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ENHANCING PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES IN OSUN STATE: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

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Abstract

In Nigeria, public libraries are designed to satisfy the demands of the populace for free information by offering resources and services. This paper focuses on the public library services in Osun State in the face of best practices in a bid to identify the challenges and propose effective strategies. These services include those related to education, information awareness, children's libraries, and other services. However, a number of issues were found to be hindering public libraries in Nigeria's efforts to offer patrons effective services, including insufficient funding, unfavorable service and employment conditions for staff, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and limited ICT skills. The suggested solutions to address the aforementioned difficulties are to encourage non-governmental organizations to provide help to Nigerian public libraries; the staff conditions of service should be upwardly reviewed in terms of salaries, allowances, employment processes, retirement, and others to motivate the staff and also make public library jobs more attractive. Strategies to fortify the public library for effective and efficient mandate delivery were also spelled out in this paper.

Keywords: Best Practices, Public Library, Public Library Services, Public Library Resources.

Introduction

Over the years, there have been numerous objections against Nigerians' bad reading habits, which have been linked to factors such as the influence of the internet and the deteriorating state of public libraries. The federal and state governments appear to have overlooked the crucial roles that public libraries can play in enhancing national identity and reducing crime and corruption. A well-known American study by D'Elia et al. (2002) investigated this issue using data from a representative population sample, exploring the domains in which the Internet and libraries competed and complemented each other. Nwofor and Ilorah (2015) stated that public libraries across Nigeria trace their roots back to the humble origins of the Tom Jones Library in Lagos in 1910. Nonetheless, a pivotal moment in the history of public libraries in Nigeria occurred at the UNESCO Seminar on Public Library Development in Africa, which took place at the University College (now University

of Ibadan) in Ibadan from July 27 to August 21, 1953 (Abubakar, 2017). The seminar promoted the establishment of public libraries across Africa, among other things (Opara, 2008). As stated by Nwegbu, Echezona, and Okafor (2015), rural library services were first provided by public libraries in the 1940s. Book boxes, portable libraries, and libraries aboard boats are all some of these services. In Nigeria, the state library is the name given to the public library, while the divisional library is the name given to their branches. The Director of Library Services is in charge of public libraries, which are managed by state library boards. The Ministry of Information is the Supervisory Ministry, according to Onwuka (2016). The primary objective of Nigeria's public libraries is to provide facilities, resources, and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of people and groups for knowledge and growth.

The value of the public library in our society cannot be overemphasized. The library evaluated its potential expanded role and value as a physical hub for social interaction and a public space in the digital age. There are several perspectives on the value and purpose of public libraries. The mission statement and library act of this page serve as its cornerstones, outlining its main objective and purpose. These aid libraries in comprehending their place and function in society (Webster, 1996). The financial value of public libraries is based on how well they perform their function and how essential this function is viewed in comparison to other social values. It also affects how useful (i.e., important and significant) they are to citizens and communities. Collecting data from the public is one of the public library's goals in order to design the necessary adjustments to its services, address shifting public demand, and discover new needs (Anyalebechi, & Odu-Anyanwu, 2016)

Akanwa (2013), defines a public library as one that provides services, leisure activities, and information resources to the general population, which encompasses both the young and old, literate and illiterate. Public libraries are accessible to all users, unlike other kinds of libraries, and their contents are created to represent the variety of their patrons. Public libraries should provide facilities, resources, and services that are specifically designed to fulfill the requirements of the communities where they are located. Books are and have always been elitist; thus, it is clear that one of the numerous elements influencing Nigeria's reading culture is the high cost of books and literature.

If a sizable amount of tax money is allocated to public libraries, then every class in society will have access to excellent books, information, and expertise for production. Statisense (2017) compared the number of prisons and public libraries in each of Nigeria's states and concluded that there are 242 prisons and 316 public libraries nationwide-275, 25, and 24 in the states of Delta, Edo, and Katsina, respectively-which respectively-which was intriguing. With 17, 15, and 15 prisons, respectively, Adamawa, Borno, and Kaduna are the three states with the most jails. Do Nigeria's federal and state governments realize that a well-managed public library will drastically cut down on crime, which will cut down on crime and

corruption and, eventually, the number of people going to jails? It is clear that the government still does not see libraries as tools for fostering national growth or as solutions to a great many of the issues that confront our nation today. Public libraries across Osun State are struggling to remain relevant; without intervention, they would all become historical landmarks, and we will be left wondering, "When did we get here?" It is appropriate to advise declaring a state of emergency given the current situation.

A public library's infrastructure, resources, and services ought to be tailored to the specific requirements of its users and communities. The state government establishes public libraries, which are funded by taxes (Anyanwu, 2016). Through a variety of resources and services, they give everyone in the community equal access to knowledge, information, and imaginative works, regardless of their race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, or level of education (IFLA/UNESCO, 2001). One may therefore refer to a public library as "a university of the people," "a library for all," or "an ordinary man's school." Aiyebelehin, Onyam, and Akpom (2018) highlight that public libraries play a crucial role in supporting education, eradicating illiteracy, and providing access to a wide range of resources for community residents. As such, it serves as the local information hub, giving consumers easy access to a wide range of knowledge and data. Nwofor and Ilorah (2015) state that the humble beginnings of the Tom Jones Library in Lagos in 1910 served as the impetus for the establishment of public libraries in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the UNESCO Seminar on Public Libraries marked a significant turning point in the history of public libraries in Nigeria.

