

Full Length Research

Smart Libraries: A Response to Literacy and Self-Empowerment among Girl-Child in a Depressed Economy

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This paper identifies smart library as a relevant tool to respond to the plight of girl-child in a depressed economy through promotion of literacy and self-empowerment. On this, concepts of smart libraries, the framework of literacy and empowerment in relation to the girl-child was discussed. The need for literacy and self-empowerment among girl-child and the roles of smart libraries to literacy and empowerment needs of girl-child were reviewed. Challenges of responding to literacy and empowerment need of girl-child were highlighted, while recommendations were made to deal with the issues.

Keyword: Smart Library, Literacy, Self-empowerment, Girl-child, Depressed Economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Economic depression is a term used against occurrences of cut in purchasing power, wages/income, jobs, and production of economic inputs. It is an advanced stage of recession which could lead to devastation, hunger, poverty, and death. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia (2013) in economics, a depression is a sustained, long-term downturn in economic activity in one or more economies; it is a more severe downturn than an economic recession, which is a slowdown in economic activity over the course of a normal business cycle. Economic depression is an unusual and extreme form of recession. Economic depressions are characterized by their length, by

abnormally large increases in unemployment, falls in the availability of credit (often due to some form of banking or financial crisis), shrinking output as buyers dry up and suppliers cut back on production and investment, large number of bankruptcies including sovereign debt defaults, significantly reduced amounts of trade and commerce (especially international trade), as well as highly volatile relative currency value fluctuations (often due to currency devaluations). Price deflation, financial crises and bank failures are also common elements of a depression that do not normally occur during a recession.

The implications of economic depression are enormous –deprived, hellish, and weaned living condition, a

condition not worth experiencing, which countries in the world irrespective of developmental stage have tried to avoid since the great depression of 1929-1935. Unfortunately, most countries in Africa find themselves in depressed situations. For some countries; their governments are rich, while the citizens are poor, while in other countries both the government and their citizens are poor making women and girl-child the most vulnerable group. Under this situation, the need for literacy –abilities and skills to understand trends, articulate ideas and use them to make a living, for self-empowerment which is a will to self-decision making, self-esteem, self-assertiveness and self-sustainability become paramount.

However, literacy and self-empowerment cannot emerge in the lives of anyone, girl-child inclusive, without emergence of an open society, that is, an information and knowledge vibrant society; a society that can decode written words transform them into knowledge for economic and socio-political advancement, pioneered by availability and access to information materials. It is worthy of note that, libraries are chief promoters of open society which empower citizens literally and economically, through their service frameworks; creation of access to information/knowledge materials, promotion of reading and research, dissemination of information and environmental awareness. These frameworks breed a set of social elements that are requisite for girl-child literacy, self-discovery and self-empowerment. In present time, the social nomenclature and methods of rendering services by library are fast metamorphosing into modern trends which highly recognize electronic-digital structures. So under this dispensation, *smart libraries*, a term which reflects digi-intelligent state of libraries, has become a major tool to capture embodiment position of a today's library in response to promote and to meet literacy and self-empowerment needs of girl-child in a depressed economy.

CONCEPT OF SMART LIBRARIES

Papers in the field of smart library reflect on the new paradigm in library system –environment, structures/facility, services and personnel. On it, technologies play host and the outcome leads to information explosion. According to Ruslan, Olga, Pavel, Vera and Nikita (2015) Smart library is a new quality library in which the expert usage of hardware, services and Internet lead to qualitative changes in the user-librarian interaction, allowing acquisition of new effects for better services. Smart library organizes the “smart” work based on the “smart” infrastructure, taking into account the needs of users, who play an important role in the development of library smart culture. Technology in the smart library previously was based on information and

knowledge, but it has transformed into technologies based on interaction and exchange of experience –smart technology. Smart library, using technological innovation and the Internet, provides users with the opportunity to acquire knowledge on the basis of the systems multidimensional vision of knowledge. ALA Tech-source (2015) opine that smart library is an Integrated library system, which is comprehensive for the acquisition, management, and access to primarily print materials, but, saw their role in the overall technology environment of libraries that shifted their collections and acquisitions to primarily electronic and digital resources. Smart library is the concept and practice of the modern library in a sustainable development, based on digital network and intelligent information technology with interconnection, high efficiency and convenience as the main features, and green development and digital services for the general public as the essential pursuit (Wang, 2013).

