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Librarians' Perceptions of the Role of Information Literacy for Sustenance of a Democratic Nation

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Abstract

This research adopted a survey design which sought information from respondents on the Information literacy, for sustenance of a democratic nation. The population comprised forty-seven (47) practicing library staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Library, Anambra State. The nominal role of the staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Library was used to derive the population of the study. There was no sampling because the whole population was studied since it is small and manageable. A self-developed questionnaire entitled "Information Literacy for sustenance of democracy Questionnaire, ILSDQ" was used for data collection. ILSDQ was validated by experts from Library and Information Science Department in the Faculty of Education of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data were collected and analysed using mean scores. The findings revealed that, the librarians agreed that information literacy actually sustains a democratic nation. Illiteracy, low computer skills, lack of professionals trained in information literacy, lack of reading culture, among others, are some identified challenges to information literacy. Based on the findings, recommendations include among others that information literacy should be included in primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions curriculum, with teachers, lecturers and librarians teaching it.

Keywords: Information, Information Literacy, Democracy, Democratic nation

Introduction

Democracy is the most popular among all the systems of government in the whole wide world. It is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy has its genesis from Athens in Greece between 508-507BC (Ugwuanyi, & Achebe, 2012). Since then, it has undergone several modifications, metamorphoses and reformations in tandem with the interest of the masses. In a democratic system of government, the people exercise their governing power directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves. In the business of governance, the masses representing the popular constituencies have the overall say. Democracy therefore implies the existence of majority rule, electoral activities, rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, independence of the judiciary, freedom of movement, right to life, right to gainful employment and right to information. According to Nwofor, & Ilorah, (2015), democracy is simply, government by consent of the governed, public accountability, majority rule, recognition of minority rights, constitutional government, enthronement of justice and a voice for the downtrodden. In democracy, government policies and actions are generally determined by the majority of the masses to a larger extent.

The supremacy/ sovereignty of the rule of law make democracy outstandingly beautiful. Today, democracy which is a global phenomenon has become the yardstick for measuring good governance in the various geographical

locations/countries including Nigeria and other African countries (Nwofor, & Ilorah, 2015). Democracy is acclaimed to be the best system of administration, and functions best where the electorates are literate, have freedom of assembly and full access to information, freedom of speech, and freedom to contribute to the civil and political decisions of their countries.

Information is useful facts and figures. It is a processed data used in decision making. Information is man's cumulated knowledge in all subjects, in all forms and from all sources that could help its users to make rational decisions (Azubike, n.d.). He further stressed that information could be defined as data of value in planning, decision-making and the execution of government programmes. Thus information could be regarded as the life wire of any successful operation.

Information literacy is a natural extension of the concept of literacy in our information society, and information literacy education is the catalyst required to transform the information society of today into the learning society of tomorrow. This is in conformity with the views of researchers such as (Rivano Eckerdal, 2017; Smith, 2016) that explained information literacy as social need and access for the huge amount of information in today's information society. Association of College and Research Libraries ACRL, (2002) defined information literacy as the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information. Information literate person is one who is "able to recognize when

information is needed,” knows what information is needed to address a given problem or issue, and, beyond that, has “the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information. An information literate person possesses knowledge which stands at all times as an instrument per excellence for achieving growth, progress, and national development in a democratic nation.

Advanced nations of the world have attained a high level of social, economic, scientific, and technological advancement through well planned and implemented educational systems (Ifeanacho & Nwachukwu, 2015). Information literacy is important owing to the amount of information that is available in this information society.

In Nigeria for instance, people crave for good democratic governance because of the progress of the society and its citizenry. The library being the key perpetrator of information literacy 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 makes information available during the electioneering campaigns and accommodates those who want to know

more about politics. The library assists in bridging the gap between the poor, and the less privileged who could not afford newspapers, magazines, etc. Such poor persons always rush to the library for newspapers, to read and get educated about what had happened and the things happening in the society. 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, but are informed by the library through these materials as they come requesting for newspapers, magazines, and bulletins. It takes information literacy knowledge to understand the available information and as such make meaningful decision. These information sources in the library, radio, television, or elsewhere is useless to a person who lacks information illiteracy because he does not have the ability to access evaluate and use information.

