

EMERGENCE OF THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN NIGERIA

Osagie OSEGHAE
University of Ibadan

Josiah Ifedayo ADEYOMOYE
Caleb University

Abstract

Lifelong learning has been described as education for the knowledge economy. But indicators from international assessments suggest that some developing countries risk being marginalized in the competitive global knowledge economy because their education and training systems are described inadequate to equip learners with the skills they need for active participation. Coverage is insufficient, access is inequitable (especially in tertiary [higher] education and in employee and adult training), as education facilities are grossly inadequate and the quality of education is low. Private intervention in education has not helped matters as rote learning, exam-driven schooling, and the soaring cost of private education have long been policy concerns in most developing countries. Thus the goal of education for all has revoltingly remained elusive in many low-income countries. This paper examines the challenges that knowledge economy has posed to lifelong learning and training systems in Nigeria. It considers the implications of the knowledge economy on lifelong learning and outlines the key competencies needed for citizens to participate effectively in the knowledge economy. The paper stresses the need to strengthen public libraries in order to encourage lifelong learning in Nigeria where formal education systems are almost unaffordable and grossly inadequate. It summarizes policy options for developing viable option of lifelong learning using public libraries.

Keywords: Economic Globalization, Lifelong Learning, Knowledge Economy, Nigerian Education Challenges, Nigerian Public Libraries and Lifelong Learning, Education and skills acquisition

Introduction

Human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of Nations. Capital and natural sources are mere passive factors of production; human beings are the creative agents who exploit natural resources and carry forward national development. The principal mechanism for developing human knowledge and skill is continuous education. Consequently, in the modern industrial societies education attains an unprecedented economic importance as a source of knowledge, skills, competencies, scientific research, inventions and technological innovations. Mohasi and Lephoto (2007) have rightly acknowledged that for any substantial economic development to take place, human resources need to be skilled and trained through continuous 'education' and 'training'. Education therefore, is the foundation of all developed societies and globally competitive economies. It is the starting point for reducing poverty and inequality, improving health outcomes, enabling the use of new technologies, and creating and spreading knowledge. In an increasingly knowledge-driven world, it has been extensively argued that availability education is a key factor in the development of the society. That means, for any society to attain economic growth, fight poverty, reduce disease, hunger, and improve on the life style of its people,

facilities for continuous education must be given enormous attention. Supporting this opinion, Ajayi (2003) noted that qualitative and technical education is supposed to be positively associated with economic growth. The crucial role that education plays in enabling development to happen has been underscored as the World Bank development report further stresses:

“The emergence of the global knowledge economy has put a premium on learning throughout the world. Ideas and know-how as sources of economic growth and development, along with the application of new technologies, have important implications for how people learn and apply knowledge throughout their lives” (World Bank, 2003).

Considering the critical role it plays, great nations of the world have placed emphasis on education accessibility to all people at all levels – from childhood throughout adulthood, hence the slogan “Education For All (EFA)”. According to Human Development Report 1995, “Human development has two sides. One is the formation of human capabilities – such as improved health, knowledge and skills. The other is the use people make of their acquired capabilities- for productive purposes...” (UNDP, 1995, p.11)

Skill acquisition, more often than not, is a function of learning. Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It’s what people do when they want to make sense of the world around them. It may involve an increase in skills, knowledge understanding, value or the capacity to reflect. Effective learning therefore, will lead to change, meaningful development and the desire to learn more. Lifelong laterally means, womb to tomb; never too early and never too late. Lifelong learning therefore, is learning activities that extend throughout one’s life. A lifelong learning framework encompasses learning throughout the life cycle, from early childhood to retirement, and in different learning capacities and environments. These include formal, nonformal and informal. Opportunities for learning throughout one’s life time are becoming increasingly critical for countries to be competitive in the global economy (World Bank, 2003). It has indeed, been used more broadly to imply the integration of educational services provided from various sources, including universities, industrial training schemes, libraries, and other civil institutions. The central objective of lifelong learning is to provide people with opportunities to acquire skills, aptitudes, values, knowledge, and experience needed to equip them to become active citizens, to find employment in constantly changing workplace environments, and to cope with and respond to changes throughout their lives.