By disposition, Ruslan, Olga, Pavel, Vera and Nikita (2015) state that smart library concepts tends to connect multiple features;

- Creating of smart environment: Certain services and technological developments have reached a high level, allowing the development of an environment, which begins to approach the natural intelligence –mobile access, availability of all digital service types anywhere in the world.
- Smart library creation is only possible on the basis of new information and communication technologies and library technology, on the basis of new knowledge creation and collective creativity, with the involvement of expert groups, using social networks.
- Active content – simply placing the content in the repository is not enough for it to become active. All objects must be interconnected. In turn, the quality of the repository must be monitored due to the introduction of such systems as e-metrics and work as a team.
- Adaptively – the formation of a customized service set for user requests. Large number of sources, the maximum diversity of media (audio, video, graphics), the ability to quickly and easily adjust to the level and needs of a user.

From the available literatures, any library that is equipped with computer interface, modern furniture, computerized user learning spaces, personified into individual user access –mobile apps, remote with limitless access, and is able to be timeless, man by *techrarian*, operate in a state of art or smart environment and can detect knowledge

and generate information within or outside its environment is smart library.

Literacy and Self-empowerment: Frameworks and Nexus

Literacy and empowerment are distinguishable in definitions, but very identical or intertwined by explanation. Literacy is associated with knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies, while empowerment is aligned with independence, will, power, authority, and execution. Emphatically, once literacy components is absent in upbringing of girl-child, it will result to direct inherit to lack of empowerment of the child, that means, the girl-child future is brink. In other words, without literacy there will be no concrete empowerment and vice versa. McDonald & Scollay (2009), Metcalf & Meadows (2009), McLachlan (2009) and Bingham (2009) found in their valuable (and rare) longitudinal research, conducted in developed countries (US and UK) using substantial samples depict that literacy learners gained feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence. They explained that, literacy learner's feels as being less dependent on others for several tasks, gaining improved skills in communication, feeling able to use information technologies, being able to write formal letters; and being more competent in dealing with government officials. Learners report also increased contact with local people, including involvement in community organizations. Furthermore, the finding shows that self-esteem on the part of the learners was detected either with structured self-esteem scales or open-ended interviews; and the effects were found to persist after several years of literacy program participation.

Literacy is the binding glue for personal, psychological, political, socio-cultural, and economic empowerment. UN (2016) in an attempt to recognize the diversity of definitions attributed to the term, regards 'literacy' as being beyond simply "the set of technical skills of reading, writing and calculating..." to a plural notion encompassing the manifold of meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competencies. "Literacy is a set of cognitive skills necessary to make meaning of print communication. These skills are developed in particular social contexts and practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Literacy empowers the individual to develop capacities of reflection, critique and empathy, leading to a sense of self efficacy, identity and full participation in society. Literacy skills are crucial to parenting, finding and keeping a job, participating as a citizen, being an active consumer, managing one's health and taking advantage of digital developments, both socially and at work (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012). Literacy has never been more necessary for development than now because it is a key to

communication and learning, and a fundamental condition of access to today's knowledge societies.

With socio-economic disparities, and global scramble over control of food, trade and currency, and energy, literacy is a survival tool in a fiercely competitive world. Literacy leads to empowerment, and the right to education, includes the right to literacy – an essential requirement for lifelong learning and a vital means of human development and of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (UNESCO, 2008). From all side of views, literacy means empowering -to do, survive, or perform by self.

