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LIBRARIES AS CUSTODIANS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

The study focused on the role of libraries as the custodians of local knowledge, preservation, conservation, cultural heritage and transformation. Libraries are reservoir of accumulated wisdom of men from generation to generation. Culture is a binding force holding the society together. A society is noted by its culture. Different societies are influenced by their culture since their education, occupation, recreation, vocation, marriage, beliefs, dressing, food; economic activities and their other social of lives are determined by their culture. In our contemporary society, public libraries preserve and conserve the cultural accumulated heritage of the community more than other types of libraries as it serves as a source of knowledge and memory banks for man's recorded idea. Public libraries serves a far wide range of patrons than other kinds of libraries, such patrons include; all members of the community, children, young adults, adults, people with disabilities, different occupational groups for their jobs, illiterate people aspiring to be literates, farmers and business men etc. the study recommends that libraries and librarians should engage on preserving and conserving cultural heritage of the communities where they established for posterity. Librarian's particularly public library librarians should embark on training within or outside in order to acquaint themselves on modern techniques of preserving and conserving our cultural artifacts.

Key words: Behaviour, community, culture, conservation, cultural heritage,

information, integration, library, preservation, society.

Introduction

From birth to death, man lives out his life as a member of the society. Society is an organized collectivity of people whose activities centred on common goals, share common beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, character formation and modes of action. In society, the integration of individuals into society, the control of society over the person's attitudes and behaviour is determined primarily in the community.

It is this influence that makes a biological man into a social man who is a member of a community. Society according to Kamba (2019) is a group of people that share common interest and goal in their bid to achieve socio-cultural development and other endeavours. Therefore, an information society is a society where the creation, use, dissemination, integration and manipulation of information to its members for economic, cultural, social, physical, political and socio-cultural activities in their bid to meet their demands exists within the society. From the above, information society can be viewed as a group of people who share the common interest of communication or imparting knowledge in a context that gives relevance to its seeker to enable them have maximum comprehension and decreased uncertainty. It is distinguishing feature of the modern world where we can be said to be part of a global information economy.

Information

The concept of the term "information'' has gained remarkable prominence in this modern society. Gellert (2022) highlights that the concept of information has its roots tracing back to ancient times but gained prominence during the middle of 20th century alongside the advancement of information technologies. Information deals with communicating knowledge in modern time but the precise definition of information remains elusive to information users. According to Olubiyo (2023), the question, "what is information'' lacks definitive answer, suggesting an inherit ambiguity since the delineation between information and data remains a subject of ongoing debate and exploration (Taherdoost, 2022). But according to Gellert (2022), data denote sensory stimuli as well as a collection of symbols representing empirical stimuli; likewise, information exhibits a dual nature, signifying both the interpretation of these stimuli and collection of symbols representing empirical knowledge. An information system is designed to enable users to find relevant information from a stored and organized collection of documents. In library, information retrieval has gained remarkable usage. Information retrieval is the process

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of representing, storing, and searching a collection of big data for the goal of extracting knowledge and access to find relevant results that satisfy the user's needs as a reaction to user's query.

Benefits of an information society

There are many benefits of an information society, this includes, greater efficiency and productivity in business and organizations, increased opportunities for education and lifelong learning, improved health care through telemedicine and other applications, greater social inclusion for marginalized groups, enhanced cultural exchange and understanding and a more sustainable planet through increased use of information communication technologies in environmental monitoring and management. According UNESCO (2023) an information society must care and take cognizance of the information needs of the disadvantaged group or population of a group that is at the risk of education exclusion because of gender, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement.

Persons with special needs otherwise referred to as people living with disabilities can be found in virtually every corner of the world. They are individuals who experience sensory, cognitive, physical, mental and other forms of impairment. The impairment could range from mild to profound such as hearing defects, visual limitations, mobility challenges and emotional disturbances, constantly suffering from discrimination, marginalization and oppressed and as result are prone o poverty, low level of education

Information service

Information service is the act or progress of making information available to meet the diverse needs of different user groups within the society. Information services can be provided in libraries whether public, academic, national, school, special, research or industrial libraries. Such services like circulation, reference, mobile, information and referral, information service for children, services for special groups, current awareness, outreach, selective dissemination of information (SDI), literature search, document delivery and reprographic services are provided to users in libraries particularly public libraries that is non-discriminatory and its collections are heterogeneous in nature.