Global Knowledge Economy

The individual human being, like any other organisms, is defined by the problems he confronts. The human is unique by virtue of the fact that he must, as a matter of necessity confront problems that arise from his unique biological and emotional needs. Since he is constantly in a state of becoming (wanting to be something), he is decisive. The maintenance of that state of his humanity, and indeed, of his survival, depends crucially on his ability and his potential to generate ideas, to seek information, knowledge and understanding. This is further enhanced by effective communication, freedom and unfettered access to relevant knowledge and information. Knowledge as a basic form of capital can either be codified and Written down, or tacit and in people's heads (World Bank, 1998d), accumulation of which Economic growth is driven (Romer, 1986; 1990). Knowledge-based economy relies

primarily on the use of ideas rather than physical abilities and on the application of technology rather than the transformation of raw materials or the exploitation of cheap labor. It is an economy in which knowledge is created, captured, acquired, transmitted, and used more effectively by individuals, enterprises, organizations, and communities to promote economic and social development (World Bank, 1998d).

A knowledge-driven economy is one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant part in the creation of wealth" (United Kingdom Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). Knowledge economy is an information-driven economy. Knowledge therefore, has become the third factor of production in leading economies (Romer, 1986; 1990). Interestingly, knowledge economy is transforming the demands of the labor market economy throughout the world. In industrial countries, where knowledge-based industries are expanding rapidly, labor market demands are changing accordingly. Technology and knowledge are now the key factors of production. Where new technologies have been introduced, demand for high skilled workers, particularly high-skilled information and communication technology (ICT) workers, has increased tremendously. At the same time, demand for lower-skilled workers has declined (OECD, 2001).

Globalization is usually recognized as being driven by a combination of economic, technological, sociocultural, political, and biological factors. It embodied the transnational circulation of ideas, languages, or popular culture. It is in fact, a combination of the free exchange of goods, services and capital. As noted by Hallak (1998), the phenomenon dates far back with the development of international trade (the 'silk road', the 'cities-world' of the middle ages). During the second half of the nineteenth Century, this phenomenon was highlighted by industrial revolution as a result of colonial exploitation. The continuous modernization of international exchange process during the twentieth Century and its ratification through international agreements (The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade GATT in 1974) maintained and placed emphasis on the globalisation of societies. However, to meet the challenges of globalisation, Hallak (1998) believes it would be necessary to prepare individuals for a workplace where responsibilities are constantly changing, where vertical management is replaced by networking, where information passes through multiple and former channels, where initiative-taking is more important than obedience, and where strategies are especially complex because of the expansion of markets beyond national borders. Therefore education must help individuals to perform tasks for which they were not originally trained, to prepare for a non-linear career path, to improve their team skills, to use information independently and develop their capacity for improvisation, creativity and lay the basis of complex thinking linked to the harsh realities of practical life. Therefore, society must aim to allow every individual to develop freely. According to Hallak (1998) the individuals will have to find his points of reference in society of constant change that generates short-lived values. It is therefore imperative that the individual succeeds in delivering himself from set of types of stereotypical activity, both psychologically and economically, and discovered a taste for improvisation, invention and discovery. Schools must give the pupils the capacity to acquire the relevant knowledge and interpret new values that will, in turn, guarantee them the ability to remain up-to-date with evolution of their environment. Hallak (1998) warns however that if concerted effort is not made to strengthen the individual, then human integrity is under threat by several influences which are now replacing traditional standards. Thus, the under-educated is fast becoming unproductive and an economic liability.

Education in Developing Countries

Education is not given adequate priority in most developing countries. Evidences suggest this is true as coverage is insufficient, access is inequitable (especially in tertiary [higher] education and in employee and adult training), and the quality of education is poor. Adult literacy rates are low, and too few children complete basic education (World Bank, 2003). Thus the goal of Education For All (EFA) remains elusive in many low-income countries. And the education system is too rigid. Rote learning, exam-driven schooling, and the soaring cost of private education have long been policy concerns in most African countries (World Bank, 2003). Nevertheless, UNESCO has predicted a sizable increase in student numbers enrolled in higher education worldwide – from 65 million in 1991; to 79 million in 2000; to 97 million in 2015; and 100 million by 2025 (Taylor, 2001).

The Nigerian Situation

In Nigeria, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) the body saddled with the responsibility of conducting examination into Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education is becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the wide disparity between the number of candidates who apply to it for admission yearly and the actual figure of those who finally secure placements in tertiary institutions across the country. Less than 200,000 in about one million qualified candidates secure university admission every year, mainly due to lack of space in existing universities (JAMB, 2005). The expansion of facilities, such as lecture theatres, libraries and hostels in existing universities will enable the institutions to admit more qualified candidates. This is one of the major considerations, why the National Universities Commission (NUC) in Nigeria has been issuing licenses to private universities to expand admission opportunities to as many qualified candidates as possible. But due to explosive increase in the number of candidates, their impact in this regard has remained rather marginal (JAMB, 2005).

