CHALLENGES OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The article examines the meaning of democracy, emerging (new) democracy in Africa and Nigeria, benefits of democracy in Nigeria. Also discussed are the role of university libraries and librarians in promoting democracy, university and the society, expectations and demands of library staff in a democratic society, the expectations and demands of library users in democracy; constraints facing university libraries are also highlighted. Seven point recommendations for the promotion of effective university libraries are postulated.

Introduction

In a Nigeria university, the university librarian is a principal officer of the university, a council member, a member of the university management, a Senate member and the head of the university library. He is involved in the policy matters that involve the university and its library. For universities that run courses in humanities and social sciences, especially programs that deal with theories of democracy, the university library is expected to champion the selection, purchase, processing and dissemination of necessary information to its community of users. These responsibilities of the university librarian pose a lot of challenges in a democratic set up. Therefore, in examining challenges of university library administration in Nigeria, the paper will be considering democracy in Africa and Nigeria, role of university libraries in promoting democracy, the university and the society among other issues.

Emerging democracy in Africa

According to Obasanjo (1992), leadership in Africa has passed through different experiences after over three decades of independence. These include romance and adventure with "African socialism". Marxist–Leninist theory and practice, one party governance, no party governance and Military governance, but as of 1990 African was awash with new awakening from home grown and home nourished democratic governing with human rights, accountability, transparency and developmental attitude and orientation. To him (Obasanjo) democracy is both an expression and expansion of man's freedom and has overtime become synonymous with man's progress. He further informed that democracy in the African continent is the option which the governed prefers, but which is often denied them by the governor under one pretext and pretence or the other. The principles of democracy in Africa may be the same and the factors similar, but the practice is usually different, depending on the history and the culture of the people and the practitioner. In other words Obasanjo is saying that the way of life of a people determines the type of democracy they practice.

In discussing the emerging democracy in Africa, Shinkaiye (2004) quoted Kilgour (2000) who stressed the fact that one overriding truth about democracy is that it is precious but vulnerable and there is no place where this vulnerability is more experienced than in Africa. He also dwelt on the fact that

military force has for a long period constituted a major obstacle to the growth and sustenance of democratic governance by seizing power with depressing frequency and often dominating the political process even under civilian regimes. For this, Nigeria provided a perfect case study because only few countries in Africa have experienced greater trauma in attempts to build democracy than Nigeria. In the view of Metz and Butts (2003), the sad effect of the decades of military rule in Nigeria, like most other countries in Africa, is that the continent's armed forces nearly lost all semblance of professionalism. Furthermore, civil-military relations were eroded (Shinkaiye, 2004).

From the late 1980s, Africa began to experience a wave of democratic transitions and popular movements in support of open government (Shinkaiye, 2004). The emergence of these movements in the opinion of Metz and Butts (2003) coincided with the changes in the global strategic landscape that resulted from the end of the cold war. These movements provided fresh opportunities in a region long seized by violence, repression, corruption and inept governance. In the case of Nigeria, the military establishment itself became the catalyst through which the transition to democracy was achieved in May 1999 (Metz and Butts, 2003).

Emerging democracy in Nigeria as argued by purists is that Nigeria does not yet have a democratic system. Rather, what we have is a system of periodic election for choosing political office holders (Ibori, 2004). According to Ibori there is no need to be troubled over the definition of democracy in Nigeria because the experiences of people in the world differ a great deal in relation to the forms and traditions of democratic governance. However, the holding of periodic elections is an essential element of democracy.

The history of the evolution of democratic culture in Nigeria has been troubled by too many interruptions. Ibori argued that in the first place the British did not show enough commitment to enthroning democracy in the sixty years of its colonial rule. They had hardly left when the armed forces seized power and truncated the development. Secondly, the residues of feudal autocracy have survived for too long especially in the northern sections of the country. Feudal aristocracy and military dictatorship have combined to undermine the possibilities of fostering a democratic order suitable for multi-ethnic and plural society in Nigeria. This has also affected different sectors in the country, especially the universities and the university libraries.

