INFLUENCE OF LIBRARIES IN BUILDING A VIRILE READING NATION: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN STARTING EARLY

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ABSTRACT: *That the nation Nigeria is continually being described as a nation with poor reading culture with declining standard of education is a painful fact we have lived with for years. To reverse this trend and develop virile reading culture in the country, the paper examined the role and influence of the libraries as institutions with the mandate to support teaching, learning and doing research through the instrumentality of language and reading. The paper also examined the roles the stakeholders could play individually and collectively as a viable strategy in developing enduring reading culture in Nigeria through systemic thinking as theoretical construct. With the centrality of libraries the various influences of such stakeholders as governments, parents, teachers, booksellers, publishers, authors, and non-governmental organizations could easily be coordinated for positive and desired effect. The paper recommends adequate funding of libraries being the central player that is saddled with the responsibility of driving the acquisition of reading skills among citizenry of the nation.*

KEYWORD: reading skills, language and language, acquisition, libraries, reading culture

INTRODUCTION

Distinctive and significant is the development in contemporary time in human history that involved the collaboration among nations of the world to present an agenda that is relevant to all people in all countries in order to ensure that no one is left behind. Irrespective of this, two vital socio-cultural variables - reading culture and quality education - that would easily drive Nigeria to take maximum advantage of this collaboration to improve the lots of the citizenry are drastically declining. Confronted with such monumental depreciation in the nation's reading culture and education quality, the hypothesis is rife and rightly so that Nigeria in the foreseeable future will be at the brink of being left far behind by other nations of the world, particularly, if decisive steps are not taken to reverse the decline in our reading culture and revamp productive and quality education. Reading as a conscious academic and leisure activity has lost its glamour to majority of Nigerians to such extent that youths now take unbridled interest in cheating in examinations, shopping for marks, spending endless time on video games, social networking, and watching home videos.

This problem of declining interest in reading is being compounded by the quantum leap in advancement being very frequently recorded in the area of information and communication technology (ICT) and it use to the extent that it is feared that Nigeria could someday become a

well-defined non-reading nation. There is urgent need to save the reading culture of the nation Nigeria from further degradation not just on account of the importance of reading in accessing information and knowledge for transformation, and for leisure; but to halt the discernible decline in the standards of education vis-à-vis the stratospheric rise in the proportion of ill-literate Nigerians in contemporary shrinking world where intellect, information and knowledge are increasingly driving growth in every facets of human endeavour.

One area the cumulating effect of poor reading habit and chequered basic education is being felt is the university defined by Fayemi (2012) citing the work of John H. Newman, as the place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. According to Faborode and Edigheji (2016), the Nigerian higher education landscape presents many paradoxes and contradictions. Citing NUC (2015), they observed that the number of universities in the country has grown exponentially from five (5) in 1962 to today's figure of 141, made up of 40 Federal, 40 State-owned institutions and 61 licensed private universities. To expound on the dwindling quality of higher education in Nigeria, Faborode and Edigheji (2016) citing Akinkugbe (2011) and others intoned that there has been growing concerns over the quality of graduates from Nigerian Universities in addition to the questions on the relevance of the institutions to national development in terms of paucity of research and development impact. As a nation with high proportion of non-reading populace, it is not unlikely that academic Lilliput in terms of knowledge and skills will someday constitute the pool of experts that would formulate needed policies to position the country to compete in the evolving global village and/or knowledge society.

To stem this murky trend from ever coming to be, contemporary librarians and information scientists are decisively taking up the responsibility to give full expression to the need of strengthening our libraries and information centres to deliver on their statutory mandates of effectively meeting the information needs of their diverse audience. This paper seeks to address the following concepts- reading, language and language acquisition, the centrality of reading to education, knowledge acquisition, and other ancillary but instructive issues appertaining to human distinctiveness and knowledge ecology in a virile nation of our dream. The role of Libraries in championing reading and spearheading a collaborative move in building and sustaining a virile reading populace and the challenges and strategies in the process will also be examined.