In 2008 the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) warned that with the current carrying capacity of all universities in Nigeria, less than 20 per cent of the people who write the Universities Matriculation Examinations (UME) would gain admission into tertiary institutions (E-Punch Wednesday, 21 May 2008). This shows that coverage is not sufficient as the number of candidates taking the University Matriculation Examinations (UME) keeps on increasing, irrespective of the limited spaces in existing universities.

Besides, it has been reported that about 11 million out of the World's 80 million school-age are currently out of school in Nigeria (Businessday May 12, 2008, P.8). Unfortunately access and retention levels particularly for certain categories of people such as girls, children with special needs and those in difficult circumstances were still ridiculously low. It is worthy of note that urgent attention must be given to the sector if the goals of Education For All (EFA) by 2015 are to be achieved. Some of the challenges in the education sector, “ including poverty with its extreme manifestation, dilapidated infrastructure, resulting in insufficient child-friendly classrooms, insufficient instructional materials, inadequate teachers and poor quality of education delivery, cultural barriers and gender discrimination” (Businessday May 12, 2008, P.8) were noted as factor revolting against the quality of education in Nigeria.

TOTAL ENROLMENT IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (2001 - 2005)

YEAR	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
2001	19,264,000	4,601,000	696,000
2002	19,353,000	4,866,000	746,000
2003	24,768,000	6,152,000	846,000
2004	25,464,000	6,343,000	888,000
2005	26,160,000	6,534,000	930,000

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report (2000 - 2006).

The university system in Nigeria has witnessed a lot of turbulent experiences. The crisis has been characterized by a combination of chronic under-funding, rapidly increasing student enrolment, inadequacy of facilities, deterioration of physical infrastructure, a growing culture of arbitrariness and suppression in managing the institutions, demoralization of staff and students, incessant student riots and periodic staff strikes. Efforts at solving and ameliorating these problems have often led to collision between the government and staff unions on one hand and between university administration and staff unions on the other.

The issue of funding has been a source of crisis in the Nigeria education system. Various organizations, parents, labour unions, etc, have at various fora, pointed the attention of government to the poor funding of the system. For instance, Ibukun (2004) reported that between 1987 and 1997, average expenditure on education by the federal government, as a percentage of the annual budget was 5.1%. When related to the GDP, Federal government expenditure on education averages 1.1%. In addition, Arikewuyo (2004) reported that since the advent of democracy in 1999, funding of education dropped from 11.12% to 1.81% in 2003.

UNESCO (2000) had earlier reported that unlike Nigeria which spends an average of 1.1% of its GDP/GNP on education, other countries like Ghana spend 3.6%, Kenya 6.2%, and Zimbabwe 9.5%. The effect of poor funding is evidenced in the brain drain, a phenomenon which has seriously depleted universities in Nigeria. The country has lost most of its experienced academics to even smaller African countries, such as Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, South-Africa, to mention a few. Academic Staff Union of the University (ASUU), for instance, has gone on strike several times, namely, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2009 to press home its demand for increased funding for the system. Perhaps the government fails to understand the fact that the success of any education system depends upon the resources available to it. Money is very important in this respect because by it, all other vital elements in the school such as school buildings, purchase of equipment, payment of teachers' salaries and allowances and running expenses can be catered for.

In a study conducted to assess academic achievement of students in two modes of part-time programme in Nigeria, Adeyemi and Osunde (2005) found that there is a significant gap between supply and demand for higher education throughout Nigeria. It also shows that there is logical justification for expansion of Nigeria's higher education system and that the part-time degree granting programmes do, play a significant role in addressing societal demand for access to higher education. This finding echoes similar developments found across the globe (Asmal, 2000; Taylor, 2001). In sum, the level of compliance to the minimum standard set by Nigeria's quality control agency for the university education (NUC) was found to be below average for both programmes. While the standards of the on-

campus programmes were superior to that of the outreach centres, they too remained below national standards.