Benefits of Democracy in Nigeria

Democracy presents a great opportunity for the empowerment of civil society. According to Shinkaiye (2004), democracy subordinates states to people and makes the people their own government. It also implies freedom of speech, association and assembly, these are ideals that are contradictory to the hierarchical command structure of the military which is dictatorial in nature. However, the main ingredients of democracy are based on the concepts of openness, transparency and the rule of law.

In Nigeria the most stubborn impediment to democratic governance is the demolition of the federalist system during the military rule. Ibori (2004) observed that the federal arrangement was discussed and negotiated for over a decade before its experiment started in 1954. Refinement was brought into its theory and operation from 1954 to 1963 with the Independence and Republican constitutions. Though the system encountered strains and stresses, it worked considering the country's varieties in culture,

politics and resource endowment. Also in the view of Ibori (2004), federalism brought a lot of advantages to Nigeria from 1954 to 1966, but one of the emphases is education which the regional governments encouraged. It is worthy to note that the first generation universities in Nigeria that came into existence were within this period. These universities assisted in training of man power needed in all sectors of economic, political, educational, industrial, etc fabrics of the society (Nigeria). The establishment of these universities also brought along with them the various university libraries to provide resources for teaching, research and learning.

The Role of University Libraries and Librarians in Promoting Democracy

Raseroka (1999) opined that, university libraries derive their mission from that of the parent organization, the university. This therefore, implies that the historical development of university libraries has been influenced by the contexts in which the parent organizations operate. Perceptions held by university's stakeholders in the role of the library as a contributor to these core functions, influence the environment within the university library and crafts its own mission and role. In the view of Wolpert (1998) the commonly accepted perception is that the university education process values self-motivated discovery on the part of students and faculty and assumes that libraries and librarians play an important and sometimes essential role in education. Education is the bedrock for democracy because it forms the focal point to literacy. Literacy provides the path to freedom of speech and association which is considered as the pillar to democracy.

Major components of the academic library that most university administrators sometimes lack an appreciation of in the view

of Raseroka (1999) include among other things:

i. inputs: Staffing, budgeting, information technologies, collections and physical facilities.
ii. Process: Policy development and advocacy, collection development, organization and management.
iii. Out-puts: User instruction individually and for university classes, human resources development, reference services, provision of funding, tools, catalogues and databases of local and regional information, collections, archival and special collections and document delivery services.
iv. Constant evaluation of services through ongoing feedback from stakeholders: students, staff and the public (p. 3).

These major components of the academic library as highlighted above form the bases for sound democracy in the university library, especially feedback from stakeholders. This is an opportunity for library materials to be freely provided to the users, who include politicians (the public) who require information that will expose them to international standards of democracy and its tenets or practices.

University and the Society

The flip-side of the privilege of being unique are the high expectations and the delicate relationships between the universities and the different stakeholders in the society. Academic liberty and university autonomy in Africa acquire a very particular meaning and these pose permanent challenge (Matos, 1999).

Government-University Relations

According to Matos (1999), with very few exceptions, universities in Africa are public institutions and receive most if not all

their funding from public treasures. Other sources of funding are grants provided by funding agencies for very specific and earmarked activities, frequently for research and postgraduate training activities. Governments at their end see themselves as the elected representatives of the people and as such mandated to ensure that universities fulfill their obligations, and that the right value is obtained in return for tax payers' money invested in higher education. These two conditions are often compounded by factors like poor accountability of the university leadership or by political activism and alignment with one or another political stream but the university leadership or members of the academic community (students or staff). As a result, governments are prompted and feel justified to violate the sacred liberty and autonomy that academic staff and universities must enjoy if they are to discharge their duties properly. Further, in the view of Matos (1999), in countries with poor democratic track records where respect for the rule of law and basic civic liberties are violated and where governments fail to appreciate the fundamental role of universities and the imperative of freedom and liberty for the pursuit of knowledge, universities are subject to all forms of interference. In extreme cases leaders and staff members are appointed and dismissed at will by government, if not imprisoned. The challenge is to be responsive to public demands, to be fully accountable and to maintain transparency in acts and expenditures, to remain faithful to the pursuit and diffusion of truth and the respect for the rights of all citizens, to maintain independence of judgments and to be politically not aligned, to establish a principled relationship with the government; these are the biggest challenges facing the leadership of many African universities and the university library administrations.