In order to create an information society, information must be well packaged, preserved, conserved and made accessible to the members of the society for consumption in solving their

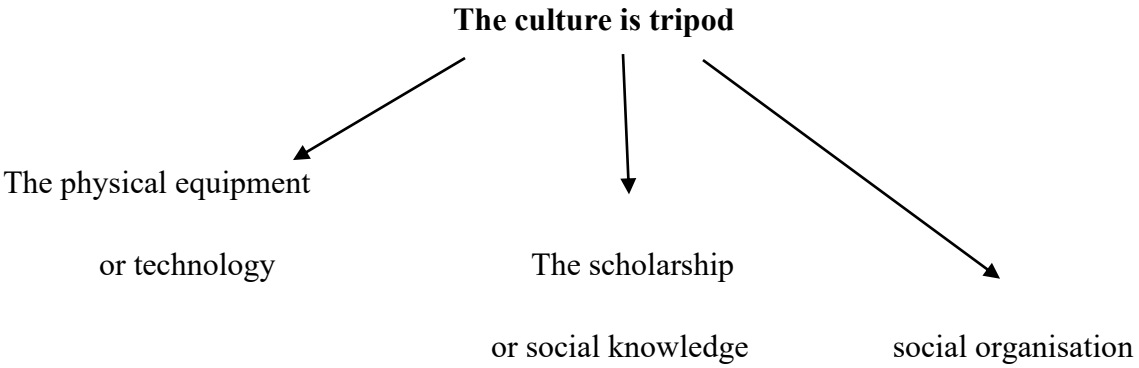
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information needs; such information must be transmitted from generation to generation. The library helps users in locating information materials by providing him or her not only with adequate primary resources in book and non-book materials, but also secondary bibliographical apparatus such as guides to literature, subject bibliographies, abstracting and indexing journals, directories of research completed or research in progress.

Community is a geographical area composed of internal structure of their own, groupings of people, family, friendship, work, religion and tradition that revolves within them. Community may also not mean a narrow geographic area, but may mean wider area such as regional, state, national and international. Community may also mean a group of educated people, middle class, rich and poor, illiterate, majority and minority, young and old, healthy and handicapped, eager and apathetic.

Culture is all learned habits, the total way of life of a social group, or a group's social heritage, for example language, dress, beliefs, customs, behaviour, dance, type of food. In conventional sociological usage, culture refers specifically to the values and ideas which give meaning to human social interaction. Culture is a cohesive force holding society together. According to Castaneda and Cuellar (2020) "culture'' is the way in which the people in any group do their things, make and use their tools, get along with one another and with other groups, the words they use and the way they use them to express thoughts and the thoughts they think. Janssen (2020) defined culture as "that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Therefore, culture is vital and represents a means of exerting power not only to control meaning, but also to influence the life chances of different groups of people within society. A group is defined and differentiated from other groups by its culture. The culture character includes language, custom, laws, morals, beliefs, religion, government, music, literature, habits, arts and technology. Culture is dynamic which language is one of the characteristics in which human beings within the cultural setting facilitates cooperation among them and through this language exhibit the power of expression and manipulation of objects within and around their environment. This culture has tripod model as illustrated below

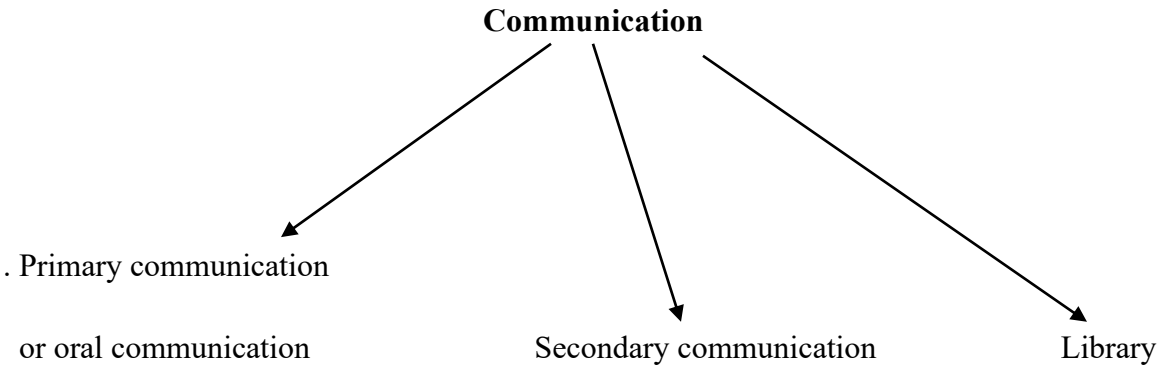
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The first leg of the tripod is the physical equipment**:** This culture is consisting of the tools and other mechanisms essential to the work being performed by the society. Such physical equipment includes the hoes, cutlasses, handlooms, daggers, guns, axe, shovel, etc which constitute part of the technological repertoire of our traditional society.