The Concept of Reading

To read according to the Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2005), is to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols. It is an act and a purposive learning habit hence reading is regarded as the purposive activity or doings of someone who searches for the meaning and understanding of words in print or in electronic format. Research shows that reading as a lifelong learning is sustained by the love of reading which must be nurtured beyond the school environment and formal schooling years (Rajaratnam, 2013). The act of reading is not only central to learning and education; it is also helpful to the acquisition of requisite information that is very often processed into implicit knowledge which invariably is externalized or made explicit through publishing for others to read. According to the Scriptures, of making many books there is no end and so reading will never cease because people will always have to study to show themselves approved as

workmen that needed not to be ashamed but rightly dividing the word of truth. It takes those that have read to become experts that could drive development and scientific discoveries and not those lacking in knowledge and understanding. Reading is not an end in itself but when it is done, it is to acquire information/knowledge by probing written or printed words for meaning and inspiration. Sometimes art works as encoded information or databanks could be probed, interrogated or read for meaning by those deft in the act of appreciating works of arts.

Librarians and information scientists must do well to develop interest and skills to unlock the vast amount of information stored in every information-bearing materials for use because libraries connect us to the insight and knowledge of the greatest minds that ever were, with the best teachers, drawn from the entire planet and from all our history, to instruct us without tiring, and to inspire us to make our own contribution to the collective knowledge of the human species (Sule, 2014). Reading is a real workout for the brain and it requires doing all the eight steps outlined by the Nemours Foundation (2014) at once, and the eight steps include:

   i.   Understand the way speech sounds make up words,
  ii.   Focus on printed marks (letters and words),
 iii.   Connect speech sounds to letters,
 iv.   Blend letter sounds smoothly into words,
  v.   Control eye movements across the page,
 vi.   Build images and ideas,
 vii.   Compare new ideas with what is already known, and
viii.   Store the ideas in memory.

for use and reuse in quest for the ultimate truth about desired human transformation and comfort, and societal development.

Language, Language Acquisition and Reading

In any society, reading is done by the reader in the operative language in order to discover meanings, acquire vocabularies for introspection, internalization of knowledge and discovery of new understanding with which to leverage the formation of intelligible worldview required for survival and robust co-existence. Language according to Agweda, (2015) is the foundation upon which every significant human invention rests. As averred by Anderson (1994), language is more or less a formalization system of correlation between sound and meaning and hence Egbokhare (2011) in his inaugural lecture, "The Sound of Meaning", stated that whatever he was going to say at the inaugural would be sound, and whatever the people would understand will be meaning, and that we share meaning because we share a common language. Languages do not only provide us with access to understanding the world around us, they also assist us to establish the true essence of our humanness. Since languages are composed of sounds that are assembled to form words, the acquisition and understanding of this wonderful invention of man starts with learning to construct the spoken word and decode meaning.

From the cognitive perspective of learning to read, reading comprehension (or, simply, reading) is the ability to construct linguistic meaning from written representations of language (Wren, 2001). This ability is based upon two equally important competencies. One of which is language comprehension - the ability to construct meaning from spoken representations of language; and the second is text decoding - the ability to recognize written representations of words. Although children acquire their first language early in life even beginning from the

womb as Wren (2001) had argued, it is not in all cases they excel in exhibiting reading proficiency due to one form of disorder or another. Prominent among the causes of reading disorder include the following ranked in order from least common to most common (Wren, 2001):

a. Hyperlexia, This is a rare form of reading disorder and it is characterized by the ability to rapidly and easily decodes text without understanding what is being read. Hyperlexia was first identified by Normsn E. Silberberg and Margaret C. Silberbergin 1967. They defined the term as the precocious ability to read words without prior training in learning to read, typically before the age of five (Wikipedia, 2017).

b. True dyslexia or the ability to understand spoken language but an inability to decode text (less rare). Dyslexia is a learning problem some people have including children. Those with dyslexia have difficulty in learning to read despite traditional instruction … and an adequate opportunity to learn (Medicinenet.com, 2013). From the view point of the World Federation of Neurologists dyslexia is a disorder in children who, despite conventional classroom experience, fail to attain the language skills of reading, writing, and spelling commensurate with their intellectual abilities. This situation can persist through life. Although caused by impairment in the brain's ability to translate images received from the eyes or ears into understandable language, early treatment and coordinated efforts at reading, spelling and writing will cause the affected person to develop into efficient and serviceable human being in the society.

c. Garden-variety is a reading disorder which characteristically involves a difficulty in decoding text and a difficulty in understanding spoken language (relatively common).Children with this type of reading disorder are poor readers and they usually exhibit intellectual or cognitive processing in many areas. Those that cannot read proficiently by third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of high school (RemedyGuru.com, 2011).