The study revealed that lack of coherent and reliable information technology infrastructure does not help matters, particularly in the area of knowledge dissemination and information distribution, especially as flowing from the university campuses to their respective outreach centres. More to the point, the use of ICTs and other educational platform as well as Internet are also being disgustingly hindered by epileptic supply of electricity to Nigerian university campuses. These are critical technological issues that impact seriously on student learning, and by logic, could likely translate into low academic performance. No wonder, evidence from international assessment of students (World Bank, 2003) suggests that some developing countries and transition economies lag significantly behind industrial countries in providing their people with the skills needed in the knowledge economy. Policy actions are needed to reduce inequities in the distribution of learning opportunities and discrepancies in the incidence of the costs and benefits of education. Formal education, too, needs to become less about passing on information and focus more on teaching people how to learn continuously on their own.

Therefore, a developing country like Nigeria risk being further marginalized in the competitive global knowledge economy because its education and training systems are in short supply to equipping learners with the skills they need for active participation in the global knowledge economy. According to New Growth Economics, a country's capacity to take advantage of the knowledge economy depends on how quickly it can become a "learning economy". Learning economy means not only using new technologies to access global knowledge; but using them to communicate with other people about innovation. In the "learning economy" individuals, firms, and countries will be able to create wealth in proportion to their capacity to learn and share innovation (Foray and Lundvall, 1996; Lundvall and Johnson, 1994).

This paper explores the challenges knowledge economy posed to education, lifelong learning and training systems. It takes a look at the use of libraries for lifelong learning in developing countries where formal education systems are almost unaffordable and grossly inadequate. It outlines policy options and viable systems of lifelong learning to be adopted in addressing the challenges posed by knowledge economy in developing countries. It addresses four questions:

- What are the implications of the knowledge economy on lifelong learning?
- What skills and competencies are required to succeed in the global knowledge economy?
- What are the roles of libraries in the promotion of knowledge and lifelong learning?
- What are the challenges of libraries and lifelong learning in Nigeria?
- What is the way forward?

This paper which is aimed at providing a structure of education reflecting global perspective of knowledge dissemination, successful practice, planning and implementation of continuous learning strategy, will identify the need for developing countries to look beyond traditional approaches to education and training and to engage in a policy of dialogue on the pedagogic and economic consequences of lifelong learning.

Implications of Knowledge Economy on Lifelong Learning

The features of the knowledge economy have important implications for libraries and lifelong learning. First of all, knowledge is being developed and applied in new ways. The information revolution has expanded networks and provided new opportunities for access to information. It has also created new opportunities for generating and transferring information. Knowledge networks and sharing of information have expedited innovation and adaptation capacity. Changes in ICT have revolutionized the transmission of information. Semiconductors are getting faster, computer memories are expanding, and bandwidth is growing, and Internet hosts are expanding and multiplying. Cellular phone usage is growing worldwide, adding to the pace of and capacity for change and innovation (World Bank, 2003).

Small and medium-size enterprises in the service sector are becoming increasingly important players, in terms of both economic growth and employment. Trade is increasing worldwide, increasing competitive demands on producers. This implies that countries that are able to integrate into the world economy may be able to achieve higher economic growth and improve health and education outcomes (World Bank 2002e). Unlike the slow, gradual evolution of human labour in the past generation, present day changes are occurring rapidly and with little or no warning. Unless society members anticipate these effects and prepared to cope with them mentally and in practice, job dislocations and forced geographical relocations may prove traumatic and imminent for employees and their families.

Skills and Competencies Needed in the Knowledge Economy

Operating successfully in the knowledge economy requires mastering a set of knowledge and competencies. Three categories of competencies are needed (Rychen and Salganik, 2001; OECD 2002a). These include:

Acting autonomously

Building and exercising a sense of self making choices and acting in the context of a larger picture, being oriented towards the future, being aware of the environment, understanding how one fits in exercising one's rights and responsibilities, determining and executing a life plan and planning and carrying out personal projects.

Using tools interactively

Using tools interactively as instrument for active dialogue; being aware of and responding to the potential of new tools; and being able to use language, text, symbols, information and knowledge, and technology interactively to accomplish goals.

Functioning in socially heterogeneous groups

Being able to interact effectively with other people, including those from different backgrounds; recognizing the social embeddedness of individuals; creating social capital; and being able to relate well to others and cooperate and manage to resolve conflict.

