CHALLENGES IN THE PROVISION AND UTILISATION OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA: A LITERATURE SURVEY

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Introduction

IFLA (2001) opines that a public library provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, physical and mental limitations, economics and employment status and educational attainment. Conable (2012) submits that every citizen should have equal right of public library services, buttressing the IFLA position on public library services. According to Waller and Mcshare (2008), two major challenges were identified in the utilisation of public library services which are: lack of obtaining a thorough understanding of the nature of the environment which borders majorly on information accessibility and utilisation; and the development of a policy framework that clarifies the institutional goals and brings coherence to diverse and sometimes conflicting policy demands.
Introduction (cont)

Evans, Amodeo and Carter (1999) describes some of the services that can be rendered by public libraries as: providing information services to support local business; economic and workforce development; maintenance of up-to-date reference materials on market trends and career opportunities; providing materials and programmes for young children, which encourage an interest in literacy and learning; offering settlement support; providing materials and programmes that complement formal studies; assisting users to find relevant, accurate information quickly through print and electronic sources; and using information and communication technologies (ICT) to connect virtually to the libraries, their community and a world of databases and cultural resources (Federation of Ontario Public Libraries 2010).
National Library of Nigeria, (2007), Ogbonna (2010), and Nigeria Library Association (2011), posits that, there are thirty six (36) public library boards in all the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, serving a population of about 160 million people. Although, there are a number of community/local government public libraries under the supervision and or guardian of these library boards, the services is grossly inadequate compare to the country’s population.
Map of Nigeria showing the six geopolitical zones and Abuja (The Federal Capital Territory)
Several studies have been carried out by researchers and organisations such as the America Library Association (2011), Conable (2012), Medina (2009), and Black & Muddiman (1997) Mutshewa (2010), Van der Walt (2004), Ogbonna (2010), Aina (2004), Badawi (2009), Mostert (2001) and Opara (2008) on public library services in both developed and developing countries.
Introduction (cont)

► Despite the existing studies on public library services in Nigeria addressing the challenges in the provision and utilisation of public library services, thereof are very limited in scope only concentrating on specific aspects and not looking holistically at the challenges as a whole. It is against this backdrop that, this study is desirable in order to fill the established gap concerning the challenges in the provision and utilisation of information services in public libraries in Nigeria.
Objectives of the study

• To determine what information services are currently offered in public libraries;
• To ascertain the challenges experienced in providing information services in public libraries;
• To establish the challenges concerning accessibility and utilisation of information services in public libraries; and
• To determine satisfaction level of users and develop a framework for improvement of public library service delivery.
Levels of public libraries in Nigeria

- The operationalisation of public libraries in Nigeria is categorized majorly on three levels which are: Federal, State, and Local. On the Federal level the National is categorized as a public library because it is serving all categories of users at the national level (Ogbonna, 2010). The allocation of funds is derived directly from the federal government budget, while selection and acquisition of materials, service delivery, and all other administrative responsibilities are discharged by senior librarians and the executives of the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) through the Federal Ministry of Education.
Human and material resources

- Staff quality is very low and inadequate in number (Aina, 2004). It was much better during the colonial era and immediately after the independence. Public libraries in Nigeria lack locally produced resources which led to the inability to procure books, journals and other necessary resources that require foreign exchange because of the introduction of structural adjustment programme (SAP) by the world bank in most countries of Africa, including Nigeria.
Provision of services

- IFLA/UNESCO (2001) posits that, provision of public library services have been very effective in many countries of the world such as United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Canada and Denmark. Aguolu (2002) opines that, public library services compliments the formal education institution by imparting in the students the required socialisation through effective participation in adult education activities. This is a demonstration of the paramount value of the services public library could offer.
Provision of services (Cont)

- The following are public library services that could be rendered to users in specific term: Lifelong learning; leisure; recreational reading; services to special user groups; services for immigrants and new citizens to help them to find their native culture; reading promotion and literacy; customer care; user education; co-operation and resource sharing; among others.
Access and use

