



Submitted on:04.09.2018

Libraries as Centers of Community Engagements for Development
23 August, 2018
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Public Library Service: A Catalyst for Community Development

Comfort C. Madu

University Library, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria.

Cajetan O. Onyeneke

ELibrary, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria.

cajetanonyeneke@gmail.com

Ngozi C. Azubogu

Eastern Palm University, Owerri, Nigeria.

ngoziazubogu@yahoo.com



Copyright © 2018 by Comfort C. Madu, Cajetan O. Onyeneke and Ngozi C. Azubogu. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine public library service as a catalyst for community development. This study is delimited to 10 public libraries in Isu, Mbano, Umuhu, Aboh-Mbaise, Okigwe, Orlu, Orodo, Afara, Nkwerre and Obowo, all in Imo state of Nigeria. The population of the study consists of all the staff working in the ten public library divisions and all the dwellers in these same ten communities listed above out of which the researcher selected 46 Librarians and 200 community dwellers using the stratified sampling technique. A 4-point Likert scale titled Public Library and Community Development in Nigeria (PULICODEN) was developed by the researcher and used for data collection. The instrument was adequately validated by four experts and the reliability of the instrument was established at a reliability index of 0.89 using the cronbach alpha method. Two research questions and a null hypothesis guided the study. The research questions were answered with mean scores and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using the z-test statistics at 0.05 significance level.

Keywords: Public Library, Services, Catalyst, Community Development

Introduction

Libraries are institutions of basic learning with the mission of providing collection of services to meet information needs of the academia and other individuals who may have need of their services Okebuihe (2011). Several authors regard libraries as the store of books and knowledge as well as the intellectual wealth of the world which serves as the working tool for satisfying man's curiosity. The variety of services and the group of people that it serves highly determines how a library could be categorized or classified. Public libraries are categorized differently from research libraries, school libraries, and other special libraries in that their task is to serve the general public's information needs rather than the needs of a particular school, institution, or research population.

According to Shiri (2003), Public libraries are social institutions offering services based upon books and information for various public groups on social, political, economic, cultural and other matters. They exist to serve the need of the community both at work and at leisure while the size and organization of such services depend largely on the type of community concerned. He further stated that public libraries are found in different countries across the world. They are considered to have contributed much in having and sustaining an educated and literate population that is necessary for community and economic development. Public libraries provide access to knowledge and information through a wide range of educative resources and services and this is equally accessible to all members of the society regardless of race, age, gender, religion, similarities, dissimilarities, economic and educational status.

Kent (2006) averred that the history of public library could be traced to an early library that allowed access to the public was that of the Kalendars or Kalendaries, a brotherhood of clergy and laity who were attached to the Church of All-Hallowen or All Saints in Bristol, England. Records show that in 1464, provision was made for a library to be erected in the house of the Kalendars, and reference is made to a deed of that date by which it was appointed that all who wish to enter for the sake of instruction shall have 'free access and recess' at certain times. In the early years of the 17th century, many famous collegiate and town libraries were founded in England. Norwich City library was established in 1608 (six years after Thomas Bodley founded the Bodleian Library, which was open to the whole republic of the learned) and Chetham's Library in Manchester, which claims to be the oldest public library in the English-speaking world, opened in 1653.

Public Library has been described by several scholars from their different perspectives on the importance they attach to its objectives. However, a widely accepted definition of public library is the one formulated and posited by UNESCO (1949) as revised in 1972. According to UNESCO manifesto (UNESCO 2004), the definition of a public library is as follows:

- a. Public Library is financed for the most part out of public funds.
- b. It charges no fees from users and yet is open for full use by the public.
- c. It is intended as an auxiliary educational institution providing a means of self-education which is endless.
- d. It houses educative and informative materials giving reliable information freely and without partiality.

According to Obizue and Obizue (2016), a public library is a library that can be easily accessed by the general public and they share the following characteristics;

1. They are generally supported by taxes (usually local, though any level of government can and may contribute)
2. They are governed by a board to serve the public interest

3. They are open to all, and every community member can access the collection
4. They are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and they provide basic services without charge.

Aroma (2011) posited that public Library is a public institution or establishment charged with the care of collection of books and the duty of making them accessible to those who require the use of them.