The Place of Reading in Education
Education according to Halsey (2009) as cited by Akomolafe (2012) is a system of formal teaching and learning as conducted through schools and other institutions. In other words, education is a process of imparting and acquiring knowledge through teaching and learning especially at school or similar institution. In order words it is a formal system of teaching knowledge, value and skills (Henslin, 2003).

Education in its formal and informal arrangement is infinitely invaluable both to the individual and the society. Like health, education, is often seen as an unproblematic social good to which everyone is entitled as a right (Giddens, 2012). According to Ferrante (2011), education includes the experiences that train, discipline, and shape the mental and physical potentials of the maturing person. Informal education that usually starts at birth is availing and yet spontaneous and unplanned, and it contrasts with formal education which is a systematic process in which someone designs the educating experiences. An experience that educate is predicated on the internalization through reading of life transforming facts and/or information and knowledge that have been made explicit through writing, publishing and/or other means.

For education to be effective in delivering on its mandate and corporate objectives, reading to acquire language is invaluable and essential. Some people or students that acquire reading ability early in life, far more often than those that did not, read at much more faster rate and as such are predisposed to being able to perform better in academics, seek and obtain more relevant information to accomplish intellectual tasks, and solve human and societal problems that would impact positively on development. In attempt to make reading and education effective in Nigeria as elsewhere, the production of information-bearing materials as integral part of linguistic activities on which libraries thrive for effective service delivery become imperative. To librarians and information scientists, information comes in many different forms, and is expressed in many different ways (Mayer, 2005) in books, maps, designs, pictures, talking books, Braille materials, charts, statistics, even in artworks that are sometimes referred to as databanks. Information contained in these outlined sources could only be effectively retrieved and utilized by those that are equipped with the ability to read to add value to life and reconstruct something new to expand the frontiers of knowledge and academic discourse in the interest of human and societal development.

Regardless of the enormous diversity encountered in the different ways and formats information is expressed and packaged, there are common fundamental elements that always occur when linguistic activity is expressed (Mondin, 2007: 134). These essential elements according to him are called transcendental conditions in so far as without them, linguistic activity becomes impossible. The three conditions so enunciated and adapted from Mondin (2007) that give credibility to the production of books and other information-bearing materials in print and/or electronic formats and their sustenance as linguistic activities include:-

- *The subject*, that is, the author/artist who speaks through his works (and who by speaking through his works expresses himself and create information/knowledge);
- *The object*, that is, the world view being spoken of (and is symbolized and indicated through the information or words in abstract forms);
- *The interlocutor,* which is, the audience or target group who is spoken to and with whom the author/artist wishes to communicate using creative works.

Accessing information and knowledge through reading is a necessary precondition for the evolution of a progressive society. Reading is often done in a language that one is grounded in and with its provision of systematic grid for interpreting and intervening in reality, concepts, abstracts notion and scientific linguistic tools are most accessible with the accompaniments for effective usage. This process has never been without challenges that are enunciated in the subsection following.

Challenges

The challenges bedeviling sustainability of reading and reading culture and by extension education in Nigeria are numerous. Our interest in addressing these crippling challenges stems from the recognition accorded reading and education for development and wellbeing of humanity. To get it right by overcoming these challenges amidst many others is enough justification for considering it expedient to undertake what Faborode and Edigheji (2016) called a soul-searching national consultative policy dialogue with core stakeholders in the education sector in Nigeria. Although Faborode and Edigheji (2016) narrowed their consideration of the subject matter to universities and other higher education institutions, we expand the frontiers to cover education in totality both at the pre-university and other higher

institution and without to be the beacon of hope for the society, providing deep insights and practical solutions to societal challenges.

Education of our dream is the education that will produce roundly functional men and women as against the type the type that produce at the moment marginal and dysfunctional crop men and women that are regularly turned out of the nation's existing educational systems. The 1974 marginal man of Professor Ayodele has been greatly multiplied onto Nigeria to the extent that except national emergency is declared for the nation's education systems there will be no availing shift in the dominant paradigm. The marginal men describes the educated elites in Nigeria and as Babarinde (2016) avers quoting Ayodele (1974), are people who have been educated over and above their traditional culture but yet are not fully accepted into the new culture which they now worship so much. In other words, they are people of two cultures and citizens of neither. The overriding challenges within the framework of building virile reading culture in Nigeria include:

i. Wide spread poor reading habit and gross disinterest in serious academic activities in the country
ii. Inadequate funding of libraries
iii. Power outages
iv. Irregular training and retraining of library personnel
v. Noncompliance of majority of publishers in Nigeria with legal deposit law, thus making bibliographic control an overwhelming task
vi. Lack lustre development of infrastructure, etc