The concept of competency has several features. It is strongly related to context, as it combines interrelated abilities and values. It is teachable (although it can be acquired outside

the formal education system), and exists on a continuum. Possession of the key competencies contributes to a higher quality of life across all areas (World Bank, 2003). Performing in the global society requires mastery of technical, interpersonal, and methodological skills. Technical skills include literacy, foreign language, mathematics, and science, problem solving and analytical skills. Interpersonal skills include teamwork, leadership, and communication skills. Methodological skills include the ability to learn on one's own, to pursue lifelong learning and to cope with risks and challenges. These competencies are needed because of the rapid proliferation of scientific and practical knowledge, the shortening of the useful life of knowledge because of continuous production of knowledge, and the growing influence of science and technology, which profoundly change the organization of jobs and lives. The consequences of these changes cannot be reliably foreseen (OECD 1996).

However, a knowledge economy rests on four pillars (World Bank Institute 2001c):

- A supportive economic and institutional regime to provide incentives for the efficient use of existing and new knowledge and the flourishing of entrepreneurship.
- Educated and skilled populations to create share and use knowledge.
- A dynamic information infrastructure to facilitate the effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information.
- An efficient innovation system of firms, research centers, universities, consultants, and other organizations to tap into the growing stock of global knowledge, assimilate and adapt it to local needs, and create new technology

Generally, managing knowledge in the organization requires that one locates where a certain kind of knowledge is, retrieve and store the knowledge, and then make it accessible to other employees. However, knowledge management also refers to the information that resides in the minds of employees. Ideally, employees are expected to share what they know with one another. In daily work, employees are required to draw upon a variety of knowledge to accomplish their jobs. The knowledge they need is not always found in their area of expertise. In this case, they have to learn what they need to know from some other sources. The information source can be a book, the Internet or some other person. Learning from some other person who is trusted and who is also an expert in the area in a face-to-face situation is a very efficient and practical way to learn (Davenport, 1998, pg. 94, 95, 100). Creating an atmosphere that encourages face-to-face meeting and discussion allows knowledge to be passed around and enhanced. Knowledge sharing, however, is still an ideal goal that many corporate organizations are now trying to reach. It is, however, the heart of knowledge management.

The Roles of Libraries in the Promotion of Knowledge and Lifelong Learning

A library is an organized information system charged with the responsibility of providing information for the advancement of the society. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), Libraries are social institutions, created to conserve knowledge; preserve the cultural heritage; provide information; and to serve as fountain of recreation; undergird and underpin education and research. Quoting P.F. Wilmot a well noted sociologist, Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) emphasized that libraries as repositories of intellectual production, play a fundamental role in a well-functioning society, and, when tied to global development priorities, can promote sustainable development solutions. Library serves as content and knowledge repositories by collecting and providing access to books journals, and all other forms of recorded information. By providing access to, and repackaging information, libraries can

ensure that the right information is made available and in form that users can understand. As the Agenda 21 affirms, “the need for information arises at all levels, from that of senior decision makers at the national and international levels to the grass-root and individual levels” (Agenda 21 :40.1). Libraries are established to support researchers, policy and decision-makers, as well as grassroots participation in development. Whether through the more traditional paper-based library, up-to-date internet and other ICT resources, or through a combination of both in the form of “hybrid libraries”, society needs to be able to access information to allow it to develop. Information exchange and knowledge sharing are now accepted in the development sector as essential to effective partnership and collaboration. Beyond connectivity, people and organization in developing countries need to acquire new capacity and skills suited to knowledge economy (Ballantyne, 2000).

Many advance nations of the world acknowledge the place of library in national development. They value highly, the materials of knowledge that are housed in a purpose building infrastructure, systematically arranged and made available for use as vital requirements for daily survival. The materials can broaden knowledge as well as sharpen and upgrade skills. They are means of investigating past events with a view to finding solutions to current problems of keeping abreast of current development as well as serving as the repository of the heritage and civilization of the people. There are different types of libraries performing various functions in the society. Prominent among them are the State or public libraries, academic libraries, special libraries and school libraries.

It is the importance attached to libraries that made professor John Harris observed that “libraries are instrument of power, potent with force of human intellectual thought and should be handled with caution, understanding and respect” in recognizing that power in the libraries, they are used to promote socio-economic and political development thus: firstly education of the masses is very important in development of any society. Libraries are extension of learning environment or schools. Students, academicians, workers, market women and artisan use libraries to further their formal education. When the people are educated, they contribute to meaningful development in the society. Conable (2007) has pointed out that American public libraries flourish out of a commitment to the principle that knowledge and access to information empower the individual. Libraries embody the firm belief that information must not be the exclusive province of a privileged few and that it should be widely and freely made available to all.