This definition describes two functions of a library as;

- The care of a collection of books means protection and preservation of collection.
- To make them accessible in real sense so that the right person can get right information at the right time.

Obizue and Obizue (2016) noted that the main objectives of a public library are;

1. To provide up-to-date and authentic information on all subjects
2. To provide services free of cost or at nominal rates to each member of the society without any discrimination
3. To provide a harmless and elevating use of leisure
4. To be responsible for preservation and development of cultural and antiquarian heritage of the community

They also averred that in pursuit of these objectives, a modern public library will perform the following functions;

1. Information Dissemination Center
2. Life Long Learning Center
3. Community's Intellectual Center
4. Recreation Center
5. Community's Culture Preservation Center
6. Instrument of Social Change
7. Representative of Democracy

In a similar dimension, Ebiwolate (2010) posited that the objectives of public libraries in relation to community development are to promote cultural awareness and provide informative services as well as liaise between government and community towards bettering the living standard of the community dwellers. Public libraries are libraries that are built and provided fully or partly from public taxes or any other form of public fund and it is not restricted to the use of any special class of persons in the community but is freely available to all. This shares the view of Christopher (2001) in his assertion that a public library is a social institution established by law, financed by public fund, open for all without any discrimination, for general and free diffusion of knowledge and information in the community. It is the obligation of government to establish a public library system throughout the country at national, state and local levels. Besides this, the rural and suburban areas should also be covered by branch and mobile libraries.

Public libraries are funded through a wide combination of sources; the most significant is usually government funding (UNESCO, 2004). It is the obligation of government to establish a public library system throughout the country at national, state and local levels. Besides this, the rural and suburban areas should also be covered by branch and mobile libraries. Public funding has always been an important part of the definition of a public library. However, with governments at different levels facing financial pressures due to the economic recession, some libraries have explored ways to supplement public funding. Small fees, such as library fines or printing fees, cafes, bakeries, bookstores, gift shops and similar commercial endeavors are common features of new and urban libraries strategies of supplementary public

funding that has never been sufficient. For example, the Boston Public Library has two restaurants and an online store which features reproductions of photographs and artwork.

Among the different types of libraries evolved by the society in modern times, public libraries are the most popular because of the functions they perform. They play a significant role in the welfare and development of the society. In the words of Obizue and Obizue (2016), these libraries serve as gateway to knowledge and information which help in lifelong learning, community development and appropriate decision making choices of individual members of the community. For this reason, the demand for the services and resources of public libraries has become critically important that most people and most societies have built public libraries through community collective efforts and/or some philanthropic assistance.

Public libraries are indeed potential catalyst for community development. They have a social mission and are devoted to the development of the community. Information is vital to rural community development and it takes relevant information at appropriate times to easily avert and/or eradicate the ignorance about the problems that plague an individual community dweller and that which also plummets community development. Another school of thought believes that public libraries serve as a link between past, present and future the preservation of local cultural materials thereby promoting cultural awareness.

According to International Association for Community development, community development is a process of empowering individuals and group of people with the skills they need to effect changes within their community. Edoaka (2000) stated that the purpose of public library is community development through the provision of equal access to the community dwellers on educational resources and on all range of human activities such as agriculture, crafts commerce and industry. He further stressed that public libraries provide the resources that empowers community people to accelerate and advance socially, politically and economically. Parameswaran and Vimal (2008) generalized the role and services of public libraries towards community development as;

1. Provision of books, periodicals, internet and other materials for community users which are also available for borrowing and lending
2. Provision of reference and research assistance to the general public through finding reliable sources for papers and presentations; finding answers to questions or evidence in a debate; or providing resources related to a specific event or topic and several forms of reference interview.
3. Collection of reference books, such as encyclopaedias, dictionaries, phone books and unique or expensive academic works.
4. Provision of a wide array of other media including audio books, e-books, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, and DVDs.
5. Digital engagement to help bridge the digital divide as more books, information resources and government services are being provided on line.
6. Serving as community centres, public space and classroom for reading, studying, formal and informal public meeting space.
7. Libraries promote cultural awareness, economic competitiveness and neighbourhood vitality, providing job search assistance, computer skills training and resume help to patrons.
8. Cultural diversity throughout the country by giving equal access facility and want to make everyone feel welcome no matter the religion, race, ethnicity, sex, or financial status thereby making both staff and the library programs more culturally sensitive.