The second leg of the tripod of the culture is the scholarship of the society also known as social knowledge, which consist the totality of the knowledge accumulated by members of society, the body of verified knowledge, theory, belief, accumulated experiences, myths, and legends within a society.

The third leg of the tripod is the social structure consisting of the institutions and agencies in society that gives meaning to culture. These institutions are family, law, religion and education and their agencies such as the courts, the church, the school and the library by which society exerts its influence or maintains conformity. But for the society to survive, its physical equipment, scholarship and social organization or institutions and agencies must be transmitted from generation to generation. This transmission of culture is through communication.



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The primary communication or oral communication:

This is person to person interaction using verbal communication through language, and non-verbal communication through signs and gestures. This was the first oral/aural phase of human communication and civilization. During this era, the human organic memory was the basic information holding device. During this oral/aural period, there is no way to look up anything if the person carrying the information dies or were to die, the information he had died with him also. During this period also, there was no way to find out when someone was born, dead, or when event happened or where it took place. During this period knowledge is depended on memory, therefore, there is need to develop more permanent system by the society for information preservation of the cultural heritage.

Secondary communication:

This was the development of communication carried out through print and the electronic media. The secondary communication made it possible for society to developed forms of putting his thoughts, ideas and words in writing, first through ideographs, hieroglyphics, later through alphabets. Then clay tablets, papyrus, parchments, vellum and finally to modern book which came into existence. It becomes evident that social knowledge can now be stored and preserved under the reach of few people in the society that would have access to such public communication held in scattered places.

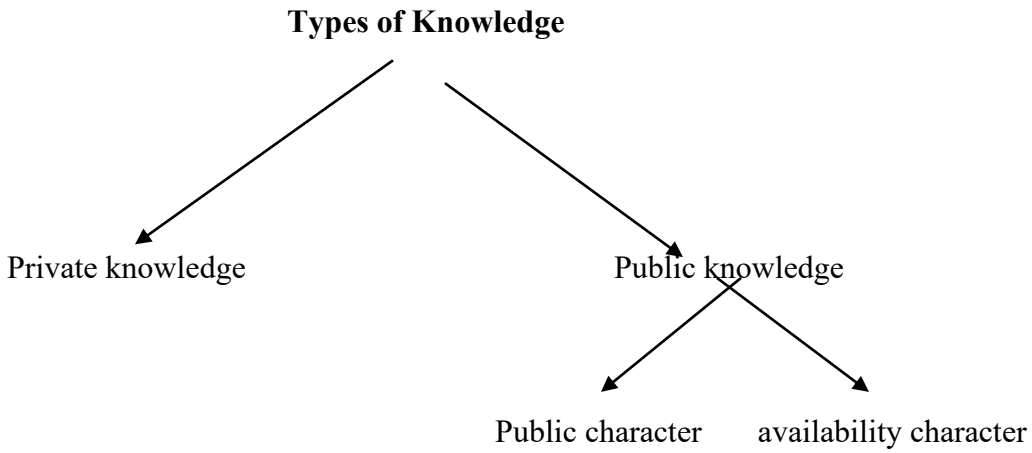
Library:

To solve this problem of scattered social information communication and for ease access, proper documentation and management, consultation and retrieval by the public, there is need for the library. The library became a place where social knowledge possessed by the society are conserved, preserved and are made available to the members of the society for consumption in order to solve their information needs of both past and present (Beneyat and Cabenero, 2023).

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Library as the conservator of knowledge

Knowledge is applied information. Information is kinetic, that is applying information to do something.



Private knowledge is a personal knowledge (subjective knowledge) that exists in the mind of an individual and is available to no one except that person and there is no way another person will know it except through questions, answers and letters.

Public knowledge, public knowledge is objectivity because it is a social knowledge that is available to every member of the society through records of diverse format. Public knowledge is divided into two types namely: public character and availability character. Public character means that the recorded knowledge of human culture is not the property of any person, meaning that everybody in the society can make use of it. Availability character means that everyone in the society can access social information and is not restricted to anyone; the information is available for the public consumption (Khaola and Mabilikoane, 2015).

Social epistemology

This is knowledge about knowledge. Objective knowledge depends largely on personal knowledge and much of the private knowledge is derived from the public knowledge that is available to the society for criticisms. It is in public knowledge that we have several primary information transfer packages, such as books, journals, technical reports, patents, official publications, preprints, reprints, thesis and dissertations, microfilms, microfiche, microdot,

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seminar and conference papers, handouts, posters, audio-visual materials, machine readable data. The secondary information transfer packages include indexing and abstracting publications or services created to help control the proliferation of information materials.

