Review

Roles of libraries in ensuring political integration

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This study is a qualitative review on the roles of libraries in enhancing political integration in Nigeria. There is need to foster national integration from the political dimension through library which is a key information institution. This view is presented in terms of the library enhancing political consciousness and participation, federalism, democratic governance, and individual’s response to political campaign messages. It is concluded that library as a social-based information institution is rightly positioned to function outside the box to meet the political information needs of the public and equip them to become better citizens that are politically inclined. Thus, the authors recommend that libraries should provide equitable access to political information, provide media literacy skills, create awareness on the need for political participation and provide rural dwellers with information to meet their educational, medical, political, economic, and social needs.

Key words: Library services, political participation, democratic governance, federalism, national integration/development.

INTRODUCTION

Before the British colonial invasion, Nigeria lived as autonomous communities, kingdoms and caliphates, where political, social and economic administrations were carried out independently. At the invasion, Nigeria became a British protectorate, part of the British Empire in 1901. However, for administrative purposes the protectorate was divided into the Southern and Northern Protectorates. In 1914, both protectorates were merged into a single colony known as Nigeria by the effort of Sir Fredrick Lugard. This amalgamation was with the intent to unite the people and culture of the Northern and Southern protectorates into a sovereign nation called Nigeria. However, the success of this 1914 amalgamation has been called to question given the ever widening gap in unity and continuous disparity among people, cultures, ethnicities and tribes especially between those in the north and south where this fusion endeavour emanated.

According to Eric (2016), the amalgamation of Nigeria spurred ethnic conflicts, disunity in tribes, religions, and natural endowments which is hinged on politics of resource control and allocation. The fission of Nigeria into regions, states and ethnic groups seem to negate the original purpose of the nation’s amalgamation, hence the cravings for national integration which is a core determinant of peaceful coexistence and a building block for national development. It can therefore be extrapolated...
that the ideology of national integration in Nigeria dated back to 1914 when Nigeria was amalgamated.

Integration is defined by Rex and Tomlinson in Rex and Singh (2003) as “not a flattening process of uniformity but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance”. Whereas, national integration is a process of creating relationship between and among hitherto separate nations, after an understanding and reconciliation of the fundamental differences, and an establishment of an acceptable consensus that guide people for peaceful coexistence (Folarin et al., 2014).

National integration which is an emotional unity of different ethnic groups exists in the cultural, political, social, economic, and psychological dimensions (Gurung and Bhandari, 1993). While all these dimensions interact to anchor national integration, the crux of this work will be on political dimension which seems to champion the others.

Political integration (PI) or integration in a political sense (Ilievski, 2015), is considered as the condition “where state attempts to create a congenial atmosphere in order to secure people’s genuine participation and their involvement voluntarily and spontaneously” (Gurung and Bhandari, 1993). It is the loss of sovereignty amongst integrating member states in favor of an increasingly sovereign supranational entity (Kingsolver, 2011).

Political integration helps to build political community by establishing rules, creating common institutions with the power of decision-making, and projecting an identity of the integrated community (Ilievski, 2015). Therefore, political integration enables people within a political constituency to participate in the political activities by which they are governed as well as develop the structure that governs people.

The development of any nation is influenced by the level of their political integration which is an integral part of national integration. It is thus pertinent for scholarly efforts to improve the level of political integration as a means towards national integration and development. While some literatures especially in Political Science have treated political integration, very few have considered factors that can spur political integration in Nigeria but there seem to be none that considers the concept of political integration from the field of Librarianship.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the roles of libraries as information institutions in enhancing political integration in Nigeria. In achieving this, the focus of presentation would be on political consciousness and participation, federalism, democratic governance, individual's response to political campaign messages.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While national integration has been of great concern to government, this study will be of great significance to government officials by providing ways with which the library can assist in enhancing political development which is a key dimension of national development. This can thus serve as a guide to influence the drafting and/or amendment of policies that helps to promote national integration and development.

The findings and by extension, recommendations made by authors in view of the study, will be useful to library management in rightly positioning libraries as development institutions, by promoting national development through political integration which has rarely been given attention in scholarship. This will also inform the redefinition of library services to accommodate new roles and functions in the light of national integration and development, thus extending the conventional practices of the libraries.

