

THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY IN LIFELONG LEARNING

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Abstract

Lifelong learning is relatively new in the field of study. It is being supported and advocated for by many institutions such as government, religion, society, family because of its importance to update every citizen in order to achieve socio-economic development, and as a tool for promoting a knowledge based society. This paper thus examines the definitions of lifelong learning, reasons for lifelong learning, the groups of people involved and the roles the academic libraries play to enhance the effectiveness of the different programmes in support of lifelong learning. Such roles include making use of technological media to serve the learners, cooperating with public and national libraries in making use of their materials, for lifelong learners. The paper concludes by stating the importance of lifelong learning and challenging academic libraries to wake up to possess relevant learning resources, package and repackage them to meet the needs of the lifelong learners. The paper recommends that parent institutions should provide adequate fund for the libraries, academic libraries should cooperate with national and public libraries to make use of their resources, and academic libraries should embark on advocacy programme to create awareness of their services to the lifelong learners.

Introduction

Learning is continuous from cradle to grave. Every man needs to update himself as what is recently in vogue could become obsolete very soon. Webster's dictionary (1990) defines learning as the act or experience of one that learns knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study. Modification of a behavioural tendency by experience (as exposure to conditioning). Longman Active Study Dictionary (2005) says to learn is to get knowledge of a subject or skill by studying, doing it or being taught. Brophy, Craven, and Fisher (1998) describe learning as the process through which human kind will achieve its full potential.

From these definitions it is clear that learning has a focus, it is an action or a process to achieve something. Learning can take place to achieve knowledge or skill or to modify a behavioural tendency. The behavioural tendency may be positive or negative. From the definitions also, learning involves passing through instruction or study. The instruction may be formal or informal all is to achieve a goal, that is knowledge or skill.

Learning is so important for mankind to be able to become what it should be, able to adapt and adjust to the society it finds itself, and be useful. Learning is lifelong because the society man finds himself is changing, and in order to meet up

with the changing society learning must be continuous. Brophy et al (1998) are of the opinion that planned and directed learning opportunities are needed to enable individuals to access future learning opportunities: to get a foot on the bottom rung of the ladder of personal development. The view of Brophy and others brought about what is known as formal or traditional education which is a platform by which an individual can have further studies for better development.

There are various programmes being run by higher institutions of learning to promote lifelong learning. Such programmes are: adult education, open learning, distance learning, sandwich courses, continuing professional education, extral-mural courses, and employment-based learning. All these programmes contribute immensely to lifelong learning. Those who have dropped out of school for lack of interest, or sponsorship or inability to secure admission on time, promotion at work will need further studies for better performance can make use of any of the programmes for development.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought about changes virtually in every sector of human endeavours. The introduction of technologies has made a lifelong learning a must so that every man will be able to adapt to the changing systems of doing things. Adeyoyin (2011) asserts that banks, insurance companies, government agencies, entertainment media, amongst others depend heavily on Information and Communication Technology which was alien to them some years back.

In the teaching and learning process ICT has become an instrument of development. Some years back computer operations were not known or in use but today they are essential tools for everybody

to enhance the day-to-day activities in all facets of human endeavours. For instance, whether literate or illiterate one must be able to learn the new technologies such as handsets, digital televisions, electronic mail as a means of communication and automated teller machine (ATM) to withdraw money in the bank. We have World Wide Web (WWW) as convergence of multiple databases which is accessible through the internet and can be for information dissemination. There is File Transfer Protocol (FTP) which is one of the ways of getting information on the internet. There is internet conferencing which is used to bring people together to meet and discuss issues of common interest electronically without physical human presence.

The senior secondary school students of today must be versed in computer operations so as to write Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) which is now Computer Based Test (CBT). Many public and private organizations have made computer literacy compulsory to the extent that without proficiency in computer operations, one would not qualify for employment or promotion. The impact of application of information technologies cut across all sectors of human life such as agricultural practices, transportation, health as well as educational services.

What all of the above mentioned imply is that learning does not stop at particular level or time, it is lifelong, and it can take place in a formal or an informal setting. It should be noted that lifelong learning gives dropouts from school to resume schooling whenever they are willing and opportuned.