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions or choices as entity for social transformation. Empowerment means individuals or group acquiring power to think and act freely, exercise choices and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi, Schuler and Riley, 1996). Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individuals to think take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of life. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes) (Baltiwala, 1994). It is not merely a feel of greater extrinsic control, but also grows intrinsic capacity, greater self-confidence and an internal transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers in accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Pinto, 2001).

In nexus, every literacy programme by any individual, group or organization intends to empower selected or target participant to be self-reliance, informed and contribute to the development of their environment. Stromquist (1997) found that literacy program participants reported deeper awareness of their environment, greater confidence in a variety of social activities, and greater self-esteem. There is now the realization that sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (the womenfolk) remain ignorant, marginalized and discriminated against. The provision of quality literacy to nearly half of the world population will greatly improve lives and livelihood and will no doubt have a great and sustainable social and economic impact on the womenfolk (UNESCO, 2002). A seven-country study in Latin America coordinated by Infante (2000) compared social competencies by level of functional literacy proficiency; self-esteem, autonomy, and communicative competence were found linked to performance in reading, writing, and mathematics; but the link did not emerge in a dichotomous way (literacy vs. illiteracy) but rather depended on levels of education, so that the more years of formal education, the greater the association that could be detected. An ethnographic study

by Prins (2008) on literacy programs in El Salvador found that women and men participants reported changes in the direction of greater self-confidence, self-esteem, the ability to participate in and influence new spaces, the ability to formulate and express ideas, and improved relationships with partners, parents, children, or other family members.

The Need for Literacy and Self-empowerment among Girl-child

According to UNICEF report (2002), the national literacy rate for female was only 56 percent compared to 72 percent for male and in certain states; the female literacy, enrollment and achievement rate were much lower. For example, girls net enrolment in Sokoto State was 15 percent compared to 59 percent for boys.

The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2010 shows that the gender gap in adult literacy rates for the period between 2006 and 2010 appears to be increasing instead of declining (see table below).

Gender gaps in literacy rates in Nigeria, 2006-2010

Year	Female	Male	Female/Male
2010	49	72	0.68
2009	63	79	0.79
2008	64	80	0.80
2007	59	74	0.80
2006	59	74	0.80

Source: World Economic Forum; Global Gender Gap Index 2010 Nigeria profile

The most recent data for 2011, published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2013), reveal that women's literacy continues to lag behind that of men. This is particularly so in Arab States (male rate of 85% vs. female rate of 68%), South and West Asia (male rate of 74% vs. female rate of 52%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (male rate of 68% vs. female rate of 51%). Global figures suggest that 89% of men and 80% of women are able to read and write in 2011. 493 million, or two thirds of the global illiterate population, are women.

The African Development Forum (ADF) (2008) averred that empowering women to participate in the information economy would bring about benefits such as increased creativity, expertise and competitiveness in technology sector and thus assist the information economy thereby lead to economic growth.

According to Webster University Dictionary (n.d) 4 elements of empowerment;

1. Education: This element educates women in basic confrontational principles, understanding reaction time, vulnerable target areas, personal weapons and the development of a survival mindset. The more women learn about confrontational principles the less they fear confrontation. Education also encompasses risk awareness, reduction, recognition, and avoidance techniques.

2. Dependency on Self: Teaching women to depend on themselves for protection, not their father, brother, boyfriend, husband, etc. Personal weapons are the most accessible, they are by far the most dependable, if women can instill within themselves reliance on personal weapons, they will have little need for the previous "dependency based defense". Self-reliance is an integral element of empowerment.

3. Making your own Decisions: A woman must learn to decide when to use or not use force in self-defense. Making decisions based on what is right for her at that point in time and realizing that she is responsible for her own actions or inactions. Not to second guess the decisions made at that time the main goal is to survive.

