

Public Library Services in Nigeria: For all or just for the Literates?

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Abstract

Public libraries are known to offer services to all irrespective of level of education, social, economic and political status. Unfortunately, it is the other way round for public libraries in Nigeria where only the literates benefits from the library services provided. Hence, this paper critically examines the constraints to effective use of public library services by youths in Awka, Anambra state, with Anambra State main public library as a case study. Research questions were formulated, with an observation checklist and a self assisted structured questionnaire as the data collection instruments. The sample population comprised of 70 non-literate youths in Awka. The study reveals dissatisfaction by the youths with the 'books oriented library services' rendered at the state public library due to the fact that they are not aware that the public library is not all about books, that there are many other library services they can benefit from. Based on the findings, it was recommended that public libraries need to identify with the non-literate youths in the communities where they operate, analyze their information needs and develop innovative services specifically targeted at them.

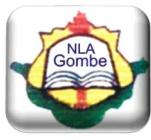
Keywords: Public libraries, non-literate youths, library services, innovative services.

Introduction

Public libraries are considered to be a place of refuge for all, the non-literates notwithstanding. Generally, public libraries are accepted as public goods, library for all and a layman's University. In the words of Kibat in Nwokocha (2012), public library is an integral part of national, socio-economic development and improvement of the general quality of life. Therefore, public libraries need to be inclusive in their provision of library services.

According to Leininger (2012), public library services are those job performed by public libraries for the benefit of the general public whom they are meant to serve, as well as the system by which they provide them. Services of the public libraries should not comprise only those services the literates stands to benefit from such as lending services, children/school services, internet services, readers advisory services, reference services and photocopying services, but should also include those innovative services that the non-literates will also benefit from.

Germano (2011) defines innovation as a change that has been harnessed and focused in order to provide something new that represents a benefit or set of benefits for a user or customer . Innovative services in public libraries is all about bringing in new ideas and introducing new services different from what the library used to have in order to promote the image of the public libraries and also help them remain relevant in the society. Some of the innovative



services the public libraries can adopt are skill acquisition services, adult literacy services, maker space services, community information services, outreach and extension services, financial literacy services, employment and job creation services, Linking clients and artisan's services agriculture training services, health information and medical expertise services.

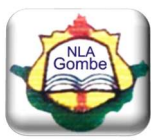
In this present era of economic trauma, to successfully promote the true value of public library services, in order to empower citizens for self actualization, the non-literate youths needs to be carried along by the public libraries in terms of service provisions. In order to achieve this, librarians in the public libraries must be service oriented instead of books oriented and move outside of the libraries to change the misconceptions of the masses about the library. Just like Adeyoyin, Omotoso and Bello (2011) puts it that librarians must move outside of the library and become personal advocates for the library to promote library services. They went further to state that librarians must also utilize important, essential and primary marketing tools, such as advertizing and publicity. In their words, advertizing will help to create awareness, loyalty and stipulate demand. Effective advertizing communicates to both the literates and the non-literates the value of a product or service that the library has to offer.

Every public library user must not be literate, meaning that they must not have the ability to read and write. Many youths in Nigeria are not literate. Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our independence as members of a community (UNESCO, 2017). Librarians in the public libraries as information professionals should extend their services to include the non-literate youths. In the words of Achebe (2008) the basic functions of a public library is training of users on ICT literacy, trade and skill acquisition. If the public libraries can put into practice the above functions mentioned by Achebe, the non-literate youths will be favored to an extent. Investigating how non-literate youths perceive the library services available for their use can help the public libraries provide library services that will help to empower them for self actualization, hence, the need for this study.

Statement of the Problem

Public library services are for all and not for a targeted audience. The UNESCO (1994) manifesto for public libraries stipulated that the services of the public libraries are provided on the base of equality of access to all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. According to the manifesto, the key mission that should be at core of public library services includes creating and strengthening reading habits in children from early age, supporting both individual and self conducted education, as well as formal education at all level, providing opportunities for personal creative development.

Although, some public libraries in Nigeria are trying their best with the key services in the UNESCO manifesto, but providing opportunities for personal creative development, which is the major service the non-literates will benefit from has suffered neglect. From the researcher's personal observation, you can hardly see a non-literate youth making use of the public library. This makes the researcher to wonder if public library services provided are for all or just for the literates, hence the need for this research.



Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the research sought to

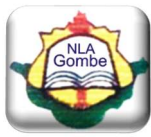
1. Find out the available library services at Prof. Kenneth Dike public library.
2. Ascertain the patronage frequency of the public library by the non-literate youths.
3. Determine the awareness of the public library services provided by the non-literate youths.
4. Find out the constraints to the use of the available public library services by the non-literate youths.

