



Challenges Facing Public Libraries in Information Literacy Development of Farmers in Nigeria: The Case of Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State

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Abstract

This study investigated of the challenges faced by public libraries in information literacy development of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local government Area of Abia State. Five specific objectives guided the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey design with a population of 75 farmers from six (6) registered farmers' cooperative societies and associations. The entire population was used for the study. The instruments for data collection was focused group discussion. The data collected were analyzed qualitatively and presented using descriptive illustration and interview. The findings revealed that the information needs of farmers in Idima Abam include: information on agricultural loans/credit facilities, information on types of fertilizer and its application, information on marketing of agricultural products among others. It also revealed that the sources of information for the farmers were agricultural extension officers/agents, radio, mobile phones, farmers' cooperative societies/associations, friends/relatives among others. The finding of the study disclosed that the farmers' information literacy level is not quite high because a lot of farmers barely possess the skills of accessing, recognizing, locating and utilizing information in solving various farming needs, independently. The findings further revealed that the roles of public libraries in information literacy development of farmers include: providing information resources and services to farmers, promoting agricultural literacy activities and programmes among farmers, supporting self-conducted and lifelong learning of farmers among others. The findings equally revealed that the challenges militating against the role of public library in information literacy development of farmers include: low level of farmers' income, inadequate financial allocation to public libraries, low literacy level of farmers in terms of reading and understanding English language among others. The study recommended that governments at all levels should endeavour to make adequate financial provision and allocation to public libraries in order to finance information literacy training programmes to farmers.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Information, Information Literacy, Farmers.

Introduction

Information that is effectively applied is power. However, information can only be said to be effectively applied, if it is based on a clear understanding of what type of information is needed, when it is needed, where to obtain it and how to apply it. This logical relationship holds that public libraries must play its roles in ensuring that farmers acquire adequate information literacy competencies to enable them function effectively. This is because information, in all its ramifications, is as essential for successful agricultural practices as oxygen is for human existence. Thus, Olubiyo, Ogunniyi, Ademilua and Fagbemi (2019) opined that information is



essential and basic to human existence, national development and global relations, as well as in agricultural development, in particular. This reality, therefore, brought to fore the need for farmers to be information literate in order to derive optimum benefits from available information sources and media for their farming activities and for better living conditions.

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries, as cited in Uzuegbu (2014) information literacy refers to those abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Corroborating the above perspective, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (2011) asserted that information literacy entails the skills of knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner. It is a prerequisite for participative citizenship, for social inclusion, for the creation of new knowledge, for personal, vocational, corporate and organizational empowerment (Bundy, as cited in Uzuegbu, 2014). Also, Usman and Maidaino (2018) further clarified that information literacy connotes an individual's abilities to recognize a need for information; identify and locate appropriate information sources; know how to gain access to the information contained in those sources; evaluate the quality of the information obtained; organize the information and use the information effectively. Information literacy development is very fundamental for farmers in promoting productive agricultural activities. This is because information literacy development of farmers helps in increasing farmers' ability to identify information needs and properly navigate various sources of information relevant to their present and potential needs.

Public libraries have the mandate of promoting information literacy of members of the public, including farmers through their programmes and activities. In fact, facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills, as well as supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups are some of the core mandates for establishing the public libraries (Okoye, 2014). However, preliminary observations revealed that the public libraries do not live up to their expectations in fulfilling these objectives of which information literacy development of the farmers is part and parcel as a result of some challenges. Based on this premise, it became paramount to carry out this study in order to ascertain the challenges facing public libraries in information literacy development of farmers.

Objective of the Study

The broad purpose of this study is to ascertain the challenges facing public libraries in information literacy development of farmers using Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria as a case. The specific objectives are to:-

1. Identify information needs of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area.
2. Ascertain the probable sources of information for farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area.
3. Examine the information literacy level of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area.
4. Identify the role that public library plays in the development of information literacy amongst farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area.
5. Identify the challenges militating against public library in information literacy development of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area.



Literature Review

According to Satija (2013) information needs and information literacy stems from the inadequacy or lack of appropriate knowledge of reliable and up-to-date information on which the choices that could lead to benefits or services of information seekers could be met. The absence of information literacy is the presence of information illiteracy. Thus, information literacy arises as a result of seeking effective answers, reducing uncertainties, bridging gaps, solving problems, understanding and coping with issues of life, including challenges in effective farming and agricultural development. However, the problems militating against public libraries in information literacy development of farmers are multiple and diverse. First and foremost, Osuchukwu, Otubelu, Alor and Okonkwo (2014) noted that farming as a noble profession that puts regular food on the table as well as possess the capacity to affect national development has suffered severe setback due to lack of strategic information, thus creating the impression that farming is the occupation of peasant people.