- In order to successfully deliver services made available in public libraries, physical accessibility is essential. Otherwise, the services may not be meaningful to those who are unable to access them no matter how high the quality of such services. This should be carried out in a way that maximizes convenience to users and potential users. If possible, they should be near the centre of transport networks and close to areas of community activity. The public library in some cases could share buildings with other services such as arts centres, museums, art galleries, community centres and sports facilities. The library must be opened at all times for maximum convenience to those who live, work and study in the community.
Satisfaction of public library services

- Edwards & Browne (1995) and Coleman, Xiao, Bair & Chollet (1997) justifies the essence of utilising public library services which is to derive satisfaction from the use of such services. Needs should generally be more objective than either wants or demands. As a result, Users’ needs of public library are likely to be at least partially based on reason or logic. If public library users do not have their needs met, they may fail to achieve their goals. Public library patrons desire a quality service or product provided in a friendly and courteous manner. Dimension of expectations by public library users involve two service levels.
Satisfaction (Cont)

- This first is the desired service level or what the user hopes to receive a blend of what can and should be. The second represents the adequate service level. This is the level of service a patron finds acceptable and satisfying. Edwards and Browne (1995) opines that library staff tends to emphasise empathy, tangibles, and customer/staff relationships in order to facilitate users’ satisfaction.
Satisfaction (Cont)

- Library users tend to attach greater importance to reliability and responsiveness, hold expectations for concrete indicators such as the rapid delivery of library services (Coleman, Xiao, Bair, & Chollet, 1997). Public library staff with a good understanding of needs and expectations and their relation to customer satisfaction will experience greater success in satisfying their customers.
Yield Shift Theory of Satisfaction (YST)

- The premise of the yield shift theory (YST) is satisfaction response which led to outcome, desired by an individual pre-determined effective arousal of emotion (Biggs, et al 2011). It explains the satisfaction response which could either be positive or negative feelings. When one is positive in his feelings, it is adjudged that, one is satisfied and if the feelings are negative, then, dissatisfaction comes in. The theory is not categorizing “Satisfaction” and “Dissatisfaction” separately but characterizes the phenomena arousal by individual leading to positive or negative feelings.
YST (Cont.)

- **Attenuation effect**: stands on the premise that, the level of satisfaction responses of an individual diminishes over a period of time.
Discussion and summary

- Public library services in Nigeria, no doubt are plagued by several challenges ranging from insufficient number of libraries’ availability serving a population of about 160 million people (National Library of Nigeria, 2007; Ogbonna, 2010; Nigerian Library Association, 2011 and Aina, 2012). The services of the available public libraries in Nigeria are grossly inadequate with outdated collections coupled with lack of sufficient professional librarians (Aina, 2004).
Discussion and summary (Cont)

- The level of patronage of the existing public libraries is low, less relevant materials; awareness and understanding of the public library concept by the community are poor, bureaucratic in-orderliness, poor funding, and lack of the seal to introduce new services. Introduction of new services will trigger the increase in interest rate of both the clienteleles and potential users to wanting to use the library more and better as earlier proposed by yield shift theory in this study.
Summary

- These challenges are outcomes of the deficiencies in the administrative arrangements in managing these libraries. Although, we have the public library boards, headed by a Chairman, who, in most cases is a politician and knows little or nothing about library management, the board on the other hand, is responsible to the permanent secretary or the commissioner in the ministry of education, who is either an administrator or politician also. It is obvious that critical understanding of the public library settings cannot be posited by these leaders and unfortunately, they are the policy makers on public library matters.
Recommendations

- The government should set up a formidable committee comprising of professional librarians, IT experts, and administrators of integrity to come up with modalities for improved public library services. Autonomy should be given to libraries and complete access to the collections is desirable by allowing clienteles to borrow library materials for a number of days, weeks or months as the case may be.

- The totality of the public library collections should be overhauled so that they reflect the thinking and values of the communities which they serve.
Recommendations (Cont.)

- New services such as film show, debate and reading club, story times, lap time for infants, preschool explorers, selective dissemination of information (SDI) and others, should be introduced as it is done in the developed countries of the world. This will increase the degree of utilisation and service performance.

- Attenuation effect as explained by the YST should be implemented because; introduction of new services must be a continuous process as satisfaction of clienteles diminishes with time.

- Potential users should be sensitized through mass media and other devices on the benefits of public library services. This will trigger their quest for using the services.
THANK YOU