

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN PROMOTING PEACE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Peace is a fundamental tool in development of any society, and it is obvious that national development and transformation can only be achieved in a peaceful environment. This study discussed the strategic role of the libraries in promoting peace, the importance of information for peace promotion and the use of new technologies in achieving it. The paper also examined the role of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in promoting peace, libraries as advocates for democracy and the need for global collaboration for research on peace promotion. Budgetary limitation and other challenges were identified. Recommendations were also proffered for the achievement of peace education.

Introduction

Peace as defined by Wikipedia Encyclopedia (2012) is a state of harmony characterized by the lack of violent conflict and the freedom from fear of violence. Chambers Dictionary (2005) defines peace as freedom from civil disorder. Peace education, on the other hand, has also attracted research interests and opinions from several authorities and institutions. The Hague Appeal for Peace in its programme - Global Campaign for Peace Education defines peace education as a participatory holistic process that includes teaching for and about democracy and human rights, non-violence, social and economic justice, gender equality, environmental sustainability, disarmament, traditional peace practices, international law and human security. The Hague for Peace posits: *"A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems, have the skills to resolve conflicts and struggle for justice non-violently, live by international standards of human rights and equity, appreciate cultural diversity, and respect the earth and each other. Such learning can only be achieved with systematic education for peace"*.

According to a United Nations report on peace education in Africa (2006), peace education is more effective and meaningful when adopted according to the social and cultural context and the needs of a country. It should be enriched by its cultural and spiritual values together with the universal human values. It should also be globally relevant. Peace education is a process of developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and values that enable learners to:

- Identify and understand sources of local and global issues and acquire positive and appropriate sensitivities to these problems;
- Resolve conflicts and to attain justice in a non-violent way;
- Live by universal standards of human rights and equity by appreciating cultural diversity; respect for the earth and for each other UNESCO (2001).

Wikipedia (2013), defined peace education as a process of acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills and behavior to live in harmony with oneself, with others and with the natural environment, To show the importance of peace education, the United Nations Secretary General had dedicated the International Day of Peace 2013 to peace education, in an effort to refocus minds and financing on the preeminence of peace education as the means to bring about a culture of peace.

From the expert definitions stated above, peace education can be described as a unifying and comprehensive concept that seeks to promote a holistic view of education. However, its relevance is inextricably part of and is highly dependent on contextual specificity.

Harris, I. (2002) states that peace education is about empowering people with the skills, attitudes and knowledge to:

- Build, maintain, and restore relationships at all levels of human interaction.
- Develop positive approaches towards dealing with conflicts -from the personal to the international.
- Create safe environments-both physically and emotionally- that nurture each individual.
- Create a safe world based on justice and human rights.
- Build a sustainable environment and protect it from exploitation and war.

Nigeria has been facing the challenge of terrorism and extremism in recent years. This has negatively affected all human activities including educational institutions and their libraries. The print and electronic media are replete with

reports of violent activities of some individuals and groups. According to Naija News, (2012) "Boko Haram claimed responsibility for attacks on telecommunications infrastructure in Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, and Kano States. The group wanted to punish GSM companies because they have helped security agencies to arrest and kill many of its members. He vowed that the attacks would continue until the companies stopped cooperating with the authorities". Another article by Kolade (2012) states that: "fundamentalist sect Boko Haram yesterday intensified its killing spree, which started at the weekend. Two government officials were shot dead in Borno and Adamawa states while former Comptroller General of Prison Alhaji Ibrahim Jarma, who was shot on Monday by gunmen in front of a mosque in Azare, Bauchi State, died in the hospital yesterday." Other articles by Olalekan, (2012), Anyanwu, (2012), Moshood, (2012) and Onumah, (2012) are eloquent testimonies that there is serious security challenges in Nigeria. Waslekar and Serageldin, (2006) indicated that extremism and terrorism are plagues that take humanity back to the dark ages, a time when human life had no value, and violence prevailed over the rule of law. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to start examining the roots of these phenomena and to discuss appropriate response strategies that must be implemented in order to combat these modern day crises.

The negative incidences and effects of the Boko Haram in the North and the kidnapping, armed robbery and ritual murders in the Southern parts of Nigeria reveal that there is insecurity in the society. It is therefore inevitable to look at the role of libraries in a troubled society such as ours. How can libraries, by giving access to knowledge, encourage better understanding between people of different origins and different opinions? How can libraries, by giving access to learning, build up the capacity of people and communities and so be a positive force for equality of opportunity, personal development, economic advancement, and social transformation? These factors form the preconditions for peace. Therefore, the need for investigating the active part of libraries in promoting education for peace is the call for every academic and library professional. Thus, using libraries as a platform for exploring the causes and effects of extremism, bringing about positive change in the societal thinking and attitude, convincing the global communities that violence is not an inherent ingredient of Nigerian society and that all the contributory factors must be examined, is the basic motivation of this study. In doing this, the research intends to

- Identify the strategic roles, libraries should play for the successful actualization of peace education;
- Ascertain various challenges facing the library in this undertaking;
- Suggest the possible ways for libraries in promoting peace education in Nigeria.