4. Self-Realization of your Physical Power: By creating the opportunity for a woman to exert her physical strength, you help her to explore the possibilities of that strength. This is usually on uncharted territory, because most women have not hit anything with 100% of force.

Empowerment was made in the year 2010 International Literacy day titled; World Literacy Day: Empowering Women through Literacy. The then UN secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in his speech said that if women are empowered through literacy considering their multiple roles in the society will contribute greatly to the development of the nation. Women need greater access to educational opportunities, skill acquisition and positions of authority for them to be truly empowered. To this end, developmental programmes are designed to improve living conditions of women's and to allow them participation in processes that will enhance their development at home, community and national levels. The main objective is to alleviate the burden of women daily lives through appropriate empowerment programmes (for example basic education, skill development, access to information regarding health, nutrition status, legal rights and so on).

Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of society. For the United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means: acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed. Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired

changes and the right to control one's life, and gain the ability to generate choices and exercises of bargaining power. Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

The summary below depicts that unlimited exploration of literacy and empowerment among woman in a depressed economy; has become paramount.

Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential (Annan, 2004).

Smart Libraries: A Response to Literacy and Self-empowerment among Girl-child in a Depressed Economy

In all cases, "Smart" is a term used to quantify how intelligent, sharp, easy, compatible, and aesthetic human environment, communication, appearance, and interactions could be. It is advancement in totality of human's facet or contact with his surroundings, library inclusive. Smart library having more of this generic component of *smart features* is one among several stimulus that is capable of responding to literacy and empowerment needs of girl-child. Among the smart library vitality are its services and roles spanning across provision of reading materials and promotion of knowledge and education such as;

➤ **Provision of Access to Information:** information is key and central to literacy promotion and women empowerment. It is an effective mechanism to open a society or ways to connect communities to global stage. In this information society, whatever area of empowerment, access to information is very crucial and the African Union Gender Policy realized this, thus one of the policy frameworks is to "promote equitable access for both women and men to resources, knowledge, information and services including basic needs, and also, facilitate the implementation of corrective measures to address existing inequalities in access to

and control over resources, as well as other empowerment opportunities" (Department of Trade and Industry, 2011). Library is the institution obliged to ensure that information sources is acquired, organized, and disseminated in a rich and conducive environment. So to advance on access to information to girl-child, element of smart –relevant and flexible library environment with unrestricted access to information, and inviting aesthetics has to play host in library environment, structures, and services.

➤ **Facilitate Adult and Distance Learning:** Through digital embodiment -ICTs, institutions and students can be connected to unlimited pool of information and educational resources that support their curriculum, learning, and research. Here, assignments can be done, communication on various platforms made available and accessible. Knowledge and literacy will be acquired in a more supportive, more flexible, more compatible, more convenient, interactive, aesthetic and attractive way than just a physical embodiment of learning and reading standpoint. Irrespective of distance, smart library via adoption of ICTs helps in accelerate globalization of information and knowledge resource without limit.

➤ **Can Led to Self-Discovery:** As a library advances beyond supporting research, to become an intelligent environment of its own, it means that literacy and empowerment are readily available. Thus, has the capacity to assist people to re-discover themselves, actualizes dreams, and achieve their aspirations. This response in its true phenomena goes beyond physical accomplishments, to psychological -mental and emotional fulfillment. In so doing, frees individual to captive of economic dependent, political propaganda, and ideological enslavement.

➤ **Develop Tech Savvy:** It is obvious that a technologically induced environment spurs citizens who are technological advanced than those in less tech-environment. Smart library as a place for digi-advanced or digi-intelligent information services creates opportunities for people to be empowered with digital literacy and skills; an essential skill for 21st century economic survival.

Challenges of Responding to Literacy and Empowerment of Girl-Child in a Depressed Economic

African and some of Arab countries constitute most of the depressed economics in the world. To those countries, girl-child literacy and empowerment problem is fundamental owing to religious dogma, corruption, militarization, terrorism, lack of access to adequate information, and absent of good governance. This factor

has multi-facet effects on socio-economic and political deficiencies of the entire citizens and girl-child in particular, specifically, in area of socialization, skill acquisition, literacy, and economic engagements.