Also, at a critical time as this when the relevance of library is questioned in the face of rising technologies, this study is significant in further justifying the relevance of library in the 21st century. The misconception that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and “disruptive” innovators like Google has displaced the relevance of library is corrected by this study in demonstrating other relevance of library especially those which directly correlates national development.

Moreover, there seem to be a dearth of literature on how libraries can enhance political integration, which further depicts the significance of this study. The study will add to the sparse existing literature connecting libraries to national integration especially from the political perspective.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a literature based approach to collect, analyze and synthesize existing findings of research in respect to the roles of libraries in view of enhancing national integration and development. Literature from journal articles, books, web resources among others in the areas of librarianship and political science forms the basis of this review. The approach to this study helps to provide a summary of literature on the variables understudied.

ROLES OF LIBRARIES IN POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND PARTICIPATION

Political matters in Nigeria are so sensitive and decisive that it call for political consciousness and participation by all citizens, and can be beefed-up by libraries through awareness creation to the public.

Consciousness has to do with feeling or state of mind about something. Consciousness is someone’s ideas, feelings or opinions about politics (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2012). Meanwhile, political consciousness is one’s political state of mind which is
Based on the personal awareness of politics, position in the political system and history, and actions one perceived as available to take in an effort to influence the political reality in which one operates. Political consciousness is closely related to the concept of political participation and the idea of social contract between the people and the government. Reasons for political participation go beyond parties.

Political participation connotes actions of citizens by which they seek to influence or to support governance and government. People with more education, higher incomes, and white-collar jobs are more likely than others to participate in politics. People participate in electoral matters to have freedom to speak out, hold offices at any level of government, have opportunity to register as candidates, vote and be voted for. They can also participate in politics to socialize and hence act as agents of socialization to empower the democratic society and foster social transformation as they take part in conducting public affairs through the following ways as outlined by Lauren (n.d) as information provision, privacy, equity of access, education, independent learners and intellectual freedom. Effort will be made to discuss the first two as stated in the following.

**Information Provision**

Information provision is required from library and information professionals to meet the challenges of Nigeria’s political system and history, to influence political realities operational in the country.

A unique role of libraries as social institutions charged with responsibility of acquiring, organizing, and disseminating information to all members of the society, naturally position them to ensure that information is provided and that citizens have access to information that will enable them function reasonably and make useful contributions in politics.

A public library, regarded as the people’s university and the custodians of knowledge, makes political information available publicly.

People need to be able to find and use information in order to understand how the political system works, and participate in formal and informal political activities (Lauren, n. d.); libraries should provide such information in order to contribute to democratic ideals, as a purveyor of information and knowledge.

The Australian Library and Information Association statement on Information for All Australian (2001) clearly stated that information alone is no democratic guarantor. However, Dinneya (2006) opined that without access to information, governance processes lack transparency and government officials will be at pain to earn the confidence of an uninformed citizenry. Access to information enables the citizenry to make informed judgments regarding government performance. Libraries play a key role in making information readily available to enhance political consciousness and participation in Nigeria.

**Privacy**

Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, thought, and association. The possibility of surveillance, whether direct or through access to records of speech, research and exploration undermines a democratic society. Privacy, an interpretation of the library bill of rights protecting user privacy and confidentiality has long been an integral part of the mission of libraries. The ALA has affirmed a right to privacy since 1939. Rights to privacy and confidentiality also are implicit in the guarantee of free access to library resources for all users.

Libraries advocate the rights of people to unfettered access to information (Okeke et al., 2013). Libraries are the focal point for people’s inquiry into the physical and social phenomena of their environment as it serves as a social instrument, a learning centre and an open university for all classes of people. Nevertheless, for political consciousness and participation/participatory citizenry, information literacy is essential. Libraries also serve as trusted providers of information literacy programmes to citizens required to spur their political consciousness and participation.

**ROLES OF LIBRARIES IN ENHANCING FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA**

Federalism has been operational in Nigeria since the former British colony was reorganized into a federation of three regions in 1946. Federalism can be seen as a system of government in which governmental powers that exist in a country are shared between central government and other component units, that is, state and local government (Adekoya, 2016). It is a political arrangement which admits a relationship of multiplicity of interest that can be managed in a compatible, just and equitable manner (Madubuike, 2007).