Systems Thinking in Working Together to Build a Virile Reading Nation
In attempting this approach is to x-ray strategies that will ameliorate the situation. Theoretical framework is ineluctably connected to scientific research. Appreciating the provision of skeletal frame for academic discourse, Mukherji (2000) asserts that there is need for conceptual and theoretical abstractions for an efficient and deeper comprehension of reality as systems tends to provide in this study. Central to this study is the concept of General System Theory in the sense that all conceivable systems and methods of providing and sustaining the development of effective reading for the building of a virile nations being considered. Underscoring the usefulness of systems theory in scientific studies, Ackoff (1976) observed that the systems approach to problems focuses on systems taken as a whole, not on their parts taken separately. Such an approach as he further stressed is concerned with total-system performance even when a change in only one or a few of its parts is contemplated because there are some properties of systems that can only be treated adequately from a holistic point of view. As a set of interrelated elements, a system according to Ackoff (1976) is an entity, which is composed of, at least, two elements and a relation that holds between each of its elements and at least one of the elements is connected to every other element, directly or indirectly. In this construed matrix of interrelationships, no subset of elements is unrelated to any other set. A typical system is characterized by the interactions of its components and the nonlinearity of those interactions (Walonick, 1993). One common element of all systems is described by Kuhn as knowing one part of a system enables one to know something about another part.

The project of building a virile nation through reading is complex as it is involving not only in monetary terms, human and material resources, but in sustained interest, coordinating and organizing the activities and commitments of the various interest groups, and periodic evaluation of the project in a holistic manner. To this end, working together as collaborative

approach entails, as informed and underpinned by systems thinking, commends itself as the best option for effective coordination of efforts of the various stakeholders. In Nigeria, there have been vested interests in making the nation great through reading and education; but for the fragmented and uncoordinated efforts of various interest groups in the past, appropriate results have remained largely elusive. The very last news making effort in this connection, however, was the "Bring Back the Books" literacy project of the immediate past President of Nigeria – Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Much as the proponent tried to enlist the various stakeholders such as parents, teachers, authors, publishers, libraries, NGOs, etcetera, in the literacy advocacy project as Egbokhare (2011) called it, for active participation, ignoring the centrality of the roles of the libraries (academic, special, public and/or school libraries)in the process, resulted in the untimely attenuation of the expected impact. See Figure 1 as the variable complex showing the conceptual centrality and interconnectedness of library and other stakeholders' in promoting reading/reading culture in Nigeria.
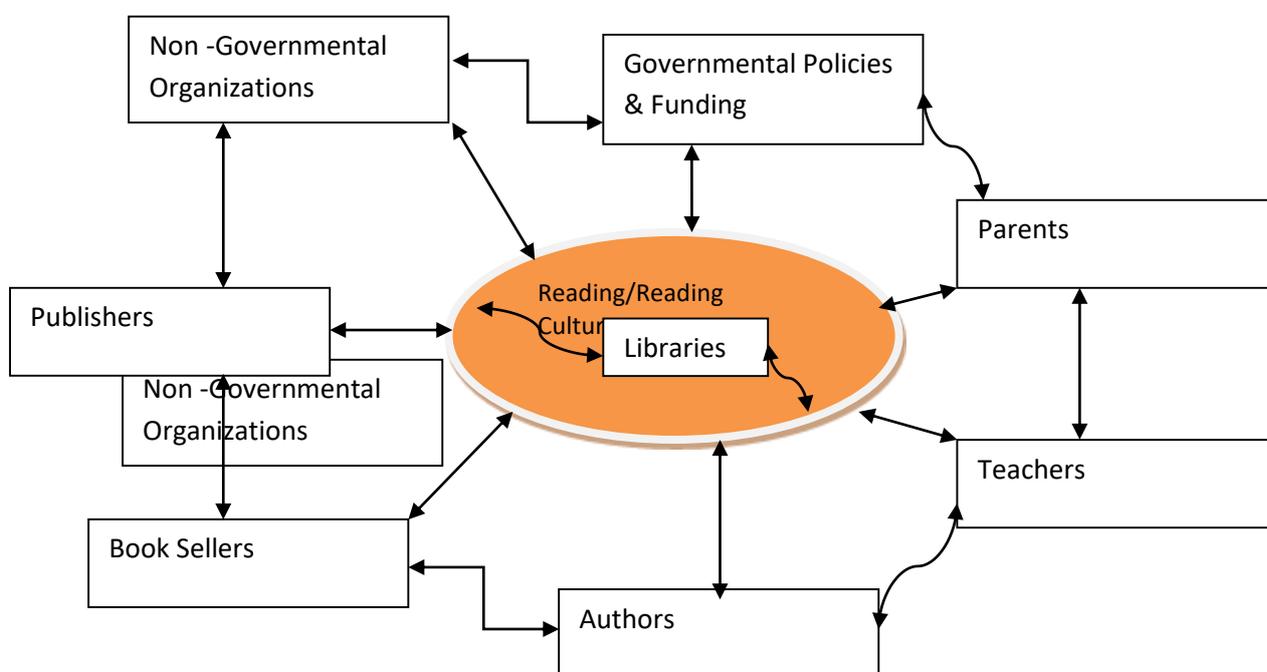