Roles of Libraries in Promoting Peace Education in the Society

A discussion with educationists, sociologists, psychologist and library professionals and also literature review suggests that education for peace should aim at developing the belief and attitude to promote broadmindedness, love, tolerance, trust, equality, unity and reverence in the society. Libraries are considered as the nucleus of all these activities. As repositories of assorted information materials, the aim of the libraries must include to educate formally and informally for peace promotion. Below is a brief x-ray of the roles of libraries in the promotion of peace education.

It is truism that libraries are indispensable in meeting the educational, information and entertainment needs of members of the society. Libraries develop their collections, facilities and services to meet the information needs of their patrons. However, in order to accomplish this task effectively, libraries must have a thorough understanding of the information needs of their users. The goals of libraries in Nigeria need to be broadened to cope with changes and reach its target in the enrichment of peace in all spheres of life. Seminars/workshops must be arranged for the dialogue and exchange of knowledge and ideas for specific groups on issues, topics or problems in all areas of societal interest. Maheswara (2008) is of the opinion that libraries should focus on the following to support peace building and become a strong agent of change in the society:

- Seminars, Lectures, Conferences
- Book fairs and library exhibitions
- Display of new publications about the subject
- Clippings maintenance
- Bibliographic services,
- Reference services,
- Selective dissemination of information and current awareness services
- Reprographic services Translation services.

Libraries should organize talks, lectures, seminars, conferences addressing the issues relating to peace building process and resolving conflicts, reading clubs for children and youths, literacy programmes, story hours and make available books that talk on the need for peace and peaceful coexistence in the society.

Libraries should expand their concepts of library service and build up positive interaction within their community. These should be built with teachers, civil society, lawyers, doctors, sociologists, psychologists, journalists, artists, business community, social workers, community development workers, NGO's both local and international, youth workers, and peace and reconciliation officials. Omopupa (2006) stressed the need for cooperation between library and information professionals and educators as a requirement for establishing integrated information literacy programmes.

Libraries should take steps to bring together diverse streams of knowledge, focusing what might be incongruent approaches into solutions to common problems. By organizing both intellectual and cultural programmes involving national and international community, the National Library can bridge the gaps not only between various religious sects but also between civil societies. It must be based on the philosophy that through a mutual process, peace educators facilitate human development.

Role of Nigerian Library Association in Promoting Peace Culture

The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) with its chapters in the 36 States of the federation has a very vital role in the promotion of peace culture. This can be achieved by organizing various seminars, conferences, lectures, book fairs and exhibitions addressing the various contributing factors, problems and solutions for bringing up optimistic change in the culture. It should be committed to motivate and facilitate its professionals towards facilitating research activities influential to a growing educated society, peaceful culture, and conflict resolution in the country.

Importance of Information for Political Stability and Peace Promotion

Needless to say that in developing peace the provision of valid, reliable and relevant information is indispensable. Information is a key resource for conflict resolution, peace promotion and security. Through the provision of relevant information at all levels, libraries can support government, policy makers, and the civil society. They can also establish the base for the effective functioning of

a democratic system. Wright, (2001) rightly said that "Information promotes and empowers citizens¹ participation in the democratic process; it maintains the Rule of Law and creates a viable outlet for the injection of public opinion. Information availability facilitates the policy-making process of political leadership, all of which nurtures the building of sustainable peace for the enhancement of the State and the nation at large."

Societal Awareness and Growth

The library associations have recognized and championed the power of the printed word in a free and open society. As noted by Bttiha (2010), there is no right more fundamental to a democracy than the right of all citizens to information. In the present social, educational, political and economic scenario of Nigeria, the vision and mission of NLA (Nigerian Library Association) should be very critical as the libraries and societies are interlinked and interdependent. Library is a living social institution made by the people and for the help of people. Part of NLA's mission must be to give the awareness to the society on the immense benefits derivable from the use of libraries; and to promote the vital role of libraries in a democratic society. Issa (2003) observed that economic and national power and status are considered to be dependent upon the wide dissemination and use of information and knowledge. Even though the onus of library and information services rests on the librarian and information scientists, there is also the need to collaborate with others in bringing optimum information services to the public. There is no gainsaying the fact that qualitative and affordable information services promote peace sand facilitates societal cohesion.

In countries with great regard for advanced education and effective librarianship, libraries are considered as the advocate for democracy. The following statement, excerpted from Gordon (2000) amply demonstrates the roles of libraries as advocates for democracy: *"An informed public constitutes the very foundation of a democracy. Libraries are the cornerstone of democracy in our communities because they assist the public in locating a diversity of resources and in developing the information literacy skills necessary to become responsible, informed citizens who can participate in our democracy"*

Use of New Technologies

New information technology is a facilitator of the mission, goals and the objectives of academic, public, school and special libraries around the world.