Adekoya (2016) outlined the major reasons for the introduction of federalism in Nigeria as follows; cultural diversity, fear of domination by minority, geographical factor, economic factor, effective administration, and bringing government nearer to the people. He opined that the fear of domination by minorities was the major reason why the Nigerian government included federal character principle into the constitution to prevent tribal or regional dominance of any government or its agency. Federal character ordinarily protects the minorities but, its inappropriate application in Nigeria led to inequality, tribal dominance, lack of transparency and corruption.

The role of libraries in enhancing federalism in Nigeria can be traced to the Universal Declaration of Human
Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) which include the Right to Education. Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should rise up to persuade the government to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The move towards a more democratic form of education in the 1960’s and 1970’s resulted to a shift in the concept of education from one that was authoritarian and elitist to one that advocated ‘equal opportunity in education’ seen as a democratic right of all individuals irrespective of race, status, age or ability (Prajapati, 2015).

Political education in a democracy involves conscious efforts for and by citizens to acquire cognitive, procedural and habitual democratic skills. Cognitive skills ensure a certain level of awareness of the political system’s institutional structure (Dinneya, 2006).

Political education programme is also necessary for Nigerians below voting age. However, the education level of political appointees should be above school certificate. Libraries should enhance the awareness for the institutionalization of political education, as this will foster a healthy democratic development and directly address Nigeria’s worst economic problems of the time. Information professionals are to act as advisory bodies in the formulation of broad government policies (Advisory Committee on Political Matters).

Through public education (as provided by libraries), a nation is kept alive, and cherished values and virtues are passed to the next generation (Eze et al., 2015). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can also be used to support literacy rate/education. The information literate persons are those who are able to recognize their need for information, identify, locate, access, synthesize, evaluate and apply the needed information.

ROLES OF LIBRARIES IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The Nigerian society and its sectors crave for good democratic governance because of the progress of the society and its citizenry. The library inevitably has to join this crave by using the information and knowledge materials under their custody to provide the necessary information for the understanding of what it takes to govern, what governance is and how the rulers should rule exposing the fundamental human rights of the land to them.

Democratic governance, according to Bello-Imam and Obadan (2004), represents the exercise of state power with the consent of the people either directly or indirectly through their elected representatives. The library houses users from different places, who would learn from one material to another in order to get educated and give back to the society. It is through studying that the users who happen to be the citizens get exposed to know that democratic governance guides such indispensable prerequisites as economic equality, fraternal feeling and political liberty within a defined territory.

Libraries are involved in various jobs and engagements in the day to day activities that they carry out. The libraries are not just built or kept for book keeping and welcoming of users. Their jobs are numerous, ranging from guidance, referrals, and internet services to information literacy. Their activities also are geared towards a good and governable environment as they house and give out materials that will help in educating citizens of their nation run a better democracy. The idea of democracy as a universal commitment is quite new, and it is quiet essentially a product of the twentieth century. But today, we are in twenty-first century and need better democratic governance through roles played by the entire nation, of which the library is inclusive.

According to Jaeger and Burnett (2005), every democratic society relies on deliberation and dialogue between social groups with varying perspectives to provide for the representation of the diverse members of the society. The library in its own case is ready to maintain certain basic skills through organizing talks on elections using the information resources housed in it, that would empower the citizens and the leaders to become self-reliant, and foster interactions in order to move away from social vices like stealing, embezzlement, hijacking of voting materials, election violence, etc., that could jeopardize the democracy. Skills like digital literacy, information literacy, are better delivered to the citizens through the library to enable them use the computers effectively during elections/voting exercises to get information, to vote for their candidates and source for election better practices.

According to Amiye-Ofori (2009), the crucial role of democratic governance to the success of the political system was reinforced after the Second World War. And this was conquered through deliberations and contributions from learned Nigerians. These learned Nigerians could not have succeeded without studying. All that is required to study are kept in the libraries. Meaningful deliberation is another role the libraries could use to bring about good governance. This is based on open access to information which the libraries provide. The library makes information available during the electioneering campaigns and accommodates those who want to know more about politics, assist in bridging the gap between the poor, and the less privileged who could not afford newspapers, magazines, etc., but rush back to the library (les) for newspapers, to read and get educated about what had happened and the things happening in the society.

