



Libraries as Instruments of National Unity: Advancing “One Nation, One Destiny” through Inclusive Information Access in India and Nigeria

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Abstract

In culturally diverse societies, libraries play a vital role in fostering national unity by ensuring equitable access to information. This paper explores how Indian libraries, in line with the concept of “One Nation, One Destiny,” support inclusive growth, democratic participation, and social harmony. Drawing on theories from librarianship and development studies, it suggests that providing accessible information can help reduce inequality, raise awareness of constitutional rights, and cultivate a shared national identity. The discussion extends to Nigeria, another country with extensive linguistic and cultural diversity, highlighting similarities in how libraries help promote unity within diversity. Using a conceptual and comparative approach, the study incorporates scholarly insights to demonstrate that libraries are more than mere repositories of books; they are essential institutions for nation-building. The paper emphasises the importance of ongoing investment in inclusive library systems in India and Nigeria as vital for long-term national cohesion and equitable development.

Keywords: Libraries, National Unity, Inclusive Information Access, India, Nigeria, Nation Building

Introduction

National unity in diverse societies relies not only on political frameworks but also on fair access to knowledge and opportunities. India and Nigeria, both characterised by considerable linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity, exemplify this reality. India recognises 22 scheduled languages, with major ones being Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Punjabi (Khilnani, 2017). Nigeria, in contrast, has over 500 indigenous



languages, but the main ones are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (Hall, 1996). In these contexts, promoting unity requires intentional efforts through inclusive social institutions.

Libraries act as democratic venues where information is freely available to all, promoting equal access. Ranganathan (1931) established the core laws of library science, highlighting that “books are for use” and “every reader his or her book,” thereby emphasising the importance of equal accessibility. Today, this principle applies to digital and multimedia resources, reaffirming that access to information is a public good. By fostering literacy, education, and informed citizenship, libraries play a vital role in promoting national unity and collective progress.

This paper considers libraries as instruments for promoting national unity and explores how universal access to information enhances social cohesion and shared futures. Rather than relying on empirical data, it adopts a conceptual and analytical approach to assess libraries' contributions to India's educational, cultural, and democratic frameworks.

Theoretical Foundations: Libraries, Democracy, and Development

Libraries are built on democratic principles of intellectual freedom and universal access. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2015) states that libraries support sustainable development by providing public access to information, encouraging literacy, and fostering lifelong learning. Having access to trustworthy information enables citizens to engage actively in governance and societal decisions.

Sen (1999) views development as the growth of human capabilities. Providing access to information improves individuals' capacity to make informed decisions, which boosts their social and economic engagement. Consequently, libraries serve as institutions that enhance capabilities by decreasing information poverty and social exclusion.

In both India and Nigeria, where disparities in education and digital access persist, libraries serve as a vital link in addressing structural inequalities. Kumar (2018) highlights that providing democratic access to information in India enhances civic consciousness and understanding of the constitution, which supports national unity. Likewise, Aina (2014) points out that library systems across Africa, including Nigeria's, are essential for promoting literacy and fostering community growth.



Inclusive Information Access as a Tool for National Unity

Inclusive access to information means eliminating obstacles related to language, disability, gender, socio-economic background, and location. In India, the use of multilingual collections and community-focused services exemplifies the idea of unity within diversity. Libraries offer resources in regional languages, recognising cultural diversity and strengthening a sense of national identity.

Nigeria experiences similar diversity, with key ethnic groups like Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, along with many minority communities. Providing inclusive library services that offer materials in local languages and culturally relevant content can enhance national identity while honouring diversity. By ensuring access to educational resources throughout different regions, libraries help reduce marginalisation and promote social cohesion.

IFLA (2015) emphasises that equitable access to information promotes inclusive societies by empowering marginalised groups. When people from different backgrounds interact within shared knowledge spaces, it enhances mutual understanding and collective identity. As a result, libraries serve as unifying institutions that turn diversity into a source of strength rather than division.