Figure 1: Variable Complex: Conceptual Centrality of Library Roles amongst other

Stakeholders' in Promoting Reading/Reading Culture in Nigeria

Governmental position in the variable complex has to do with formulation of economic and socio-cultural policies vis-à-vis those relating to politics that collectively set the tone of operative environment for all other stakeholders. Since what publishers choose to publish or privish depend on the policies of the government, the quality of the information or knowledge that publishers make available to the public will in turn determine the hues of governance, quality of life and parental care, NGOs' activities, etc. In concrete terms, the interrelationships between government and publishers in our systemic thinking would originate a chain of occurrences as touching better quality and greater availability of information which invariably would lead to improved allocation of resources and more informed decision-making by

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governments, civil society and the private sector, and creation of quality knowledge ecology. According to IFLA (2013), access to information is essential for:

- a full understanding of which public services reach the population, especially those people who are living in poverty
- individuals and communities to engage with governments to improve public services
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the private sector to be able to undertake targeted research & development, invest effectively, and improve public services.

Publishers/Publishing

The survival of book publishing in Nigeria and indeed its sustainability in being able to adequately provide books to every Nigerian in need of books now and in the future is a significant challenge. One established fact is that Nigeria is a certificate conscious society, where publishers lay more emphasis on the production of educational books to the neglect of non-educational books. Till date, resources have continuously been deployed to bring about profitable book publishing business that would sustain book supply in the country. Irrespective of this, publishers in Nigeria have not been able to stimulate 100% local production and provision of all textbooks required at the primary, secondary, tertiary and professional levels of education in the country. As a result of the limited capacity of the publishing firms in Nigeria to handle large print run and the non-inclusion of acquisition of ICT, application of ICT and staff training into publishing operations, the supply of books to the public remain very low. As a surviving mechanism, the country has to depend on importation to meet peoples' requirements for non-educational and educational books particularly at the tertiary level of education. This method has been anything but helpful in the provision of reading materials in indigenous languages.

Publishers being those that make products out of author's ideas, finance, edit, authenticate, market and deliver scholarship and research to the appropriate audience throughout the world (INASP, 2006). Some examples of the early indigenous publishers in Nigeria as articulated by Obinyan (2011) include: Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria established in 1945, the Ibadan University Press (1951), Illesanmi Press (1955), Onibonoje Press and Books Industry Ltd. (1958) and Longmans (1961). At present, there are less than200 registered publishers with the Nigerian Publishers Association – NPA – formed in 1965 to monitor and control book publishing activities in the Nigeria. To have not up to 200 publishers on the NPA's membership update over a period of five decades in a country of about 150 million people with a burgeoning educational system raises the question of sustainability of the industry. The country in terms of market is not only large but large enough according to Obidiegwu (2006), to accommodate many times the number of publishers existing today.

i. Publishers made product with legal entity from authors' ideas
ii. They finance the project as risk takers
iii. The set the state to deliver scholarship
iv. Some comply with legal deposit law in line with bibliographic control (being an effort to access to all information there is in a given country), etc

The Libraries

A library is a collection or group of collections of books and/or other materials organized and maintained for use (reading, consultation, study, research, etc) (Reitz, 2014) in support of education. Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development; and library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help improve their education, develop new skills, find jobs, build businesses, make informed agricultural and health decisions, or gain insights into environmental issues IFLA, 2013).The National Library of Nigeria came into effect in the mid-1960s, with the enactment of the National Library Act of 1964 (Sule, 2014).As a repository or memory of knowledge, the National Library of Nigeria operating in 25 out of 36 states as Sule (2014) puts it, is charged by law to receive on deposit all materials published in Nigeria within one month of its publication (Oyedum, 2005).