9. Offering array of Children and Teens' programmes such as audio equipment training, sewing classes, knitting classes, chess club, parent/child workshops, writing and book clubs, , movie nights, craft classes etc.

Before a library is established in a community, there is always a professional survey where the community is analysed and the need and importance of library service in such locality is appraised and recommended. Information is power and it is highly recognized fact that no nation can grow beyond the level of its education and general awareness; so also no meaningful development can take place without appropriate information. This supports the importance of a public library wherever it is lacking. Some scholars have posited that the nonexistence of library services brings people to suffer a dwindling situation in their education, economic, political and social attainment hence a low developmental tendency gave credence to this view by his assertion that libraries are living agencies of progress, cultural enrichment, public enlightenment and other well-meaning attributes that will bring about general development in an community.

Onyemaechi (2017) observed that a public library is a library that provides opportunities that positively affect community development but it has suffered some challenges to the extent that successive governments and organizations in Nigeria often overlook and neglect them as institutions that foster community development. According to Opara (2008), poor funding, lack of electricity supply, inexperienced and inadequate work force, illiteracy of community dwellers and lack of public enlightenment have contributed to the poor functioning and non attainment of the community development expectation of the public libraries in Nigeria. Amaechi (2014) alerted that it is important to note that most of the public libraries in Nigeria lack digital service opportunities and do not have current books and resource materials that are needed to facilitate the slow pace of community development in the communities. There is no modern technology awareness in most of the public libraries and most staff are non professional while some others are not computer literate and cannot afford to give adequate research or reference assistance to the users. This among other factors has necessitated this current study.

The study broadly examined the public library as a catalyst for community development in Nigeria.

It specifically sought to;

1. Identify the services rendered by public libraries towards community development in Nigeria.
2. Challenges facing public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria.

Towards achieving the research objectives, the following research questions were posed to guide the study;

1. What are the services rendered by public libraries towards community development in Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges facing public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria?

A null hypothesis was postulated to guide this study and tested at a 0.5 level significance. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Pubic Librarians and Community dwellers on the services and challenges of public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A survey approach is used because varied opinions or diverse views, experiences of a problem/phenomenon could be well explored intensively and thoroughly, including emotions which could not have been expressed by other approaches (Mariene, 2012; Creswell, 2009 and Amin, 2005). This study is delimited to 10 public libraries in Isu, Mbanu, Umuhu, Aboh-Mbaise, Okigwe, Orlu, Orodo, Afara, Nkwerre and Obowo, all in Imo state. The population of the study consists of all the staff working in the ten public library and all the dwellers in these same ten communities listed above. The researchers adopted the stratified sampling technique to select 46 Librarians and 200 community dwellers from the 10 communities' public libraries giving a total of 246 respondents which is made up of two strata; 123 males and 123 females. The instrument for data collection is a research-made questionnaire in a 4-point Likert scale titled Public Library and Community Development in Nigeria (PULICODEN). The instrument was adequately validated by four experts; two from the library and information science and two from measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established by administering the instrument to 10 librarians and 50 students of Imo State University which is outside the study area of this work and the data obtained was correlated using the cronbach alpha to obtain a reliability index of 0.89. Two research questions and a null hypothesis guided the study. The research questions were answered with mean scores and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using the z-test statistics at 0.05 significance level.

Results

Tables were used to present the results of this study according to the research questions and hypothesis.

Research Question One: What are the services rendered by public libraries towards community development in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Rating of Public Librarians and Community Dwellers on the Services Rendered by Public Libraries towards Community Development in Nigeria

Public Library Services Towards Community Development in Nigeria		Public Librarians		Community Dwellers		Decision
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	
1	Provision of books, periodicals, internet and other materials for community users for their reference and research work	2.69	1.07	2.66	1.08	Agreed
	Instrument of Social Change and cultural awareness	2.81	1.03	2.70	1.07	Agreed
	Serving as community centres, public space and classroom for reading, studying, formal and informal public meeting space	2.58	1.11	2.65	1.08	Agreed
	Representing and strengthening a democratic spirit among the community dwellers	2.71	1.06	2.78	1.05	Agreed
Grand mean		2.74	1.06	2.70	1.07	

Table 1 above represents the mean rating of public librarians and community dwellers on research question one which sought to identify the various services rendered by public libraries towards community development in Nigeria.