However, implementing the new technology has its impact, and obstacles associated with specific environments and infrastructures either by geographical location or socio-economic factors. Implementation and use of new information technology as a tool for the above stated purposes may be related to the impact and the obstacles experienced, as well as the perceptions, on its value for information handling, O'Brien and Sidorko, (2000).

Use of new information and communication technologies for promoting education for peace has been discussed with little application of it. The application of new ICT is imperative to reach out to communities to elucidate that conflict may be resolved peacefully. Wikis, folksonomy, Flickr, Podcasting, You-Tube, social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, Whatsapp, Tango, Skype, etc virtual worlds (Second Life), Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 may be used in order to combat the crises caused by extremism. The implications of new technology for public awareness, and peace building are enormous which makes it imperative that librarians should learn and adapt these skills to facilitate their work.

Bibliotherapy

Pardeck (1989) defined bibliotherapy as the use of books to help people solve problems. Bttiha (2010) precisely stated that; bibliotherapy is a family of technique for structuring interaction between a facilitator and a participant based on mutual sharing of literature. The idea of healing through books is not a new one it can be traced far back in history, from the days of the first libraries in Greece;

Bibliotherapy (1982). The researcher suggests that this technique should be in public libraries and special libraries i.e. Medical libraries, Special Rehabilitation centers' libraries and prison libraries (if there are any libraries in our prisons) etc, for helping people understand (through recorded and published accounts) that violence is not the real solution of the society's problems.

Need for global collaboration for research for peace promotion

Sharing of resources, reading materials, technology and sharing of ideas must be promoted for research for peace promotion. Thriving partnerships between libraries and other professionals, such as the teaching faculty and researchers, journalists, computing professionals, publishers, media designers and instructional specialists, are also becoming increasingly common in the

environment of the World Wide Web and is very much desirable for sharing relevant information for the broader objective of building a culture of peace globally. There is a strategic benefit for libraries and librarians in expanding collaborative relationships both within the academic field and out of it. Webb and Doll (1999), is of the view that no one individual or professional has all of the skills now desirable to create and maintain an information infrastructure for a community of users. All the stake-holders need to focus on the ultimate benefit of collaborative relationships, improved products and services for the community of users in an increasingly complex and sophisticated information environment.

Challenges:

Budgetary Limitations

Adequate funds are required in libraries for providing valuable resources and organizing useful programmes for users. Strong political will is necessary for governments to provide finance and planning in order to implement improvements in libraries. The government must provide sufficient budget for the education sector and libraries because with scarce financial resources it would be very difficult for libraries to focus on provision of latest information resources and guaranteeing user satisfaction. Without the provision of the latest information to researchers, staff and students, there can be no scientific and technological development. And there can be no economic and social development without an effective information service.

Libraries should find ways of raising funds like sponsorship, support from friends of the library groups, going into consultancy services, and soliciting external financial support, In addition, they should be research oriented to be able to identify those services that society needs which they can provide. Together, they should be able to market their provisions and services through the creation of public relations offices according to Kargbo, (2002), There are other challenges to promotion of peace education by libraries in Nigeria, including:

- i. Poor reading habit of Nigerians.
- ii. Endemic corruption in Nigeria
- iii. Political/religious disturbances
- iv. Ignorance of Nigerians on their rights and duties, etc...

Conclusion and Recommendations

Libraries and information centers in Nigeria need to be on the front line to contribute meaningfully in combating extremism and promoting education for peace in the society. But unfortunately, it is observed that the overall culture of librarianship tends to be responsible only to it that is librarians should make the profession relevant by applying their profession to solving societal ills. Explicitly, the structure of its work, its commitment and loyalties are defined institutionally and professionally rather than in relationship to the community which is the focus of its work, SLAALIS, (2001). Information literacy programmes are all about bringing the information users and the information they are likely to need, together. The management of information and its users can only be possible through a link by someone who understands the two. Librarians, through the training received in the course of their education, are taught to identify the positive characteristics of both man and materials that can be used for effective information provision. The study recommends that:

1. Libraries and information centers in Nigeria should provide relevant sources (both print and electronic) and service tailored to the immediate and imperative needs of their communities.
2. By organizing seminars, conferences, lectures, library exhibitions and book fairs, display of new publications about the subject, maintaining clippings, and translation services, libraries can contribute to bringing positive change in the society.
3. Libraries and information centers are considered as the best advocates for democracy and promoting societal awareness and development.
4. Bibliotherapy is the technique that can be used for creating the awareness and using books for healing.
5. The utilization of new technology for peace promotion and for communicating positively and logically with global communities is highly recommended.

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