Objectives of the Study

Lifelong learning is indispensable for one or even the society to meet up with

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the new developments that are occurring every day. This study thus examines the:

- basis for introducing lifelong learning;
- group of people involved in lifelong learning; and,
- role the academic library plays in enhancing lifelong learning.

Concept of Lifelong Learning

Haggstrom (2015) defines lifelong learning as all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. The definition goes further that the learning contains various forms of education and training, formal, non-formal and informal e.g. traditional school system from primary to tertiary levels, free adult education, informal search and training, individually, in a group setting or within the framework of social movements. From this definition, it is clear that lifelong learning improves knowledge, skills and competence of the learners in order to perform better in their undertakings. The definition further lists the forms by which the learning occurs such as formal, non-formal and informal.

Peter (2013), quoting Scottish Executive in Sachs (1995), describes lifelong learning as a process that covers the wide range of learning that includes formal and informal. It also includes the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in their day to day experiences. Tackie (2011), quoting NIACE (2003), also defines lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and or employment related perspectives.

The emphasis on the above definitions is that lifelong learning is a process by which people acquire knowledge, skills and competence, and it is

not a process that ends in a day or week or year, it is continuous throughout the learners' life span. The process of acquiring the knowledge, skills, attitudes behaviour may be formal, that is in a classroom setting or informal that is through a day-to-day interaction. In other words, everybody must be ready to learn whether in the formal setting or an informal setting.

Brophy et al (1998) define lifelong learning as a deliberate progression throughout the life of an individual, where the initial acquisition of knowledge and skills is reviewed and upgraded continuously, to meet challenges set by an ever changing society. Their emphasis is that learning is a deliberate, intentional progression which does not end until the expiration of the learner on earth, the previous knowledge of the learner is reviewed and upgraded in order to fit in into the changing society. Therefore, the initial knowledge or skills of the learner is not enough because the society is not static, new things are coming in everyday. Learning can therefore be seen as a process by which people get knowledge, skills, exposure in order to cope with new developments in society everytime.

The Basis for Lifelong Learning

Factors for the emergence of lifelong learning are information society; the rapid expansion of new technologies, the rate of economic, industrial, commercial and cultural change. Others are organizational change and societal change. Brophy et al (1998) all these changes and many others are the bases for lifelong learning, and as to adapt is to learn. Peter (2013), quoting Soni (2012), lists some factors motivating people to undergo adult education which is one of the programmes supporting lifelong learning. Such factors as: to upgrade job skills; to start a business; to learn about a subject or to extend their knowledge; to meet new people; to develop self-confidence; to

get involved in the community; to develop personal skills; and to participate in social networking. Tackie (2011) also lists the benefits of lifelong learning as to help individuals to update their knowledge base, develop new skills and competencies; handle the constant changes related to information age, acquire foresight, understand development and acquire personal, professional and intellectual development. Tackie mentions other benefits as helping in maintaining competitiveness, employability and productivity; it promotes social inclusion, freedom of expression and opinion necessary for democracy to thrive. It helps individuals increase their personal choices and options available to them. It helps individuals to adapt to the information society, and create a highly skilled workforce and therefore a strong society. It is clear here that lifelong learning is a necessity for everyone, though many people are reluctant, unwilling to adjust, it is just to their own disadvantage.

The Group of People involved in Life-Long Learning

The basis for lifelong learning suggests the people groups that should partake in lifelong learning. With all the changes virtually in all sectors of human life, it suggests that nobody is left out in the learning.

Brophy et al (1998) list the following groups of people as lifelong learners:

- The individual as learner
- The employer who needs skilled staff
- The academic institution whose mission is to enable and deliver effective learning.
- Society which needs well-educated citizens.
- Government which can deliver its programmes and secure future

prosperity the development.

In different categories, everybody is involved that is everyone undergoes learning consciously or unconsciously, be it formal or informal. It is therefore a fact that the society has become a learning society.