In the context of information for citizenship, people need (Moore, 2002) to have access to, and use information in order to function as citizens (and as consumers of public services). Information literate citizens make more intelligible decisions than information illiterate citizens. Hence they vote aright during elections. According to Dineya as cited in Alex-Nmecha, Horsefall, and Igbinovia (2017) without access to information, governance processes become translucent, confidence and trust of the uninformed citizenry would be lost by government officials. Access to information enables the citizenry to make informed judgment regarding government performance. People that lack information

literacy skills as a result of inequalities in the access and use of information, do not function well as citizens in a democratic nation.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have come up with new dissemination channels for information producers. They have made it easier for the information literate people who have access to ICT and the Internet to gather information from a range of sources. However, they also introduced a new set of information literacy skills. They also created the risk of increasing the gap between those that have information (information rich) and those that have not (information poor). Increased penetration of ICT can actually increase the level of information exclusion, one of the causes of social exclusion (Ana - Maria & Ana - Maria, 2015).

However, scholars have identified some impediments to information literacy in general. According to Akakandelwa (2010) most institutions face the following challenges in the provision of information literacy: no strategic plan for information literacy, inadequate information and communication technology infrastructure, lack of human resources trained in information literacy, lack of management support and insufficient funds. Reading phobia and negative attitude to the use of library also hinders the citizens from achieving information literacy. This in turn results to retrogressive democratic and national development.

It is against this background that this study, therefore, seeks to investigate

information literacy for the sustenance of a democratic nation.

Purpose of the study

1. To find out the comprehension of the concept of democracy.
2. To investigate the understanding of the concept of information literacy.
3. To determine librarian's perception of how information literacy, sustains a democratic nation.
4. To identify the problems militating against information literacy programmes for sustenance of national democracy.

Research questions

1. What is the meaning of the term 'Democracy'?
2. What does information literacy imply?
3. What are librarian's perceptions on how information literacy sustains democracy?
4. What are the problems militating against information literacy programmes for sustenance of a democratic nation?

Literature review

According to Kovalik, Jesen, and Schloman (2010) information literacy skills refers to an individual's ability to recognize when there is need for information and to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and use information to effectively solve the problem at hand. Information literate citizens understand the need for quality information to address problems and questions in their own lives, in their communities and in society, as

well as the need to analyse, question and integrate the information available into their own bodies of knowledge and experiences (Ana - Maria & Ana - Maria, 2015). Information literacy skill deals on the ability to access, evaluate, organize and use information in order to learn, solve problems, and make decisions in formal as well as informal learning context. It could be at work, at home, and educational settings (Bruce, 2003). In the same accord, Ranaweera (2010) said that information literacy skills empower the people with critical skills which will help them to become independent lifelong learners. Educators should adopt innovative educational strategies and ICT-based delivery that promote lifelong learning attitudes rather than subject-specific skills, for the purpose of information literacy. For example, computer studies were originally seen as a subject aiming to achieve mastery over the machine. Andretta, however, believes that the more critical and reflective aspects of information literacy must be developed alongside the technical competences.

Ogunshola, as cited in Nwofor & Ilorah (2015) states that "Information is the lifeblood of democracy" and the public librarians help their library users to become information literate. Information literate individuals have little or no barrier in information accessibility.

Contributing to the benefit of information literacy to the growth of democratic nations, Ward as cited in Ogbo, Uzoagba, & Nwebiem, (2017) states that lack of adequate developed information skills among a nations citizen hinders the successful functioning of democracy and

decision making for the common good. Poor information by local, state and national leaders according to the authors can result to the tragic unfortunate consequences. Using information literacy skills, the legislature would make high quality laws; the executive would make and initiate high quality programmes and policies, while the judiciary would deliver landmark judgments. This would amount to efficient, sustainable and enduring democratic nation (Ogbo, Uzoagba, & Nwebiem, 2017).

The idea of democracy as a universal commitment is quite new, it is essentially the product of the twentieth century. Today, we are in twenty first century and need democratic governance through roles played by the entire nation not devoid of information literacy skills. Through public education, a nation is kept alive and cherished values are passed to posterity. Information and communication technology can also be used to support literacy. Hence an information literate person recognizes the need for information, identify, locate, access, synthesize, evaluate and apply the needed information even in democratic matters. (Alex-Nmecha, Horsfall, & Igbinovia, (2017). Izukanne (2003) quoted Abraham Lincoln as defining democracy to be the government of the people by the people and for the people. Democracy has two main variants. One is direct while the other is indirect. Direct as practiced in early Greek city states represent a situation where all the citizens meet together in one place to take decisions concerning the governance of their states. Every free male adult participated in the administration of each state. The indirect

or representative democracy is a form that emerged with the growth of population and the area to be governed. In this, the citizenry choose representatives who rule on their behalf and according to the wishes of the majority (Ugwuanyi, & Achebe, 2012).

Smith (2016), lamented that citizens who were very keen to engage in information literacy programs, encounter significant impediments, such as lack of time, lack of resources, and lack of guidance around what kind of engagement with political education would be appropriate.