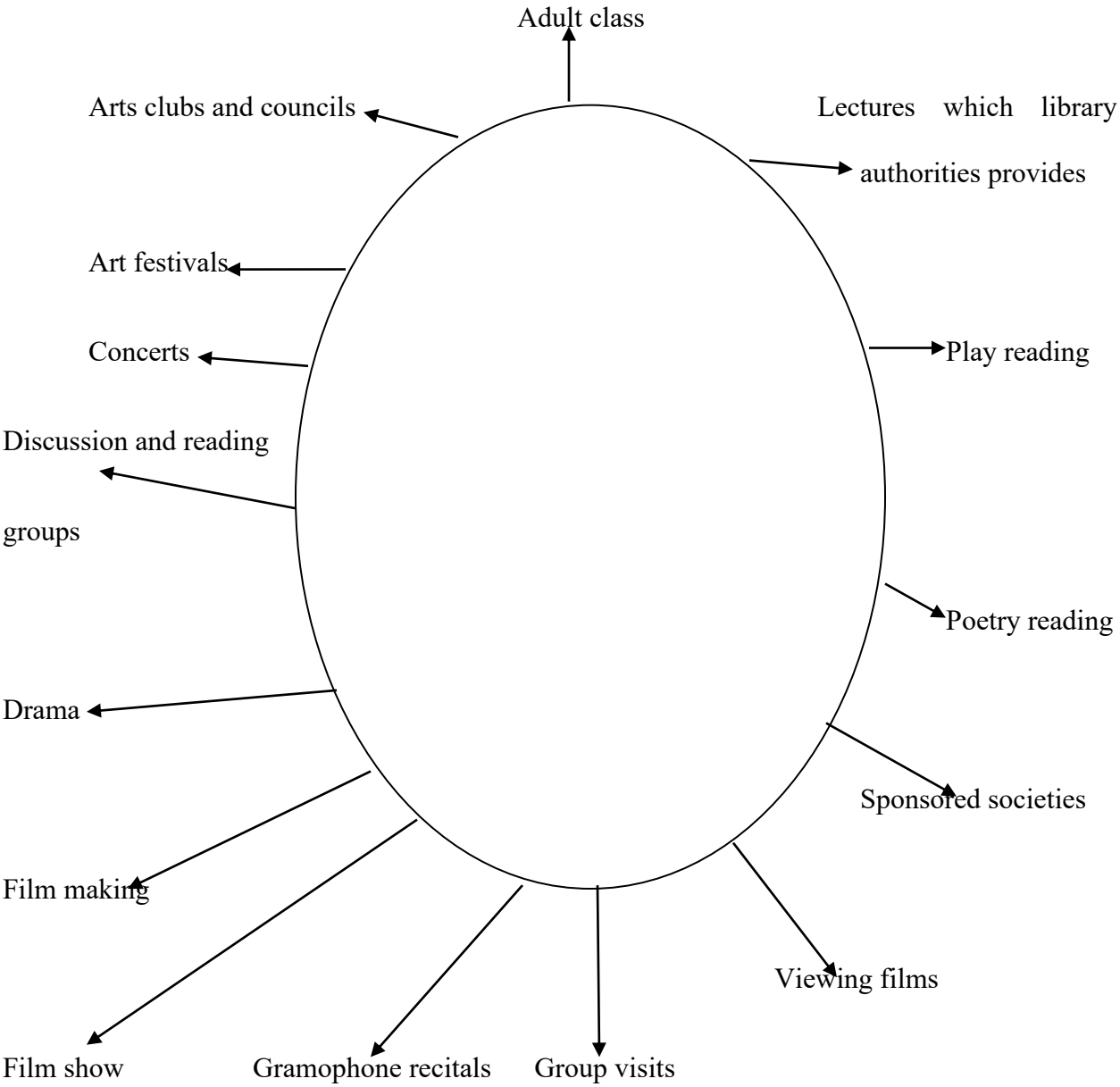
Preservation of recorded knowledge is the earliest and most fundamental responsibility of any library that acquires various types of human communication records, stores and organizes them for later use by the members of the society. According to Kulkarni and Deshpande, 2017), library conserves local knowledge, history of the people and existing knowledge of the society by rationally and systematically accumulating all kinds of records, published and unpublished, written or oral in recorded form, that embody the idea and knowledge of the past. Therefore, each idea or invention developed by man grown out of accumulated and conserved knowledge – accumulated and conserved in the library for posterity.

Library as a cultural reservoir of the society.