Civil Society – University Relations

Matos (1999) reported that the majority of African countries are undergoing very dramatic changes. That more than 35 African countries have carried out multi-party elections since 1990, 21 for the first time, which were monitored by neutral and international observers; these countries are now implementing reforms which tend to strengthen democratic principles and structures, and the respect for constitutional law. As a result, in 31 countries, opposition has been legalized, the roles of parliaments, of the judiciary, of professional organizations, of non-governmental associations and organizations of the private sector in the economy, have gained increased importance. The interests of these groups in society are now voiced in more articulated and influential ways. As with other spheres of life, access to university and more generally university policies as being monitored and scrutinized more closely.

The challenge for university leaderships is to welcome these developments and start a dialogue working in partnership with representatives of civil societies. It is to regard the other spheres of life access to university and more generally, university policies as being effectively monitored and scruitinized more closely.

It is to regard the new developments not as threats, but as opportunities to widen the university's influence and role in society, to ensure more diversified and larger basis of support, and eventually gain additional and more sustainable sources of funding. The challenge is to strengthen the mechanism and systems of reporting and improve accountability, and to mobilize public support in addition to government's support. Universities are called upon to make information about their work accessible to the

general public and to organize for a for the discussion of long and medium term development plans, of annual reports, of financial statements, as forms of improving their visibility and harnessing more support. Also the challenge to the university libraries is to liaise and work with civil societies to be collecting their publications, process such publications and make it available to users of the library. That is the beauty of democracy.

External Donors – University Relations

The economic stagnation and decline of the socioeconomic conditions in Africa during the late seventies, throughout the eighties and the early part of the nineties impacted negatively each and every university in Africa. According to Matos (1999), the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and associated policies justified by the need to contain and reduce public expenditures and to reduce fiscal deficits, resulted in further reduction of the share of higher education in the national budgets. In most cases, government allocations to universities were insufficient and totally unrelated to the actual financial needs to maintain and develop the institutions. Matos noted that despite the constantly decreasing salaries, government allocations could not hardly pay these on regular bases nor could they meet other minimum requirements of the institutions, such as the provision of funds for the libraries, renewal of equipment and replenishment of the stocks of laboratories, the maintenance of the physical infrastructure, etc. In this context donor agencies played a determinant role by providing much needed funds to continue with some basic programmes. Regrettably, however, the donor grants earmarked for specific projects, with strict conditions for disbursement reporting and financial statements, were very seldom coordinated with institutional policies. Through their grants,

funding agencies obtained increased influence over the institutions. They determined activities, reporting cycles and procedures, negotiated and controlled directly projects or individual units, and in general interfered and limited the autonomy of the institution and their capacity to establish priorities and approve their plans and priorities. It became a major challenge for university leaders to attract the much needed grants and at the same time maintain institutional autonomy, and to satisfy the funding agencies and remain faithful to the institutional plans and to the country's needs (Matos, 1999). In Nigeria right from 1992 to 2010, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has embarked on strikes at different times to press on government to provide conducive learning environment in universities in the country, this include funding of universities libraries.

Expectation and Demands of Library Staff in Democracy

University librarians will find that workforce expectations in a new democracy are very different from those in a military dispensation. In the view of Swanepoel (1996), in a new democracy the emphasis falls much more on labour relations, worker education and worker rights.

Therefore, part of the challenges, expectations and demands that university librarians will have to deal with include the following:

Employment: University library staff expect their university librarians to provide them with the skills, ability, space and time to exercise substantial influence over any decisions that affect their working lives and work environment. Swanepoel (1996) opined that such includes issues as recruitment and selection of team members, promotion and appointment of team members or other library staff, and evaluation of their own performance

and that of their sectional heads and of the university librarians.