Researchers identified funding, unfavourable government policies, lack of Internet resources, inadequate library activities and services geared towards promoting democracy, poor reading culture, ignorance and inadequate training of librarians as some of the problems hindering the success of information literacy from sustaining a democratic nation (Nwofor & Ilorah, 2015; Vogel, 2011; Ian, 2011; Jemo, 2008).

It is a quite clear and indisputable fact that information literacy is a fundamental requirement for an information society and a learning society. This confirms the point that information literacy is not just the responsibility of the library, but has a wider remit for educational social and democratic developments (Andretta, 2006).

Methods

The research adopted a descriptive survey design which sought information from respondents on information literacy in a

democratic nation. The population is made up of all the library staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu Library, Anambra State. The population was got from the nominal role of the university's library staff. The whole population was used because the number is small and manageable. The staff was stratified on the basis of their respective campuses of the university. The number of staff from each campus of the university is as follows; Amaku campus – 8, Igbariam campus – 25, and Uli campus – 14. This gave a total population of 47 library staff. A self-developed questionnaire entitled "Information Literacy for sustenance of democracy Questionnaire, ILSDQ" was used for data collection. The instrument has two sections (1&2) that elicited the extent of agreement of the respondents to the item statements. Section '1' was the demographic data of the respondents while sections '2' contained four sections separated into four clusters. Cluster A consisted of 11 items that were concerned with the concept of democracy. Cluster B contained 10 items that dealt with the meaning of information literacy. Cluster C comprised 10 items on how information literacy sustains democracy. Cluster D contained 9 items on problems militating against information literacy. The items in the questionnaire were structured on a 4-point scale that ranges from strongly agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), Strongly Disagree (1 point). The instrument was face validated by two experts in the Department of Library and Information Science, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus. Their corrections were effected in the final draft. The reliability of the instrument was tested using 10 library

staff from Imo State University, Owerri. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to obtain a reliability co-efficient value of 0.84 which seems good enough for the study. The copies of the instrument were administered on the respondents in their

libraries by the researchers. 42 out of the 47 questionnaires were correctly filled and returned. Data collected were analysed using mean. The mean of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreement to the items while 2.49 and below were regarded as disagreement to the items

Result

Table 1: Respondents understanding of the concept of democracy

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	DECISION
1.	People's rule.	3.5	Agree
2.	Respect for human life.	3.2	Agree
3.	A voice for the voiceless.	3.1	Agree
4.	Sovereignty of law.	3.0	Agree
5.	Institutionalizing the voting Rights.	3.0	Agree
6.	Accountability to citizenry.	2.9	Agree
7.	Equality before the law.	2.8	Agree
8.	Transparency government.	2.6	Agree
9.	Citizens' freedom and welfare.	2.5	Agree
10.	Equity, social justice and fundamental human rights.	2.5	Agree
11.	Liberalizing the political space	2.3	Disagree

From the result in Table 1, item 8 (People's rule) got the highest level of agreement from the respondents with the mean score of 3.5. Item 5 (Citizens freedom and welfare) has the lowest agreement at the mean score of 2.5. The rest of the items in this table got agreement from the respondents. However, the respondents disagreed with item 9 (liberalizing the political space) with the mean score of 2.3.

Table 2: The concept of information literacy

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	DECISION
1.	Knowledge of when information is needed.	3.0	Agree
2.	Knowing why information is needed.	2.8	Agree
3.	People know where to find information.	2.5	Agree
4.	Knowing the resources which best answers those need.	2.6	Agree
5.	Knowing how to use the resources found.	3.1	Agree
6.	Having the ability to evaluate and synthesize the information.	2.4	Disagree
7.	Being computer literate.	3.2	Agree
8.	Having the ability to communicate information.	3.0	Agree
9.	Possessing the skills and proficiencies to use information for planning.	2.9	Agree
10.	Using information for decision making.	3.4	agree

The result in Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that information literacy implies all the items except item 6 (Having the ability to evaluate and synthesize the information) which has a mean score of 2.4. Item 10 (Using information for decision making) has the highest agreement with the mean score of 3.4. Item 3 (People know where to find information) has the lowest agreement with the mean score of 2.5.