The word "culture'' is all embracing. It is a way of life of a people. The library as the conservator of social knowledge of a people can be used to disseminate the cultural thoughts and values of such a people (Mahesh, 2020). Library could be used to assist the country in understanding and controlling its environment through the provision of appropriate scientific and technical information generated within and outside the country. Public libraries support and promote civic and cultural organizations through the provision of accommodation for meetings and lectures.

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The cultural roles of public library are shown on circle format.



Public libraries traditionally exist to provide cultural educational support to the local community by stimulating cultural reading, culture which is education beyond course which is self education or long life education which is purely cultural role of public library. The library should be a place to read, learn, think, dream, a place to be alone, a place to sit around and talk, to see a film, look at an art exhibition, listen to panel of discussion and a communication centre.

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However, cultural heritage and transformation have several enemies that affect it, such as the nature of the material itself, natural and man-made disasters, the environment in which it is kept; and the way such cultural records are handled are the main threats of cultural heritage and transformation from generation to generation. This involves the active use of preventive measures and process of repairing of our cultural heritage damaged materials in order to ensure for the continued existence of the society's cultural heritage.

Recommendation on how libraries should foster the cultural heritage of the society

Preservation and conservation of local knowledge is obvious important and inevitable for the society to make general progress since man depended on knowledge acquisition for the advancement of all facets of human development, suffice to this, the following recommendations are stated:

1. **Societal education and awareness**

   Libraries of different kinds and their librarians should engage in societal education and awareness programmes that can help foster sense of responsibility with the members of the community where such library is located. This will enable librarians to discover the cultural heritage and tradition of such community for articulation and documentation for posterity. In this present dispensation, librarians are not interested in cultural documentation of the community where it is located.

2. **Lobbying for policy regulations**

   Librarians can lobby for favouable policy regulations from government to enact a law on cultural preservation and conservation of communities since any society that fail to preserve and conserve its cultural heritage and tradition is a lost society.

3. **Development of preservation and conservation policy**

   Libraries especially public libraries and their librarians should develop effective and efficient preservation and conservation policy towards the scholarship of the society ie its social knowledge because any new knowledge or every human invention is created from the social knowledge.

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4. **Implement preventive preservation and conservation measures**

   Today, we are gradually losing our cultural heritage, tradition, values, norms, local dialects as a result of ignorant, even few cultural records of Igbo culture are left to die and decay where as other tribes are conscious of their culture and tradition.

5. **Collaboration with preservation and conservation experts abroad**

   Librarians working in different types of libraries can collaborate with preservation and conservation experts abroad in order to learn preservation and conservation strategies so that they can receive expert advice from them. This collaboration can involve training library staff on basic preservation and conservation techniques. Today our deities are being taking away by foreigners who know the importance of such cultural deities still we are comfortable under that situation.

6. **Digitalization of cultural records and artifacts**

   Librarians can overcome the challenges of preserving and conserving the society's cultural heritage and transformation to future generation by embarking constantly on the digitalization of human cultural heritage by evolving technologies and formats, this will play a vital role in the restoration of the society's cultural artworks, ensuring that the essence and intent of human cultural heritage are maintained, even when the underlying technologies change.

7. As libraries house extensive array of invaluable records, ranging from rare manuscripts and historical documents to vast collections of other media formats, as these records possess knowledge that can be transformed from generation to generation, it becomes paramount that they must be safeguarded as a powerful tool in the libraries for human consumption.

Conclusion

Libraries play indispensable role in information transformation and it is where the accumulated wisdom of the society is preserved and conserved for posterity. Culture is a cohesive force holding the society together as no society can exist without culture. Every type of library preserves and conserve culture heritage of the community where it is located by acquiring recorded information of the local community either in print or in electronic media for cultural transmission to those unborn. Therefore, libraries are life wire and knowledge industry where

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any society that wants to development industrially should not joke with since technology is imbibe within recorded information, the more one reads, the more he gains new knowledge to leading to new creativity and invention. Therefore, libraries are they engine room for knowledge generation within the society and every society must support its growth and continued development both in cash and kind. Sequel to this, librarians who are gate keepers of information resources of diverse types should ensure that the society's cultural heritage are carefully conserved and preserved for usability, durability, through this way, the intellectual integrity of the society can be transformed to incoming generation.

Therefore, for our cultural heritage to be accessible and usable overtime in this area of rapid advancing technology, the society's cultural records and artifacts must be made to be crucial, indispensable for the stimulation of learning, reasoning and self-correction for the betterment of human environment. Suffice to this, librarians should engage themselves on the process of reformatting of society's cultural records in a manner that such cultural heritage can be retrieved, usable and readable both in time past and future.

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