Transparency: Library staff expect university librarians to demonstrate openness and honesty about the university and the library policies, procedures, rules and regulations This includes giving library staff access to source of power and to managerial information system (Net, 1994).

Flattened management structures: This is closely related to empowerment and transparency in a new democracy. Workers expect flexible levels of participation in planning and decision making.

Equity: Library staff expect equal employment opportunities. In addition, previously disadvantaged staff members expect help and training to catch up with their colleagues.

Recognition of staff rights and basic human rights: This includes the right to fair labour practices, the right to a healthy environment, the right to assemble and demonstrate peacefully and to associate with whomever one wishes.

Expectations and Demands of Library Users in Democracy

Students' expectation and demand for library resources boil down to four interrelated issues as opined by Swanepoel (1996). These include the following:

1. *Access:* Student bodies and other library users expect that there be no barriers between them and the library's resources. This implies that librarians will have to pay special attention to matters such as library opening times and the location and design of service points. Librarians in consultation with user fora will also have to rethink the concepts of user fees and censorship and the concept of diversifying services between different users' categories.

2. *Equity:* Users expect librarians to provide the full range of library services and facilities equally to all users, regardless of educational and financial ability.

3. Relevant Services: No matter the type of library, it is a general belief that there is a much greater demand for services relevant to the needs of the community. There is a growing demand by most library users that librarians should channel more time and resources into the purchasing of prescribed books, basic textbooks, audiovisual materials and softwares. A great demand also exists for more study facilities, library orientation and training in the use of library collections and services. Students also expect library collections and services to reflect changing curricular and values with no delay.

4. *Participation in all matters that involve users:* It is expected that libraries should be democratically developed and managed in cooperation and consultation with the users so that the collections and services are relevant to the needs and diversity of the users. Library users also expect librarians and management resources to be readily accessible.

Challenges of University Libraries

Many authors and researchers have observed a number of inherent problems faced by university libraries in developing countries (including Nigeria) among such are:

1.*Budgeting Process and Academic support*

Rosenberg(1997) wrote that research activities of a faculty are rooted in the creation of knowledge and the research process values, personal interests information and advance contribution to knowledge teaching and course design. In predominantly undergraduate universities, research activity is so specialized and isolated from teaching that it is very difficult for a library to provide individual research support within available budgets. Yet without library materials to

support such influential stakeholders the credibility of the library is eroded.

Involvement of library and information professionals in the planning process for new courses is generally relegated by the academic curriculum review and planning process to the last possible stage, after Senate approval, and close to the commencement date of planned programmes. This makes lecturers and students stand disadvantaged by the absence of appropriate academic support materials at the time of need. Resource allocators, such as budget administrators, do not appreciate the rationale of purchasing reading materials yearly. The idea of rapid rate of obsolescence of information and, thereafter the need for its replacement with current editions appears to be difficult to grasp. The attitudes of budget administrators towards library budgets is that they are generally perceived as the first source of funds from which budget cuts are effected with little or no consideration of the effect of such actions on academic programmes (Raseroka, 1999).

From the above discussion, it is not surprising therefore, that library stakeholders, receiving no direct personal benefit from library collections, devalue the library's contribution to academic progress and achievement. Given the political nature of budgeting and competition for scarce resources, budgetary allocations to library support are then rarely perceived as an essential shared institutional infrastructure, warranting constant support.

The library is a shared resource and as such each faculty needs to allocate a percentage of its budget for library development based on the courses offered, research undertakings and expected academic support. A minimum of 10% of the total university budget must be allocated to library services excluding personnel remuneration and related costs. In turn libraries must be accountable for the finances and the services they provide. Library services should also be regularly evaluated by stakeholders to ensure that they meet user information needs and expectations.

2. *Human Resource Development and Re-skilling*

Library constraints are closely linked to inadequate or outdated skills held by available Library and Information Professional (LIPS) staff. Universities in general assume that once LIP staff have been provided with basic professional training, they are equipped for life. The information environment however, demands continual renewal of skills and reinterpretation of operations. Library and information professionals must empower themselves to understand the nature of electronic information, the academic core business and work with academics as part of a team support of student learning .Further, the varied expertise required by the emerging roles of academic libraries of the operational level, demands that research and development be embraced as the norm and mastery of information technology skills as a tool in support of the academic core business.