Table 3: How information literacy, sustains a democratic nation

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	DECISION
1.	People that are information literate vote conscientiously in elections	3.5	Agree
2.	Injustice of the rulers is dictated by information literate people.	3.0	Agree
3.	Information literate people dictate the corrupt activities of the rulers.	2.6	Agree
4.	They make positive contributions to the political development of their nations.	3.1	Agree
5.	Information literate executive arm of government is likely to make good policies.	2.9	Agree
6.	Information literate legislative arm makes good laws.	2.8	Agree
7.	Information literate judiciary arm of government dispenses quality justice.	3.0	Agree
8.	Information literate people are able to assess the performance of the government.	2.5	Agree
9.	They develop good sense of judgment.	2.7	Agree
10.	They are good citizens of the nations.	3.4	Agree

In Table 3, the result shows that all the respondents agreed that information literacy implies all the 10 items showcasing how information literacy sustains a democratic nation. Item 1 (People that are information literate vote conscientiously in elections) has the highest agreement with the mean score of 3.5. Item 8 (Information literate people are able to assess the performance of the government) has the lowest agreement with the mean of 2.5.

Table 4: The problems militating against information literacy in democratic sustenance

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	DECISION
1	Most of the citizens cannot read and write – illiteracy.	3.6	Agree
2	Low level of computer literacy.	3.2	Agree
3	Lack of professionals trained in information literacy.	3.0	Agree
4	People do not understand the concept of information literacy.	2.6	Agree
5	No well-equipped library where information literacy is practiced.	2.9	Agree
6	People do not see the relevance of information literacy in their lives.	3.0	Agree
7	Governments do not equip schools/ libraries adequately.	2.6	Agree
8	Corrupt government personnel do not encourage information literacy.	2.8	Agree
9	People lack reading culture.	3.5	Agree

From the result in Table 4, the respondents agreed with all the 9 items which identified the problems militating against information literacy in a democratic nation. Item 1 (Most of the citizens cannot read and write – illiteracy) has the highest agreement level, mean score 3.6. Items 4 (People do not understand the concept of information literacy) and 7 (Government do not equip schools/ libraries adequately) has the lowest agreement with respective mean scores of 2.6 and 2.6.

Discussion

This paper examined information literacy as a means for sustenance of a democratic nation. For research question one, the majority of the respondents view democracy as people's rule. This is in line with the assertion of Nwofor, and Ilorah, (2015) who defined democracy as the government enthroned by simple majority.

In research question two, in Table 2, it is evident that most of the respondents understand information literacy to mean using information for decision making, being computer literate, knowledge of when information is needed, knowing how to use the resources found, and having the ability to communicate information. This corroborates with the findings of Ogbo, Uzoagba, & Nwebiem, (2017) who reviewed literature and discovered that information literacy is the ability to recognize information need, identify information, evaluate and use information effectively. The respondents however disagree that information literacy means having the ability to evaluate and synthesize the information.

Research question three, in Table 3 revealed that information literacy actually sustains a democratic nation. The respondents agreed with all the items. This finding is in agreement with the assertion of Alex-Nmecha, Horsfall, and Igbinovia (2017) that information literacy skills enable the citizens use the computer effectively during elections and voting exercises.

Research question four in Table 4 revealed the problems militating against information literacy. These include; illiteracy, low computer skills, lack of professionals trained in information literacy, lack of reading culture, people do not understand the concept of information literacy, government do not equip schools/ libraries adequately among others. This is in line with the findings of Smith (2016) significant lack of resources, a lack of relevant training, lack of professional librarians and absence of libraries in schools as problems of information literacy acquisition.

This paper examined information literacy as a means for sustenance of a democratic nation. It revealed the concept of democracy as the government by the simple majority and information literacy as the ability to identify information need, source, use, and evaluate information. It established the fact that information literacy sustains a democratic nation. There are also some impediments/ challenges to information literacy ranging from illiteracy, low computer skills, lack of professionals trained in information literacy, lack of reading culture, people do not understand the concept of information literacy. The above listed challenges,

when properly addressed, will consolidate information literacy as sustenance for a democratic nation.

Conclusion

Information is power, the flow of information from the masses to the government and from government to the masses is vital to responsible/ patriotic citizenship, responsive and accountable governance which results to a democratic nation. Information literate citizens are better equipped to utilize opportunities, access services, exercise their rights and hold state and non-state actors accountable. Information literacy is promoted here as a response to societal learning, and in particular, as a basis for a democratic nation.

Recommendation

The researchers therefore recommend that;

1. Information literacy should be included in primary, secondary, and

tertiary institutions curriculum, with teachers, lecturers and librarians teaching it.

2. The government should equip school libraries, academic libraries, and public libraries with functional ICT infrastructure and well trained librarians to strengthen information literacy programme.
3. Citizens should endeavour to be computer literate.
4. The government should provide free education so as to reduce illiteracy.
5. Libraries, especially public libraries should provide citizenship education to constituency members, inform the electorates on what they should know about democracy-rights and privileges, the role of government through posters, pictures, government documents and audio-visual resources.

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