The result revealed that all the items in the table recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5 hence were respectively accepted by the Public Librarians and Community Dwellers as the services rendered by the public libraries towards community development in Nigeria. A critical look at the result shows the high grand mean scores of 2.74 and 2.70 for the Public Librarians and Community Dwellers respectively which further validates the fact that provision of books, periodicals, internet and other materials, instrument of social change and cultural awareness, serving as community centers, public space and classroom for reading, studying and representing and strengthening a democratic spirit among the community dwellers are some of the services of public libraries that enhance community development in Nigeria.

Research Question Two

What are the challenges facing public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Rating of Public Librarians and Community Dwellers on the Challenges Facing Public Libraries towards Community Development Services in Nigeria

Challenges of Public Library Towards Community Development in Nigeria	Public Librarians		Community Dwellers		Decision
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	
Poor Funding and insufficient books and other resource materials	2.72	1.06	2.78	1.05	Agreed
Inexperienced and inadequate work force	2.65	1.08	2.72	1.06	Agreed
Proper supervision of the services of public libraries	2.31	1.17	2.45	1.15	Disagreed
Lack of public enlightenment and illiteracy of community dwellers	2.69	1.07	2.66	1.08	Agreed
Grand mean	2.59	1.10	2.65	1.09	

Table 2 stated the various challenges facing public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria. From the result, it was discovered that all the items were agreed upon by Public Librarians and Community Dwellers given the fact that they recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 except item 3 where the respondents disagreed that proper supervision of the services of public libraries is not a challenges to public libraries towards ensuring community development services. The result further revealed that the grand mean scores were 2.59 and 2.65 for the Public Librarians and Community Dwellers respectively which is also above the criterion mean of 2.5. This therefore indicates that almost all the items listed in table 2 are the challenges facing public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria. For the fact that the grand mean scores are not too high but close to the criterion mean guarantees that there is an exception in the table as in item 3 which is not a challenge but an enhancer to public libraries developmental services.

Testing the Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Pubic Librarians and Community Dwellers on the services and challenges of public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria.

Table 3: z-test analysis of the significant difference between the Public Librarians and Community Dwellers on the services and challenges of public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria.

RESPONDENTS	N	X	SD	DF	Z-cal	Z-tab	DECISION
Public Librarians	46	2.67	1.08	244	1.16	1.96	Not significant
Community Dwellers	200	2.68	1.08				

The grand mean score and standard deviation of 46 public librarians from the ten communities selected are 2.67 and 1.08 while the grand mean score and standard deviation of 200 community dwellers from the same ten communities selected are 2.68 and 1.08 respectively. At 244 degree of freedom, when the z-test calculation was applied at 5% level of significance, the outcome was 1.16 and the z-test tabulated was 1.96. Given that z-test calculated is less than z-test tabulated; the hypothesis is accepted indicating that there is no significant difference between the mean rating of Public Librarians and Community Dwellers on the services and challenges of public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

In the research question one the result obtained revealed the grand mean of 2.74 and 2.70 and standard deviation of 1.06 and 1.07 for the public librarians and community dwellers respectively which therefore implies that the services of public libraries are important and contributory in the community development strides in Nigeria.

The study actually revealed or identified some of the services of public libraries as; provision of books, periodicals, internet and other materials, instrument of social change and cultural awareness, serving as community centers, public space and classroom for reading, studying and representing and strengthening a democratic spirit among the community dwellers. This result agrees with the views of Parameswaran and Vimal (2008) and Obizue and Obizue (2016) regarding the important roles and services of public libraries in community development in Nigeria.

The result in tables two concerning research question two showed the various challenges facing the public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria. This gained credence from high grand means of 2.59 and 2.65 as well as the standard deviation of 1.10 and 1.09 for the public librarians and community dwellers respectively as recorded in the table.