If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all—except the censor. We must know all the facts and hear all the alternatives and listen to all the criticisms. Let us welcome controversial books and controversial authors. For the Bill of Rights is the guardian of our security as well as our Library - John F. Kennedy

At the time library movement began, books and education were scarce commodities. Today, the quantity of information that is generated and distributed is increasing exponentially. The issue of scarcity is superseded now by new problems of access. But the essential function of the library has not changed: to offer knowledge and information to the average citizen who cannot afford, with individual resources alone, to secure all the information necessary to meet his or her self-defined needs in a complex and challenging

world. In this way, libraries provide tangible commitment to free speech, self-government, and self-education by collecting, organizing, preserving, disseminating, and protecting everyone's rights of access to the richness of human expression in all its recorded forms. This responsibility goes further to justify the existence and support of libraries than any of the many other roles and functions that libraries fulfill within their communities.

There is one kind of library, which may be freely used by anyone and this is the public library. A public library is a "general" library. The materials are not about one or two particular subjects, but cover many subjects. The range is as wide and varied as the reading needs of the people who use the library. The public library has been described as a library wholly designed for the purpose of rendering information services to the general public irrespective of status, occupation, sex, age, and these services are meant to be free or attract little fee. According to the UNESCO, the public library should enhance lifelong learning by:

1. Providing Books, Pamphlets, Magazines, Maps, Pictures, Films, Music scores, recordings and giving guidance in their use.
2. Offering children, young people, men and women opportunity and encouragement to:
 - educate themselves continuously,
 - keep abreast of progress in all field of knowledge
 - keep abreast of progress of expression and have constructive critical attitude towards all public issues.
 - be more efficient in their day-to-day activities
 - develop their creative capacity and powers of appreciation in arts and letters.
 - aid generally in the advancement of knowledge
3. Promote personal happiness and social well-being
4. Provide needed information to members of the public.

Challenges of Public Libraries in Nigeria

The public library is the local gateway to knowledge, which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and the social group (UNESCO, 2000). For it to actualize all these, (Opara, 2008) states that establishing authorities as well as members of the community for whom public library is established need to adequately support it. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), 'the establishment of any library is predicted upon two fundamental assumptions: that the authorities setting it up are prepared to see to its continued existence by adequate financial support and that the people whom the library serves appreciate its informational and educational values'. Aguolu (1989) had earlier observed that for the library (including public libraries) to flourish in any society, the economy must be sufficiently bright to motivate the government to commit funds to library development. Supporting this view, Kuhne (2000) argues that a country that has problem of hunger, education, economic and political freedom cannot give priority to the right to information. Also, he contended that the right to information has no meaning for person who is hungry, who does not have enough money, who is not educated and who does not have freedom.

The development of libraries in Nigeria presents the policy makers and managers with a set of policy and organizational challenges. Despite the fact that access to higher education is inequitable, coverage is insufficient, adult literacy rates are low, and the soaring cost of private education have long been policy concerns in Nigeria, public library services are far below expectation. This is because they are being funded by governments. Challenges such

as inadequate funding (Sager, 1989; Opara, 2008) and gross neglect occasioned by maladjusted economy have been identified as combined factors militating against the development of public libraries (Oyegade, Nassarawa and Mokogwu, 2004). Other challenges include, inadequate and unmotivated workforce (Sahai, 1990; Sager, 1989 and Opera, 2008). The IFLA/ UNESCO guidelines for public Libraries services (Gill et al, 2001) in respect of public libraries stock provide that:

The public libraries must have adequate resources not just when it is established but also on a continuous basis to enable it to sustain and develop services that meets the needs of the local community. This means it should provide material in all formats, up-dated regularly to meet the changing needs of the group and individuals, including newly published and replacement materials.

Like other government establishments, Nigerian public libraries as alternative sources of education and lifelong learning are yet to recover from abysmal neglect suffered especially during the military governments. Dilapidated infrastructure resulting in insufficient man-friendly learning environments insufficient instructional materials, inadequate supply of resources and qualified personnel have been the consequences of the huge neglect suffered by public libraries in Nigeria. It is yet to be realized by both leaders and the led that information is power that can play a decisive role in positioning the nation for the challenges of global knowledge economy. Commenting on the state of public libraries in Africa, Opara (2008) identified the problem of ideological inclination on the part of the leaders towards supporting the public library. This is partly because the public library is hardly perceived as powerful instrument for the socio-economic and political transformation of the community in which it is located. Rosenberg (1993) states that: Public libraries set up in the first flush of independence are no longer seen as crucial to development and are certainly given no place in present Structural Adjustment Programmes.