Social equity is vital for fostering national unity. Libraries contribute by tackling structural disparities in access to education and information. Rural, community, and mobile libraries provide resources to underserved populations. Furthermore, digital library initiatives expand access to academic content and learning materials beyond traditional physical spaces.

Inclusive services that target persons with disabilities, women, economically disadvantaged groups, and linguistic minorities strengthen the unifying role of libraries. Ensuring that no group is excluded from the information ecosystem, libraries support the principle of “leaving no one behind,” which is essential for reaching a common national goal.

Libraries, Constitutional Principles, and Civic Participation

Both India and Nigeria are constitutional democracies built upon principles of justice, equality, and fundamental rights. Libraries contribute to the internalisation of these values by providing access to legal documents, civic education resources, and public policy information. Kumar (2018) highlights that informed citizens are more likely to engage constructively in democratic processes.



Public libraries frequently organise seminars, reading campaigns, and community discussions to promote intercultural dialogue. These programs foster critical thinking and tolerance, which are vital for maintaining national unity. In Nigeria, both academic and public libraries serve as centres for intellectual exchange, fostering peaceful coexistence and social responsibility.

By promoting information literacy, librarians empower citizens to assess misinformation and participate responsibly in digital environments. This function is becoming more critical for sustaining national unity in the era of social media and the rapid spread of information.

Digital Libraries and Bridging the Information Divide

The growth of digital libraries in India, in line with national digital transformation efforts, improves connectivity between regions. Digital repositories and open educational resources broaden access to knowledge beyond traditional library boundaries. Nonetheless, achieving digital inclusion depends on infrastructure, skills, and supportive policies.

Nigeria encounters similar obstacles in digital access, especially in rural regions. Expanding digital library programs and community ICT centres can help bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive growth nationwide. As noted by IFLA (2015), libraries play a vital role in ensuring fair digital access and supporting sustainable development objectives. Digital literacy programs offered by libraries in both countries empower youth and marginalised groups with essential skills for economic involvement. This fosters overall progress and supports the larger goal of a unified national future.

Librarians as Nation Builders

The role of librarians has shifted from being mere custodians to active facilitators of knowledge engagement. Ranganathan's (1931) laws still highlight the importance of user-centred services, while modern librarianship focuses on advocacy, community outreach, and social responsibility.

In both India and Nigeria, librarians hold key roles in encouraging reading, supporting research, and enhancing intercultural understanding. Through curating diverse collections and hosting inclusive events, they help build stories of unity and communal identity.

Aina (2014) highlights that African librarianship is increasingly acknowledging its role in nation-building. Likewise, Indian librarianship supports democratic and educational reforms, viewing libraries as drivers of inclusive development.



Challenges, Policy Implications and Future Directions

Although libraries in India and Nigeria have significant transformative potential, they face challenges, including insufficient funding, infrastructure gaps, and a lack of policy emphasis. Overcoming these hurdles involves incorporating library development into national planning strategies.

Policy reforms should focus on equitable funding, rural outreach, professional development, and digital infrastructure. Building collaborative networks among academic, public, and community libraries can improve resource sharing and promote national integration. Investing sustainably in libraries bolsters democratic governance and social stability.

Future library development should prioritise inclusivity, sustainability, and community engagement. Aligning library services with national goals will enhance their role as instruments of unity and shared purpose.

Conclusion

Libraries serve as essential tools for achieving the goal of “One Nation, One Destiny” in India and enhancing unity within Nigeria’s diverse society. By providing inclusive access to information, promoting civic education, and empowering through digital means, libraries help build a shared sense of identity while honouring cultural differences. Drawing on democratic and developmental theories, this paper emphasises that libraries are crucial to creating fair and unified communities. Investing strategically in inclusive library systems will enable both India and Nigeria to leverage their diversity as a strength and a driver of collective progress.

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