Specifically, public libraries are faced with several factors which make them unable to live up to their responsibilities of sensitizing the public including farmers. Inadequate trained and qualified library staff as well as insufficient modern facilities such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) are notable factors militating against public library' ability to execute information literacy development of farmers (John-Okeke & Owoeye, 2011). Public libraries are also very poorly funded by governments, while the available financial allocation to the public libraries is often times misappropriated by management (Kalu, Okai & Unagha, 2015).

In summary, the challenges facing public libraries in an attempt to execute information literacy development of farmers include: unwillingness of library to execute information literacy training, inadequately trained library staff, inadequate and irrelevant information resources, low literacy level of farmers in terms of reading and understanding of English language use in implementing information literacy programmes through agricultural information in textbooks, newspapers, etc. Some farmers do not understand English language hence, public libraries need to switch to indigenous languages. Sometimes it becomes a herculean task to make information accessible to these farmers as interpretation becomes difficult if the public libraries and librarians do not understand the local language of the farmers (Idiegbeyanose & Akpoghme 2009; Idiegbeyan-ose, Olalekan, Ilo & Odion 2015). Other factors include: poor infrastructural and environmental issues like epileptic power supply which inhibit the use of radio and television programmes to implement information literacy training, poor access to information and communication technologies by most farmers especially those in rural communities.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of seventy-five (75) farmers, who are members of six (6) registered farmers' cooperative societies and associations in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area (Abia State Agricultural Project, 2019). The population comprise male and female farmers. The complete census sampling technique was adopted as the whole population was used for the study. This is in line with Nworgu (2015), who recommended that when the population of a research study is small, the entire population can be ideally used as the sample size. The instrument for data collection was focused group discussion. The data collected was analyzed qualitatively and presented using descriptive illustration.



Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the information needs of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area?

The information needs of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State are: information on agricultural loans/credit facilities, information on types of fertilizer and its application, information on marketing of agricultural products, information on agricultural inputs (new/improved variety of seedlings, fingerlings, etc.), and information on plant diseases/ pests. Other information needs include: information on methods of storage of farm produce, information on improve/mechanize farm methods, information on weather conditions, information about agricultural extension services, information on methods of application of germicides, herbicides and pesticides and information on irrigation.

Research Question 2: What are the probable sources of information for farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government?

It was gathered through discussions that the probable sources of information for the farmers include: agricultural extension officers/agents, radio, mobile phones, and farmers' cooperative societies/associations. Other sources of the respondents' sources of information are: friends/relatives, community leaders, textbooks, television, internet and serial materials such as journals/newspapers/magazines.

Research Question 3: What is the information literacy level of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area?

Responses on the information literacy level of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area revealed low level on the following: locating information sources for variety of agricultural/farming activities, evaluating information accurately and creating other useful information from available sources. On the other hand, the farmers' information literacy level of accessing information for specific agricultural purposes, disseminating/communicating information to other farmers, recognizing when information is needed, and utilizing information in solving various farming needs, were high.

Research Question 4: What are the roles of public library in information literacy development amongst farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area?

Information generated shows that the roles played by public libraries in information literacy development amongst farmers are: provision of adequate information resources and services to farmers, promotion of agricultural literacy activities and programmes among farmers, support for self-conducted and lifelong learning of farmers, and ensuring access to agricultural information among farmers. Other roles include: strengthening reading habits among farmers and fostering intellectual dialogue and discourse among farmers to enable them share experiences and ideas.

Research Question 5: What are the challenges militating against public library in information literacy development of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area?

It was discovered through the discussions that the challenges militating against public library in information literacy development of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukwu Local Government Area include: low level of farmers' income to obtain information literacy training, inadequate financial allocation to public libraries, low literacy level of farmers in terms of reading and understanding English language, lack of public library/community information centres to promote information literacy development, and inadequate information resources for enhancing farmers' information literacy skills. Other challenges are: insufficient modern facilities such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support information literacy training to farmers, unfriendly attitude of library staff in promoting farmers'



information literacy skills, inadequate trained library staff to execute information literacy training to farmers and poor power supply to execute information literacy training to farmers.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that information needs of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukuwu Local Government Area include information on: agricultural loans/credit facilities, types of fertilizer and its application, marketing of agricultural products, agricultural inputs (new/improved variety of seedlings, fingerlings, etc.), plant diseases/ pests, methods of storage of farm produce, improve/mechanize farm methods, weather conditions and information about agricultural extension services. This finding agrees with the study conducted by Senevirathne and Mashroofa (2014), which revealed that farmers need information about new variety of seeds, type of fertilizer and methods of use, application of germicides, pests and pesticides, plant diseases and relief methods, bank loans and marketing of agricultural products. The finding also corroborates with the works of Ibegwam, Anasi and Uzuegbu (2016), which revealed that farmers require information on how to improve their agricultural products, on fertilizer application, on modern farm machineries, storage facilities, market techniques, agricultural cooperative societies, and other agricultural activities. In this finding, the highest information need of farmers in Idima Abam, Arochukuwu Local Government Area is discovered to be information on agricultural loans/credit facilities.