The state of the public library system in any nation is indisputably a reflection of the level of acceptance of libraries and librarians by the nation. It is also a reflection of the prevailing values system in the country. Opara (2008) affirmed that the poor recognition of the role of the library manifest itself not only in government action or inaction, but also in the perceptions and attitudes of individual members of the community for whom it is established. He contended that too many library users (and non-users) in our communities still have narrow views of the role of the library. While accepting that majority of Nigerians are still illiterate, He argued that inadequate support for public libraries cannot be attributed mainly to the high level of illiteracy among the citizenry. Supporting this view, Aboyade (1982) noted:

...among highly educated Nigerians, there is still that lack of appreciation for the difference which the provision of library and information services can make in their lives or that of the society at large. The result is that if such people are ever in a position of influence or policy making, they find it difficult to support the library cause.

Following this argument, Opara (2008) concluded that “if the educated minority can support the cause of the public library at every given opportunity, its fortune is likely to improve”.

Diop, (2007) quoting the former Secretary-General of UNESCO, Amadou M MBOW, stressed that “equipped with the best ability to communicate, and to gather information, developing nations would not only be able to get their voices heard in the union of Nations but would advance in the educational domain (especially in the fight against illiteracy (they would develop their scientific and technological abilities, improve their health system, promote rural development and fight natural disasters in a better manner. He added that communication literacy can also be “a means of consolidating national unity, preserving cultural identity and promoting the active participation of the people in the on-going development process.” (Aux sources du future, UNESCO, 1982, p. 59)

According to the Education For All (EFA) report (2006), literacy confers a wide set of benefits and strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families and communities to access health ,educational, economic, political and cultural opportunities.’ The report notes that on an average less than 60% of the total adult population in Sub Saharan Africa can read and write with understanding and that the region registers the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. The report states that for rapid economic growth to take place, the literacy rate of a country must reach the threshold of 40%. Adkins (2009), quoting (Greaney 1996: 27) states that national literacy rates are highly correlated with levels of development, and there is “strong association between the extent of human development (specifically economic, education, and health) within a developing country and reading achievement levels as measured by literacy rate”. As providers of materials and cultural institutions, if properly channeled, Public libraries can contribute to the development of literacy in Nigeria.

The provision of access to books and reading material is crucial to the development of literacy. Reading researcher Stephen D. Krashen (Krashen, 2004, p. 57) writes, “when books are readily available, when the print environment is enriched, more reading is done”. Evidence suggests this is true in international settings as well. Elley (2000) suggests that increased access to books increases first- and second-language literacy rates in developing countries as well. National literacy rates are highly correlated with levels of development, and there is “strong association between the extent of human development (specifically economic, education, and health) within a developing country and reading achievement levels as measured by literacy rate” (Greaney, 1996, p. 27).

Thus developing countries and transition economies face the dual challenge of addressing the longstanding issues of access, quality, and equity while moving toward a lifelong learning system. To satisfy individuals’ quest for knowledge, and cope with growing societal-demands for people-based development and adult workers seeking more opportunity to actively participate in their countries’ future, it is the position of this paper that developing countries like Nigeria should look beyond the “professed” formal approaches to education and training and engage a policy of dialogue on the pedagogical and economic consequences of public libraries and lifelong learning.

The Way Forward

To create a learning society, there is no doubt that the libraries have roles to play and these roles must be defined. This is only possible if the right attention is given to the development of libraries. First and foremost, Nigerian government through the various ministries can implement policy actions capable of initiating the society into knowledge conscious and information driving one. To be able to do this, librarians through National Library Association should sensitize the government and policy makers on the need to

repackage libraries to meet the challenge of the global knowledge economy. Secondly, librarians and National Library Association should see the need to embark on information capacity building to enable the people appreciate the place of information in enhancing their performance in the knowledge economy.

It has been noted (Aguolu, 2002) that “there is a strong correlation between the use of the library in childhood and reading activities in adulthood”. Government and indeed educational policy makers should encourage the development of libraries in primary and secondary schools in order to foster reading culture in children. Ross, Mckechnie and Rothbauer (2006) have suggested ways through which libraries can participate in promoting reading culture among children:

- ❖ Libraries could promote reading culture by providing easy access to a large rich collections;
- ❖ They could run story-time programs for babies, toddlers, and preschool children both in the library and through outreach to other community locations. These programs should include complementary activities such as crafts, songs, and finger plays that extend and reinforce the stories. (In Nigeria the Abadina Media Resource Centre (AMRC) is a classic example of a place where most of these activities have been actualized);
- ❖ Facilitate access to reading materials through book lists and pathfinders, displays, and readers advisory services;
- ❖ Provide areas for reading, especially areas for young children and adults to read together;
- ❖ Loan materials, either individual titles or specially prepared kits, and work cooperatively with other organizations such as nursery schools, daycare centres, ‘family literacy programs` or their community wide programs that serve children in their homes or in community locations and
- ❖ Libraries should educate parents, preschool teachers, or child care professionals in what and how to read to preschoolers.