Different Programmes in Support of Lifelong Learning

Brophy et al (1998) identify ten different programmes in support of lifelong learning. Such programmes as:

- **Distance Learning:** The programme separates teacher and learner from face-to-face lecturing it has the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes it from private study. Provision of two-way communication that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue. Possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes.
- **Franchised Courses:** This is described as traditional higher education courses but delivered away from the parent university, usually at a college of further education. The local college for this programme has its own library to serve the students of the college.
- **Open Learning:** This is any form of learning which includes elements of flexibility which make it more accessible to students than courses traditionally provided in centres of education and training. Very often the openness is achieved by the use of information and communication media.
- **Work-based Learning:** Work-based learning can be incorporated into:
 - Sandwich courses
 - Employment-based learning programmes

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- Joint education and industry initiatives
- Continuing professional development programmes.
- **Independent Learning:** Learning which occurs independently of the formal education system and which is characterized by learner responsibility for the direction and execution of learning. This learning also means “all learning perceive and codify stimuli in an individual, idiosyncratic fashion and to that extent all learning activities are characterised by a degree of independence”. This kind of learning does not follow the traditional pattern of education whereby teacher teaches the student. The learner is independent to develop him/herself personally.
- **Extra-mural Courses:** This form of programme is usually being run outside the institution of learning. The need for lifelong learning to prepare citizens for the changing society has made the programme relevant
- **Adult education:** Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia defines adult education as a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. In defining adult education aontas.com defines adult learning as a vital component of the lifelong-learning continuum, covering the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities, general and vocational, undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training. It should be

noted that adult education is a component of lifelong learning which adults engage in after the preliminary education or training in order to acquire new knowledge skills, attitudes or values to adapt to the changing society.

All the programmes mentioned above are designed to support lifelong learning for the citizens who need to adapt to the changing societies. The programmes are being run by higher institutions. It is therefore imperative for the academic libraries to work toward the achieving the goals of the parent institutions.

In Nigeria specifically, the Nigerian government has made provision for lifelong learning through mass literacy, adult and non-formal education. The following are their goals as stated in the National Policy on Education (2013)

- a. Provide functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who left school too early. The target groups include migrant folks, almajiri pupils, illiterate and semi-literate adults, youths and adolescents; persons who left the formal school system early and are now willing to come back and continue schooling, and other categories of disadvantaged groups; who are unable to have access to the conventional educational system and therefore require other forms of educational programmes to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances;
- b. Provide remedial and life-long education for youths and adults who did not complete secondary education; and
- c. Provide in-service, vocational and

professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

Open and Distance Education

The goals of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria shall be to:

- a. Provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities;
- b. Meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at the workplace;
- c. Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula;
- d. Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work; and
- e. Encourage life-long learning opportunities.

Academic libraries must ensure that the goals of establishing these programmes are materialized. The need for lifelong learning has brought about the establishment of the programmes, and the libraries as reservoirs and disseminators of knowledge must work toward the realization of the goals.

The Role of Academic Library in Promoting Lifelong Learning

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines an academic library as a library that is attached to a higher education institution which serves two complementary purposes to support the school's curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. Adeyoyin (2011) describes academic libraries as libraries to post-secondary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and

colleges of technology. Academic libraries are found in higher institutions of learning. It should be noted that they are established to achieve the target objectives of the parent institution.

Academic library has a lot of roles to play to support lifelong learning since the learning is a progression from one level to another to achieve a skill, knowledge, attitude or behaviour for a purpose. Usoro and Usanga (2009) observe that academic libraries have resources in their disposal. These resources facilitate the acquisition of physical and intellectual skills necessary to assisting the individual to develop literacy for lifelong education as useful member of his communication and also to acquire an objective view of the local and external environments.

Aina (2012) asserts that the library serves the following groups of people: kindergartens, students, professors, policy makers, professionals, politicians, the rural people, physically challenged persons, illiterates, neo-literates, farmers, fishermen, chiefs, artisans, miscreants, etc. He declares that these groups of users, and more, could be serviced with information and knowledge by any of the following types of libraries: academic libraries, special libraries, school libraries, government libraries, public libraries, and national libraries. It should be noted that many of these groups of people acquiring knowledge are not doing so through the formal system of education. Many of the groups acquire knowledge through adult education or distance learning or open learning etc. The onus is on the academic libraries to support lifelong learning by providing adequate resources for the lifelong learners in their various centres.

