stability serves as the oxygen for national rebirth, growth and development. It guarantees and sustains stability democratic governance, peaceful coexistence and overall national development. Thus, information access and use by the citizens remains the cardinal principles for entrenching good governance, peace, and security of life and property. It has therefore become obvious and necessary for government at all levels including other relevant non-governmental organizations to ensure that libraries are adequately funded in such a way that they can guarantee citizenry are well informed and educated with relevant knowledge and skills for nation building. It is hoped that government at all levels appreciate the indispensability of libraries and librarians as partners in nurturing an information rich population for sustained political stability in Nigeria.

The way forward

In view the above discussions, the following suggestions are made:

- ❖ A state of emergency should be declared on the state and condition of public libraries across the States and local government areas in Nigeria. This declaration will energize all the levels of government including the NGOs to intervene in remodelling the public library services in Nigeria.
- ❖ There is an urgent need for government at all levels to adhere to the provisions of the National Policy on Education on the establishment of school libraries at the pre-primary schools, primary schools and post-primary schools respectively. This will go along way in inculcating the spirit of curiosity and reading in the minds of young children.
- ❖ Librarians should as a matter of professional relevance and identity should be proactive and adapt to the emerging skills in communication technologies, innovation management, data science, advocacy and interpersonal skills respectively. These skills will help them in delivering information services to their user communities.
- ❖ Adequate budgetary allocations should be provided for the development and continuous improvement of libraries' facilities, resources and equipment by all levels of government in Nigeria.
- ❖ Also, Nigeria's educational system should be well funded to ensure availability and adequacy of qualified manpower and relevant resources, facilities and equipment needed to deliver functional and effective learning.

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