Besides, there is lack of consciousness on development and application of ICT resources; denying the citizens of opportunities that exist in global space. Lack of commitment to improve the ICT infrastructure, availability and access by the government has further dimmed the fate of improving the living conditions of people; as they are consistently faced with less career opportunity. Under this closed door situation, it quite difficult to harness the potential of the girl-child.

Also, there are dysfunction in development of social institution like tourism, health care, education, environment, and libraries. The result of this is enormous –poor social integration and orientation, inadequate medical treatment, illiteracy and mental retardation, lack of self-discovery and empowerment, deprivation of self-opinion, and acceptance of unfulfilled dreams.

Generally, financial drought in the nation's coffer due to depression lean the treasury of individuals, thereby, exposing the citizens to vulnerable situation. The financially able individuals or organizations that may be willing to provide and fund the needed literacy and empowerment programme are also affected, causing lack of competent partnerships or sole sponsorships to girl-child literacy and empowerment.

Countries under this condition might depends on foreign aids, and the funds made available may not cover the pet programmes, when compare to the number of girl-child to be empowered nationwide. Above all, these aids are provided by foreign donors are often been characterized by corruption or mismanaged by the handlers, thus may not be used adequately to achieve the set goal.

RECOMMENDATION

A concerted effort to ensure wider coverage of literacy and empowerment among girl-child and the education of woman is an indispensable tool to make ineffective the traditional belief that the place of the woman is the home and kitchen. It should be seen that in this 21st century, women have been a force to reckon with in the political and socio-economic life of the nation. The role of women has to be recognized beyond the four walls of their home and extend to all spheres of human endeavours in the development of the nation.

Above all, the process of empowering the woman and thus integrating her into the mainstream of the development must start from the early stages as a girl-child and from the grassroots. Parents, guardians, and the society as a whole must allow and encourage their female children to enroll in schools, overcome the

paralysis of illiteracy and acquire a proper awareness of their potentials, rights and higher responsibilities in society.

Expansion of quality primary and lower secondary education, and scaling up of girl-child and youth literacy programmes should be vigorously pursued. However, Literacy programmes should be incorporated with life skill's components so that women can be well equipped to perform their roles more effectively. Programmes relevant to the needs of the women should be promoted. In addition to functional skills and programmes that promote leadership skills, gender consciousness, and emancipation goals among women should be put in place.

Awareness creation through media should be intensified on the value of women education in order to raise the consciousness of the illiterates especially at the grass root level.

Social and educational institution like the smart libraries should be seen as pivot for literacy and empowerment quest of citizens especially the girl-child. Through its digital and information services, they expose girl-child to world of opportunities that they may not discover on their own. As an intelligent hub, it will be able to inspire their intellect, communicate vision, and create chances for the girl-child to acquire lifelong skills and competencies.

In support of the forgoing, Annan (2004) asserted that, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, or to reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health—including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. And I would also venture that no policy is more important in preventing conflict, or in achieving reconciliation after a conflict has ended.

CONCLUSION

Literacy and empowerment of the girl-child is one of the sure ways of enhancing national productivity, development and growth. It is a fundamental indication to measure the level in which any government has succeeded in lifting its citizens. Providing free access to smart school and libraries is a very effective way of addressing the need for empowering the girl-child literarily and economically. Smart libraries make use of digital tools in their services, and a good platform to explore and reach various communities of girl-women, where conventional education and learning may not reach. This will enable the girl-child to have access to information and knowledge, which will create economic opportunities that exist across the globe. The possible outcome of the implementation of smart library will aid in

discovering talents and skills that are capable of lifting the socio-political and economic expectation of the girl-child who will eventually become a woman functionally contributing to family, society and nation building.

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