Figure 1 shows that the library at the centre depicts an interconnectedness between political parties (and their candidates), the public who constitute the electorates and the political activities. Nigerian has a multi-party system with multiple ideologies; the people (citizens) belong to
parties of their choices which in line perform different activities on how the society could be governed democratically. The parties either gather information from their members, radio, television, newspapers or magazines during and after elections. Some citizens of the country miss these information materials for information, but are informed by the library (ies) through these materials as they come requesting for newspapers, magazines, and bulletins. Anele (2015) stated that the information that the society requires are acquired and housed in the libraries because they are custodians of intellectual knowledge put in papers and represented accordingly.

ROLES OF LIBRARIES IN ENHANCING INDIVIDUAL’S RESPONSE TO POLITICAL CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

One key element of political integration is democratic governance characterised by electoral practices at time interval, usually four years in Nigeria. Democratic governance birthed communication between political parties or its candidates and electorates in seeking the support of the latter, through political campaign messages. During this period, candidates and their parties flood the atmosphere with a myriad of campaign messages (containing diverse information) which, according to Graber (1988), are not easy to understand. The avalanche of information puts pressure on the capacity of the voter to process and comprehend information contained in campaign messages. This results in errors (Fiske and Taylor, 1991) which could pervert electorates’ decision with negative implications on democratic governance. Accurate and timely information is the “live-wire” of democracy as it equips individuals to make sound voting decision. According to Desposato (2007), many voters only have basic or no formal education and little or no access to political information which makes voting decision as part of “clientelistic” exchange and not policy debates. Libraries as social and information based institutions are well equipped to carry out information literacy programmes that could develop the ability of electorate to discern political campaign messages regardless of the media by which they are communicated.

Studies reveal audiences’ deficiency in complex skills for a sufficiently critical understanding in dealing with highly sophisticated media messages (Livingstone, 2004). However, the same media may collude with politicians to conceal useful information from the public when it is in the interest of the politicians, thereby leaving the voter to his/her fate (Nwanne, 2007); whereas, the number of people who receive political information from the media keep increasing (Swanson and Mancini, 1996). It is therefore imperative to provide electorates with a source of information that is objective and without political
sentiment. Libraries can function outside their conventional practice by arming the public with skills necessary for understanding the media and media messages in a bid to identify media bias.

Libraries could provide objective information about candidates, political parties, issues in a bid to negate widespread negativity which, according to Desposato (2007), will simply reinforce general pessimism about the ability of democracy to address the challenges of development. In doing this, libraries are promoting development by enhancing democratic governance via people-centered elections.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Political integration which is an integral part of national integration is necessary to sustain democratic governance, peaceful coexistence and national development.

Democracy strives in an atmosphere of quality and equitable access to political information and the library as a social-based information institution is rightly positioned to perform “outside the box” to meet the political information needs of the public and equip them to become better citizens that are politically inclined, hence contributing much more to nation building. In view of this, the following recommendations are made:

(1) Libraries should give the public equitable access to political information using various electronic, social and print media platforms at their disposal. Such political information should include voters right, election’s schedule, among others, should be done with the intent to increase political participation and awareness. This free and equitable access to information will enable individuals bridge the gap in the state of their political knowledge which will enhance their political participation and invariably spurs national integration.

(2) Libraries should provide information and media literacy skills to members of the public in order to enable them respond properly to political campaign messages regardless of the media. These media literacy skills will also equip them with skills to detect “fake news” propagated during campaigns thereby enabling well informed decisions.

(3) Nigerian Library Association should liaise with the government through the Ministry of Education to instate the 1948 Universal Declaration Rights, the one for education in particular.

(4) Libraries should create awareness on the need for members of the public to participate in political activities as a means to democratic sustenance. This awareness could be through the library’s blog/website, radio jingles, telecast, library notice boards, flyers, posters, banners among others.

(5) Library services and resources should be extended to those in the rural areas with limited access to scientific information. Such services and resources should focus on meeting their information needs in all aspects of human endeavour to include educational, medical, political, economical and social. These information will provide equitable access to opportunities for members of the public which is germane to building national integration.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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