Literature Review

Many authors and librarians have written on the public library services, but not much emphasis has been laid on the library services that would be favorable to the non-literates. For example, Ifidon and Ifidon (2007), library services are library book loan, reference services, photocopying services, binding, online services, overnight journal loan, abstracting and indexing services, internet connectivity, computer typesetting, CD-ROM searching and publishing. Furthermore, Aina (2004) and Kaur (2007) enumerated the following services as being sought after in libraries: photocopying services, current awareness services, inter-library loan and document delivery service, user education service, book reservation services, exhibition services, and consultancy services.

Despite all the strides made by public libraries, many librarians are still worried that public library users remain largely students who concentrate on reading for their promotional and entrance examinations with the help of personal textbooks and without borrowing books from the library (Nwokocha, 2012). According to Brophy (2007), the use of public libraries depends on the services provided or made available in the library. In the words of Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Paulina (2014), the effectiveness of any library is best measured in terms of access and demand of its services. Therefore, if the services provided are not adequate for the needs of the non-literates, it is not likely that they are going to make use of the library. This is the more reason why librarians in the public libraries should move outside the library walls and embrace new services, that the communities where they operate can feel their impact. Services that can improve farmer's lives, services that can help job seekers find jobs or create jobs for themselves, services that are targeted at supporting the needs of the youths and services that helps in promoting community health needs.

Public libraries are considered as agents of social, political and cultural change in any society and provide a wide range of readership than any other type of library (Ikenwe & Idowu, 2014). Morrison in Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Paulina (2014) see public library as a focal center, a University accessible resort for educational, informational and other cultural need of the community. He went further to say that public libraries engage in the eradication of illiteracy and are recognized as the best institution for adult education. If that be the case, there should be no discrimination in their provision of library services to the general public. In the words of Clarke et al. (2011), access to public library services to all members of the community addresses the issue of equality in a community, with no form of discrimination against any potential user. Hamilton (2013), remarked that public libraries can offer services for everyone in the community, the children and youth, women and girls, the vulnerable and marginalized, the entrepreneur and established businessman, the inventor, or the health worker. Adeniyi and Subair (2013) are of the opinion that public library services should be repackaged and disseminated through rural information dissemination activities in public libraries and community centers in order to be accessible to the rural illiterates.



For public libraries to maintain its relevance in the society where they operate, they cannot do without innovative library services that would attract both the literates and the non-literates. Innovative library services entails converting old library services as well as creating new programmes that will aid in promoting a sustainable development. In the words of Colaklar (2014), innovation covers all processes which are conducted to develop new or improved product, services, or production method, and to make it useful. He went further to provide a picture of innovative practices in libraries to include: interactive programs to realize and improve research and learning culture, author activities, seminars, exhibitions, competitions, song, dance, music shows, work and career planning, assistance in filling out job application form, social responsibility projects, information literacy among others. Electronic information for libraries (2016) advised public libraries to implement innovative ideas that use technology to improve people's lives and livelihoods. In their laid down examples, public libraries can introduce library services for farmers, library services for the long-term unemployed people, financial literacy service, building healthy community service, mobile information and communication technology service and so on.

Methodology

A case study design was adopted for this study. This design was adopted so that a more realistic picture of the views of the user population could be painted. Seventy (70) non-literate youths, [Male (35) and Female (35)] were selected using accidental sampling, targeting those that were met on the streets. Self assisted structured questionnaire was used to elicit the views of the respondents and the observation checklist was used to check the library services available. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentages and arithmetic mean. Items up to the value of 2.50 were given positive interpretation while items below the values of 2.50 were interpreted negatively.

Results and Discussion

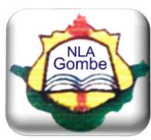
The findings are discussed in the sections that follow:

Interview Question 1

What are the available library services provided in Anambra state public library, Awka?

Table 1. Library services available in Anambra State Public library

Library Services	Available (√),	Not Available(X)
Reprographic services		√
Lending services		√
Reference services		√
Children/school services		√
Translation services		√
Internet/ICT services		√
User education services		√
Current awareness services		√
Consultancy services		√
Readers advisory services		√
Adult literacy services		X
Skill acquisition services		√
Maker space services		√
Outreach & Extension services		√
ICT training services		√
Agricultural training services		√



Financial literacy services	X
Health information and medical expertise services	√
Employment/job creation services	X
Linking up clients to artisan's services	X

Table 1. above shows that the State public library offers reprographic services, lending services, reference services, children/school services, translation services, internet/ICT services, user education services, current awareness services, consultancy services, readers advisory services, health information and medical expertise services, outreach and extension services, ICT training services and agricultural training services. However, they offer skill acquisition services on occasional basis; maker space service is available only in fashion and designing.