Being the central node with vested interest in information gathering, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination for use, libraries should take up a commanding height in ensuring enduring reading culture by coordinating the activities of other stakeholders through the following:

i. Initiate actions and plans to build up their public image in order to improve library use and by extension reading culture,

ii. Mount reading activities and programmes that would address or concentrate on early literacy with the objective of preventing reading failure,

iii. Creation of a framework of cognitive foundation of learning to read that could be used later on to acquire and organize information for personal as well as societal development.

iv. Acquire and put together materials that would assist the teaching of reading skills in early grades

v. Formation of reading clubs in schools

vi. Return of mobile libraries in an improved version

vii. Incorporate the use of social media to teach reading skills,

viii. Lobbying and advocacy to improve funding for the development of language laboratories in schools,

ix. Supervision of School libraries and branches of state libraries to ensure standards and compliance, etc.

Parents

Parents are a critical stakeholder whose interest in early acquisition of reading ability by the target subject(s) is very intense due to biological bonding and the high expectations often reposed on the subject(s). In preparing the child for the training expected to production expected positive transformation, they – the parents clued-up themselves to:

i. Show love while providing adequate care/nutrition to the child

ii. Be part of the child study time to develop and sustain early interest in books and reading activities

iii. Provide kiddies reading/study kits

iv. Provide books, toys appropriate for the grade

v. Maintain a neat and well organized home library

vi. Be active players in parents/teachers association

vii. Donate books to school libraries, even library building, etcetera

Teachers

The teachers are the accredited field officers that teach reading skills and impact the kids with requisite knowledge in an interesting and creative manner. To this end, teachers should be:

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i.   Qualified to be enlisted and saddled with the responsibility to teach
ii.   Resourceful and innovative in executing the task of teaching reading skills and more
iii.   Able to organize periodic learning competitions/activities commensurate with the grade
iv.   Able to conduct nature study within the school premises
v.   Periodically trained and retrained, etcetera.

Like the parents, teachers are invaluable in our variable complex as effectual role models.

Authors

The authors are the producers of the reading or instructional materials. Little or nothing could be achieved with an excellent lesson plans without books. No career in book writing in Nigeria for now. However, authors should be able to

i.   Produce culturally relevant trade books
ii.   Cooperate with parents and publishers to develop good titles
iii.   Visit schools and learning centres to encourage the process,
iv.   Cooperate with publishers to privish or kill what is adjudged to be harmful, etcetera.

Booksellers

Booksellers provide convenient points and locations where books could be acquired. As stakeholders, they free time up for publishers to concentrate on the business of publishing by removing the concern and challenges associated with distribution of books. The cardinal functions of booksellers as replete in the corpus of knowledge relating to bookmaking business include:

i.   Acquisition of books from various locations to create formidable outlets
ii.   Scan the environment to advice the authors, publishers, libraries and teacher the trending titles or areas to address in developing new titles
iii.   Save the other stakeholders from expending precious time having to plough through the morass of books being produced on daily basis in attempt to locate appropriate ones to buy, etc

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

Working independently of partisan interest, they look for a way to intervene in projects. In terms of building a virile nation through reading, this group could donate books to schools, libraries or individual pupils or students. They can also encourage reading by organizing competitions of various types and TV shows. In addition, NGOs could form reading/book clubs, etc.

CONCLUSION

Avid reading ability, the type National Library is campaigning for the country will create a reading culture that will leverage the existence of distinct knowledge ecology. Being a performative organizational knowledge, knowledge ecology is a system consisting of many sources, venues, forms and species of knowledge agents in a symbiotic relationship of productive exchange and value creation (Shrivastava, n.d.). The output of the knowledge ecology is both forms of knowledge that add value in the enterprise, and perform work of the enterprise hence our identity as a nation will flow from the adoption of our proposed model to exploit our indigenous knowledge system. Government interest is the overriding interest in this project in developing a reading nation. Government formulate policies, fund libraries, produce accessories for book production if any, provide tax relief for importation and provide reliable and serviceable communication arteries, etc. Irrespective of this, the role of the library as the central player saddled with the responsibility of driving the acquisition of reading skills among citizenry of the nation cannot be subjugated. To this end, we recommend adequate

funding of libraries being the handlers of information-bearing materials needed to develop a sustainable virile reading culture in Nigeria.

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