The findings of this study also revealed that the probable sources of information for the farmers are: agricultural extension officers/agents, radio, mobile phones, farmers' cooperative societies/associations, friends/relatives, textbooks, television, and serial materials such as journals/newspapers/magazines. This finding aligns with the studies conducted by Ibegwam, Anasi and Uzuegbu (2016); Ode (2017) and Sharma (2013), which revealed the sources of farmers' information to include: relatives and friends, extension agents, radio, television, print information media e.g. textbooks, other farmers, agricultural cooperatives and sales person. In this study, the finding revealed that the most probable source of information of farmers in Idima Abam is agricultural extension officers/agents.

The finding of this study revealed that the farmers' information literacy level is not quite high. However, the finding revealed that the farmers can access information for specific agricultural purposes, disseminate/communicate information to other farmers, recognize when information is needed, and utilize information in solving various farming needs. This finding agrees with the works of Godwin and Parker (2012); Senevirathne and Mashroofa (2014), which revealed that the information literacy level of farmers are measured by their ability to realize their information need, locate information sources, access information, evaluate information, utilize information, as well as create and disseminate information to others.

It was also revealed through discussion that the roles of public libraries in information literacy development of farmers include: providing information resources and services to farmers, promoting agricultural literacy activities and programmes among farmers, supporting self-conducted and lifelong learning of farmers, and ensuring access to agricultural information among farmers. Others are: strengthening reading habits among farmers, and fostering intellectual dialogue and discourse among farmers to enable them share experiences and ideas. This finding supports the work of Kalu, Okai and Unagha (2015), which revealed that public libraries are set up to meet the information needs of the members of the public, including farmers and promote computer and information literacy through deliberate literacy programmes and activities. It also agrees with the work of John-Okeke and Owoeye (2011), which pointed out that public libraries have the mission of promoting information access,



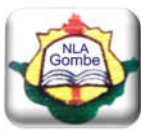
information literacy, public education as well as enhancing the achieving of community's strategic goals such as agricultural/farming activities.

The discussion revealed that the challenges militating against public library in information literacy development of farmers include: low level of farmers' income to obtain information literacy training, inadequate financial allocation to public libraries, low literacy level of farmers in terms of reading and understanding English language. It also include: lack of public library/community information centres to promote information literacy development, inadequate information resources for enhancing farmers' information literacy skills, insufficient modern facilities such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support information literacy training to farmers. Other challenges are: unfriendly attitude of library staff in promoting farmers' information literacy skills, inadequate trained library staff to execute information literacy training to farmers, and poor power supply to execute information literacy training to farmers. This finding agrees with the studies conducted by Idiegbeyan-ose, Olalekan, Ilo and Odion (2015); John-Okeke and Owoeye (2011); Kalu, Okai and Unagha (2015); Ode (2017); and Sharma (2013), which revealed that unwillingness of library to execute information literacy training, inadequately trained library staff, inadequate and irrelevant information resources, low literacy level of farmers in terms of reading and understanding of English language use in implementing information literacy programmes, poor infrastructural and environmental issues like epileptic power supply, etc., are inhibitors to public libraries in executing information literacy development programs.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The findings of this study have revealed the roles of public libraries in information literacy development of farmers. However, effective implementation of the roles of public libraries towards the promotion of information literacy of farmers are hampered by several factors, which if steps are not collectively taken can deny users of the public libraries, including farmers the needed benefits for which they were set-up. Specifically, the findings of the study showed that inadequate finances, inadequately trained library staff, poor attitude of library staff, etc., are serious challenges facing public libraries in information literacy development. From this present situation, if urgent steps are not consciously and conclusively taken by all stakeholders to implement the recommendations of the study, the future of farmers and other publics who rely on the public libraries for their information and information literacy training will be doomed, and the country will remain in its present sorry state of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were:

- Governments at all level- Federal, State and Local should endeavour to make adequate financial provision and allocation to public libraries. This is because, it has been clearly ascertained that inadequate financial resources is the major reason for the dwindling fate of the public libraries in Nigeria.
- Management of the public libraries, in collaboration with governments and other private institutions should provide adequate and current information resources to boost the collection of the public libraries.
- Governments, in partnership with the management of the public libraries should see training and retraining of staff as a priority. This is because skilled, competence and knowledgeable library staff will be able to also train library users including farmers on information literacy competencies that will help them to effectively identify information needs, access appropriate information resources and utilize available information accordingly.
- Governments, in collaboration with management of public libraries should see to the revitalization of mobile public library services. This will encourage reading habit and



love for books by taking the library resources and services to users including farmers in the rural communities.

- Governments should encourage and promote adult education among rural dwellers including farmers so as to enable them appreciate the resources and services offered by the public libraries. This is because illiteracy is a disincentive to whatever services or resources that could be offered by the public libraries.
- Governments should equip the public libraries with modern facilities such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to facilitate the provision of information literacy development to users including farmers.
- Governments should establish public libraries/community information centers in rural communities in order to promote reading habit and information literacy training programmes for rural dwellers.

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