Adult literacy services, financial literacy services, employment/ job creation services and linking up clients to artisan's services are not offered at all. The findings contradicts the view of Morrison in Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Paulina(2014) that the public libraries engage in the eradication of illiteracy and has been recognized as the best institution for adult education.

Interview Question 2

What is the frequency of use of the available library services by the non-literate youths?

Table 2. Frequency of use of library services by the non-literate youths

Frequency of Use	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Daily	0	-
Once in a week	0	-
Once in a month	0	-
Once in a year	0	-
Total	0	-

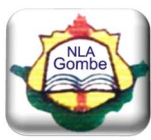
From the interpretation on the table 2 above, it shows that the non-literate youths do not use the services provided at the state public library whether on daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis. The finding is in line with the view of Nwokocha (2012) that despite all the strides made by public libraries, many librarians are still worried that public library users remain largely students. The study is also in line with the findings of Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Paulina (2014) that the major users of public libraries are secondary school students.

Interview Question 3

Are the non literate youths aware of the library services available at the State public library?

Table 3: Percentage response of the non literate youths on the awareness of the library services available for their use.

Library Services Available	Aware	%	Not Aware	%	Remark
Skill acquisition services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Maker space services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
ICT training services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Consultancy services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Translation services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Internet services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Outreach and extension services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Health information and medical expertise services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware
Agriculture training services	-	-	70	100%	Not aware



The percentage scores in table 3 above indicate that the non-literate youths are not aware of the available library services they can benefit from in the public library. The services are: skill acquisition, maker space, ICT training, consultancy, translation, internet, outreach and extension, health information and medical expertise and agriculture training. The findings are in line with the views of Kutu and Olabode (2018) that for public libraries to succeed there is need to let the users be aware of the library and its services. In their words, libraries and their information products and services should be aggressively marketed and brought to the door steps of the people.

Question 4

What are the constraints to the use of public library services by the non-literate youths?

Table 4. Mean (x) scores of the Responses of non literate youths in Awka, Anambra State on the constraints to the use of the public library services available

Items	N	Mean	Remarks
1. Not aware of the available library services	70	3.40	Agree
2. Sensitization on the available library services are not done using appropriate medium	70	3.29	Agree
3. Lack of literacy skills	70	3.08	Agree
4. No interest on the available library services	70	2.20	Disagree
5. Distance barrier	70	3.15	Agree
Overall Mean	70	3.02	Agree

NOTE; ≥ 2.50 = Agree, < 2.50 = Disagree

From the table 4 above, the respondents agreed that the major constraints to their use of the available library services are: not being aware of the available library services ($\bar{x}=3.40$), sensitization on the available library services are not done using appropriate medium ($\bar{x}=3.29$), lack of literacy skills ($\bar{x}=3.08$), and distance barrier ($\bar{x}=3.15$), while they disagreed that no interest on the available library services ($\bar{x}=2.20$) is a constraint to their use of the available library services. This result supports the view of Kutu and Olabode (2018) that inadequate marketing of public library products and services i.e poor awareness creation account for low patronage.

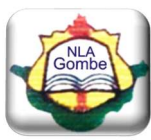
Conclusions

Library services to the non-literate youths are of paramount importance to the success of empowering citizens for self actualization. The study has shown that there are available library services the non-literates can benefit from public libraries. It was revealed that the non literate youths do not make use of the public libraries because they were not aware of what they stand to benefit from there. Poor awareness of the available public library services by the non-literate youths, have major impact on their utilization of these services. There is need for public libraries across the globe to introduce many innovative services and also promote the awareness of their innovative services to the general public so as to aid their utilization by all irrespective of one's educational qualifications/background.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

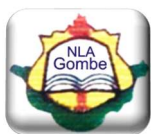
1. Public libraries should be inclusive in their provision of library services. They should have the non-literate youths at the back of their minds in their acquisition of library resources and provision of services.



2. Public libraries should identify the non-literate youths in the communities where they operate, analyze their information needs and develop innovative services specifically targeted at them.
3. There should be proper awareness by the public libraries on the library services they provide. This awareness should be created using different local medium like the use of megaphone, fliers, SMS and not just going on air.
4. Public libraries rendering skill acquisition programme, should try and make it a regular programme and not once in a while. This could be achieved by employing staff with required skills not just by educational qualifications.
5. They should also provide makeover / maker space services for all the skill they teach their users, so that users can be coming for personal practice until they are able to acquire their own materials and stand on their own, because any skill acquired but not put into practice is as good as a wasted effort.

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