Mattern (2014) describes public libraries as opportunity institutions, opening doors to, and for the disenfranchised. He

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mentions the benefits of public libraries as highlighted by the Centre for an Urban Future, he says that immigrants, seniors, individuals searching for work, public school students and aspiring entrepreneurs benefit from public libraries. He opined that no other institution, public or private does a better job of reaching who have been left behind in today's economy, have failed to reach their potential in the city's public school system or those who simply need help navigating an increasing complex world. As long as the public libraries offer these fantastic services to the categories of people like this, it will be much more relevant for the academic libraries to cooperate with the public libraries in order to make use of their resources to serve their lifelong learners.

In the same vein, academic libraries can also cooperate with the national libraries to promote lifelong learning. Tackie (2011) explains national library as a library established to serve the entire citizen of the public within a local community, a state or a nation. It is established by the national government of a country to serve the educational, social and recreational needs of the community. Since the libraries are saddled with the responsibility of collecting, arranging, storing and disseminating information, and information materials, the libraries are open centres for all and sundry to be informed, enlightened and educated with different materials available there most especially for those who want to improve on their knowledge with little or no charges. The cooperation of the academic libraries with the national libraries will go a long way to achieve their goals of establishing lifelong learning centres by making use of item resources for their lifelong learners.

With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), academic libraries can reach lifelong

learners easily at anytime and everywhere. Thorpe (2016) identified the following advantages of new media for lifelong learning thus:

- A sense of presence, possibly even community, in online interaction
- Improved learner support
- Unlimited practice of difficult concepts, skills etc.
- Unlimited access to resources via the internet
- Improved delivery of learner preferences-notably those required by students with disabilities.
- Global access to resources and teaching
- Learning anywhere, anytime.

The academic libraries will find these media so useful for their lifelong learners by making their resources available to them in their various centres through the internet facilities. The only barrier to these advantages is that if the facilities are not available especially in developing countries such as African countries these advantages may be a mirage.

Thorpe, (2016) also identifies another usefulness of information and communication technology that ease of communication enabled by e-mail and conferencing is that tutors and students are in more frequent contact and teaching is more continuous, with tutors logging on every few days, if not daily in some cases. This opportunity will enhance the effectiveness of distance learning being organized by higher institution. Academic libraries must key themselves into this new development so as to make their materials available to the distance learners through these media. Though effort must be made by the libraries to have access to the e-mail addresses of the learners in order to make the service delivery possible and easy.

In lifelong learning centres where information technologies are not available due to some reasons such as underdevelopment of the areas, lack of fund, lack of electricity etc, academic libraries can provide outreach services which deliver books and journals to their users in their different locations.

Academic libraries provide their students with information literacy skills. This is done through their general course in their first year in higher institution titled "Introduction to Library Studies". This enables them to access information effectively and efficiently not only for academic purposes but at the work place after they have graduated from formal education.

Tackie (2011) observes that academic libraries provide support for university-based non-formal and informal educational programmes. This is in a situation where academic libraries support individuals engaged in distance learning, independent learning and work-based learning activities. It is clear that academic libraries have a lot to do in lifelong learning, and as a result they must wake up and be innovative so as to be relevant

Conclusion

Learning is a continuous activity. It does not end at a particular time, and that is why it is lifelong. There are needs for learning by the citizens of the society because the society is changing, there is need for new skills, new knowledge, new attitude etc to carry out new thing that are happening, to get promotion at work, to increase productivity in the places of work, be acquainted with the new technological products. In view of this, the academic libraries must wake up and possess relevant resources, package and repackage them to meet the needs of the lifelong learners.

Recommendations

Based on the bases and the categories of people undergoing lifelong learning, the following recommendations are therefore made for action in order to improve the quality of lifelong learning by academic libraries:

- The parent institutions of academic libraries must ensure adequate provision of financial support for these libraries to meet their needs.
- Academic libraries should collaborate with the national and public libraries in making use of their resources to serve their lifelong learners in their different centres.
- Academic libraries should make the provision of ICT facilities a priority, for this will help them a lot to link with the learners through internet and social media.
- Following the goals of the government in the national policy on education substantial amount of money must be made available by the government to tertiary institutions which academic libraries serve so that the needed learning resources will be available to lifelong learners in their different locations, and in turn the goals will become a reality.
- Academic libraries should also embark on advocacy programme. This will go a long way to create awareness to the public. Those who do not know about the services of the libraries as regards lifelong learning will know, those who many not be willing in furtherance of their studies may develop interest.

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