Those who cannot afford formal education system should be catered for in public libraries. Equipment such as audiovisuals should be made readily available to take care of adult literacy classes for categories of people. There should also be room for continuing education which is part of lifelong learning. In the same way, arrangements should be made to cater for the educational needs of the special candidates such as the blind, deaf, mentally retarded etc. The mobile library section of the public libraries should be empowered to cater for the education needs of the rural people and the nomads.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is crucial in enabling workers to compete in the global knowledge economy. As Harbison (1973) put it ‘the goals of development are the maximum possible utilization of human beings in productive activity and the fullest possible development of the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of the labour force’. Experiences from the advance countries of the world of Japan, USA, Britain, even Sweden and Denmark or even Saudi Arabia attest to the fact that economic growth, higher levels of living, and more equitable distribution of income are the consequences of the investment in human capital. Therefore, a nation in a hurry, as Nigeria, cannot achieve swift industrialization unless there is proper utilization of skilled and trained manpower. In fact, it is the shortest and surest path to

technological development and industrial growth.

If countries like Nigeria cannot promote lifelong learning opportunities, the skills and technology gap between them and industrial countries will continue to grow. By improving people's ability to function as members of their communities, education and training also increase social capital broadly defined as social cohesion or social ties, thereby helping to build human capital, increase economic growth, and stimulate development. Social capital also improves education and health outcomes and child welfare, increases tolerance for gender and social equity, enhances civil liberty and economic civil equity, and decreases crime and tax evasion (Putnam, 2001). Therefore lifelong learning must be viewed as fundamental to development, and not just because it enhances human capital but because it increases social capital as well.

Basically, education and skills remain the foundation of lifelong learning. Countries with low or declining basic education coverage must set increasing coverage as their top priority and encourage the development of libraries where people would be supported with learning facilities to continue lifelong learning. The quality and nature of the learning process must change, however, and outcomes must improve. To this end, a good policy option must be developed in pursuit and sustainability of public libraries and other viable lifelong learning frameworks to make for the inadequacy, quality and inequity of access to formal education in developing countries.

The implication of the knowledge economy is that there is no alternative way to prosperity than to make learning and knowledge-creation of prime importance. Equipping people to deal with these, requires a new mode of education and training, a lifelong learning framework that encompasses learning throughout one's life cycle, from early childhood to retirement. It includes formal, nonformal, and informal education and training). It allows people to access learning opportunities as they need them rather than because they have reached certain ages. Recent knowledge and the accumulated stock of human capital are inputs in the production of new knowledge and wealth. The speed of change in the knowledge economy means that skills depreciate much more rapidly than they once did. To compete effectively in this constantly changing environment, workers need to be able to upgrade their skills on a continuing basis. Change in the knowledge economy is so rapid that firms can no longer rely solely on new graduates or new labor market entrants as the primary source of new skills and knowledge. Schools and other training institutions thus need to prepare workers for lifelong learning. Educational systems can no longer emphasize task-specific skills but must focus instead on developing learners' decision making and problem-solving skills and teaching them how to learn on their own and with others.

Perhaps more fundamental and overriding long-term implication for society has to do with the well-being of human spirit in an increasingly knowledge intensive environment where knowledge is the principal and perhaps the most valuable currency. The growing volume and the rate of obsolescence of knowledge compel the individual to live in the continuous presence of, and frequent interaction with, information resources and systems. This may be a modern definition of literacy, while the absence of such a skill may very well result in intellectual and possibly economic poverty and inequality. There is real danger that humans, unwilling or incapable or not given access to information, may be relegated to an existence that falls short of the human potential.

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Osagie OSEGHAE
Kenneth Dike Library
University of Ibadan
Ibadan
Nigeria
oseghazee@yahoo.com

Josiah Ifedayo ADEYOMOYE
Head of Library
Caleb University
P.M.B. 001, Imota
Lagos
Nigeria
ifedayoadeyomoye@yahoo.com