The challenges facing the public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria as revealed by the study are as follows; Poor Funding and insufficient resource materials, Inexperienced and inadequate work force, Lack of public enlightenment and illiteracy of community dwellers. Item three; ‘Proper supervision of the services of public libraries’ was not agreed upon by the respondents as a challenge but the opposite of it which will talk about poor supervision of public library services would also amount to a challenging factor to public libraries. This finding is validated by the assertion of Opara (2008), as he enumerated that poor funding, lack of electricity power supply, inexperienced and inadequate

work force, illiteracy of community dwellers and lack of public enlightenment have contributed to the poor functioning and non attainment of the community development expectation of the public libraries in Nigeria. Again, this finding receives further credence from the study findings of Amaechi (2014) which revealed and alerted that it is important to note that most of the public libraries in Nigeria lack digital service opportunities and do not have current books and other resource materials that are needed to facilitate the slow pace of community development in the communities. In the same vein, the results from the analysis of the hypotheses did not reflect any significant difference in between the mean rating of Public Librarians and Community Dwellers on the services and challenges of public libraries towards community development services in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend as follows;

1. The government should properly and adequately fund the public libraries to enable them procure sufficient current books and other resource and information materials.
2. Staffing of qualified and experienced librarians is very important in achieving the set goals of public library service which includes community development.
3. The government should adopt regular supervision of the operations of the public libraries as this will go a long way to facilitating effective service delivery on the part of the staff towards achieving the targeted goals.
4. Extensive public enlightenment campaign should be involved to acquaint the rural dweller on the importance of public libraries in community development so that they will largely embrace their services.

Conclusion

Education is the process by which individuals are formally assisted and directed by information to develop their innate capacities for them to live effectively and efficiently in the society and to contribute to its advancement and upliftment for their own benefit and that of the entire society. Public libraries are necessary and owe the communities the social and educational responsibility of giving the dwellers access to information and also establishing some development work where appropriate and pertinent. Therefore, it takes a provision of public libraries to give people access to the desired and deserved information and knowledge that is needed to pursue and direct developmental activities in a community notwithstanding the challenging factors.

References

- Amaechi, F.E. (2014). The Role of Public library in Rural Development in Nigeria. *Library Review*, 3(1), 213 - 220
- Aroma, J.D. (2011). National Digital Library in Engineering Science and Technology. *International Journal of Library and Information Sciences*, 9(1), 120-141.
- Christopher, E. (2001). Global Knowledge: A Challenge for Librarians, *IFLA Journal*. 27(2), 65-69
- Ebiwolate, P.B. (2010). *Nigerian Public Library Services to Rural Areas. Library Philosophy and Practice*. Retrieved from [Http://Unlib.U.Nli.Edu](http://Unlib.U.Nli.Edu). On 10th May 2018
- Edoka, B.E. (2000). *Introduction to Library Science*. Onitsha: Palma Publishers
- International Association for Community Development. Retrieved from www.iccdghbal.org accessed 28 April, 2018
- Kent, S (2006). Leadership for the New Public Library, World Library and Information Congress: 72nd IFLA General Conference and Council, Seoul, 20-24 August 2006.

- Obizue, E.C. and Obizue, M.N. (2016) *The Role of Public Libraries in the Information Society. Journal of resourcefulness* 3(1), 266 -279
- Okebuihe, E.A. (2011). Digital Library Initiative: Update and Discussion. *Bulletin of the America Society of Information Science* 26 (1) 211- 341
- Onyemechi, H. K. (2017) Knowledge and Information Centres: The Key to Self Employment and Poverty Alleviation. *library Review*, 9(2), 17- 18.
- Opara, U.N. (2008). Public Library in Contemporary Challenges and the Way Forward. *IFLA Journal* 34(4) 349 – 358
- Parameswaran N. and Vimal K. V. (2008) Re-Engineering Public Library Services for the Networked Community in the Indian Context. *Redefining the Role of Public Libraries in India: The Knowledge Society Imperatives, National Seminar, Thiruvananthapuram, 6 – 8 August 2008.*
- Shiri, A. (2003). Digital Library Research: Current Developments and Trends. *Library Review* 52 (5), 198 – 202
- UNESCO (2004) *The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.* Available At [Www.Unesco.Org/Webworld/Libraries/Manifestos/Libraman.Html](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html)