According to Raseroka (1999), a systematic approach to these issues demands the following from the university management: Definition of the university's expectation of the library's contribution to the university core business. Determination of performance indicators required to meet the stated expectations. Establishment of minimum staffing levels based on expected services and linked to full time expected students and lecturers. Establishment of continuing education programmes to facilitate an environment which is supportive of continued self development and re- skilling. Establishment of minimum periods during

which practitioners teach in the classroom, lecture and actively work in libraries.

3. Buildings and information communication infrastructures:

Library buildings provide the single most used facility on any campus, yet in the view of Raseroka (1999), analysis/predictions of growth of student numbers and course do not indicate expected impacts on library facilities and resources during the planning stages. Libraries tend to be reduced to store rooms of books with minimum reader seat allowances before plans for either alternative storage of materials are approved or extensions of buildings constructed, even where financing is a matter of prioritization rather than its shortage.

Libraries have been proactive in recognizing the need for efficient technical processing of information. Hence they have solicited for library specific software e.g CDS/ISIS, IT'S, TINLIB etc and negotiated donor funding for CD ROM database pilot projects. The relevance and effectiveness of the products of these projects in teaching and research have been acknowledged, but their cost has contributed to difficulties in obtaining university commitments to sustain financing. This is also the case with acquired personal computers and other necessary software packages independent of parent organizations in support of such pilot projects. A prerequisite for effectiveness of this infrastructure, however, is regular maintenance and upgrading of both hardware and software, in addition to skilled personnel who can exploit information technology (IT) capabilities fully for information access (Raseroka, 1999).

The acceptance of the significance of information technology as an information carrier and learning support tool requires institutional IT policies within which the library and information infrastructural needs, principles and policies on IT usage, maintenance and sustainability are crafted holistically, based on the university's mission. Governments' commitment to provide sustained financial support becomes exponentially more crucial, in view of the high costs inherent in the maintenance of information technology hardware and software. The overall impact and consequences of failure to sustain established information communication technology infrastructures at appropriate levels of currency and operation on the core business of the university needs must be fully appreciated by university administrators and policy in government to ensure that minimum acceptable financial support is sustained.

Conclusion

In conclusion, democracy like all human interaction and relationship must not be taken for granted. When it is established, it must be nurtured and sustained. The establishment, growth and sustenance of democracy with its complement of protection of human rights have never been without struggle, sweat and sometimes with blood throughout history. It is a known fact, whether in Europe, Asia, North America, Latin America or Africa that the defenders of democracy must be ready to pay the price. Democratic principles will only have their full effect if the democratic state operates in such a manner as to guarantee individual liberties through the observance of separation of powers. This separation of powers is inevitable in university library administration. Thus, what is gained in unity, freedom, consensus, stability, commitment and development in a truly democratic society easily out weights the costs of maintaining and sustaining the structures of democracy. Effective democratic process provides checks and balances which limit the ` abuse of power, corruption,

oppression, dictatorial and authoritarian tendencies which could be observed in some University Library Administrations in developing countries, especially in Nigeria.

Recommendations

For meaningful changes to be made in this new millennium in university libraries democratically and especially in developing countries, the following recommendations and suggestions are hereby made:

1. University librarians should introduce strategic and operational planning performance measure and driven actions to meet mission and objectives of their universities.
2. University librarians should be transparent, honest and sincere in dealing with all and sundry.
3. University librarians should initiate regular fora with all users and always have listening ears.
4. Government and university authorities should allocate and release adequate funds for university libraries and other tertiary institutions regularly.
5. All university libraries should be connected to the internet to enable their users benefit from the rich information resources available in the global network, especially websites that deal with democracy.
6. Team work should be encouraged by universities in the operation of their university libraries.
7. Purchase of library resources should follow due process and should be transparent.

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