A public library has a wide range of resources that meet the needs of its users. These resources are both human and material. Human resources are the staff working in public libraries. Human resources were in different cadres, such as director, deputy director, librarians, assistant librarians, library officers, and support staff who were not professionals. These staff attended to the users to ensure that their information needs were met satisfactorily. Federico and Diana (2016) defined human resources as the subset of persons that work in a public or private organization, performing diverse tasks and assignments in accordance with their abilities, talents, and the daily resources that manage the use of other non-human physical and material resources of the organization. The material resources include books on all subjects, journals, magazines, newspapers, computers, DVDs, videos/CDs, pictures, government documents, pamphlets, selected documentary films on relevant subjects, drawings, charts, models, lectures in the vernacular, posters, audiovisuals, cassette tapes of government programs, achievements and problems, and others (Nwoforet *et al.*, 2015). According to Onwuazo (2003), public library resources include a variety of both published and unpublished information materials in various forms, readable with the naked eye or as an aid for the clientele. He notes that these information resources include journals, online databases, and software programs to ensure a good learning environment for users to achieve educational goals.

Objectives of the Study

In line with the argument made, this paper attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. identify the best practices in the library; the library;
2. highlight sources of funding for public libraries in Nigeria;
3. highlight some of the public library services to the public in Osun State in line with best practice;
4. identify challenges to the provision of public library services in Osun State to suit best practice; and
5. suggest strategies for financing the provision of public library services in Osun State to suit best practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study hinges on the Bretschneider et al (2006) theory and Methodology of best practice

Bretschneider et al (2006) offers an alternate methodology for Best Practices research in a much more technical, methodical and explores issues of completeness and comparability. He addresses the fact that fully establishing whether a practice is truly a best practice would require assessment in all contexts, while in practice, only example cases are analyzed. Bretschneider and his group also stresses the fact that in order for something to be considered a "best practice" it must be arrived at through a comparative process between methodologies. In order for a "best practice" to be valid, it must take into account all relevant approaches, since neglecting to do so would lead to inappropriate usage of the term "best." Comparing sample practices may yield a good practice, but may also be altogether unreliable, depending on how the sample was selected.

1. Library Best Practices

Best practice is a form of program evaluation in public policy. It is the process of reviewing policy alternatives that have been effective in addressing similar issues in the past and could be applied to a current problem. Determining best practices to address a particular policy problem is a commonly used but little understood tool of analysis because the concept is vague and should therefore be examined with caution. Vagueness stems from the term "best" which is subjective. While some research and evidence must go into determining a practice the "best" it is more helpful to simply determine if a practice has worked exceptionally well and why. Instead of it being "the best", a practice might simply be a smart practice, a good practice, or a promising practice. This allows for a mix and match approach for making recommendations that might encompass pieces of many good practices (Bardach, 2011)

We must educate ourselves on the finest library practices to guarantee that we can quickly get the greatest content from the shelves of the modern public library, which may be electronic, metal, or wooden. We accomplish this by getting over the mindset that the library is an alien land, quickly recognizing the differences between

materials, and making efficient use of search engines. A structure for assessing the public library's operations and performance is provided by the Best Practices document. It is the cornerstone of strategic planning as well. This text has numerous sections, some of which are repeated. Each part should comply with specific norms. For example, it should maintain clean, high-quality code.

Clean code: Clean code is essential for creating a useful library. For many reasons, having a clear, unambiguous code is crucial. It facilitates code comprehension, maintenance, and reading. In addition to being more secure, it is also simpler for other developers to grasp. Here are some pointers to assist in creating clean code. Initially, divide up a lot of functionality into distinct classes. Make sure the code behaves as intended by testing it next.

Use sensible and consistent naming for public API methods: Users find functionality more easily when names are consistent. When using acronyms, make sure they make sense. Try to be consistent if not. An acronym's initial letter should always be capitalized.

Planning Package Structure/Library Space: A Planning Resource for Librarians is a publication by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Planning initiatives can be accelerated by using the best practices found in this resource. In addition to discussing programming and space concerns, the booklet explains how to present a business case and its needs to possible funders and municipalities.

Making a goal statement: It is critical to take your community's special needs and assets into account when crafting a goal statement. Additionally, think about the advantages the library may offer that community. The mission statement must be succinct and unambiguous. Additionally, it needs to make clear the library's goals and aspirations. As an alternative, you can express your aspirations for the community in a vision statement. A mission statement can be a highly helpful tool in planning, even though it might not appear to be required at first. It can help direct choices about purchases, programming, technology, and other crucial issues. You can use your mission statement to inform other stakeholders about the job that your library does. The organization's basic beliefs should be reflected in the best mission statements. An overly ambiguous mission statement will hinder the company's ability to get recognition. A mission statement that is too general is akin to persuading someone to apply for a job without giving them the necessary information.

Documenting your library: When recording library best practices, make sure to provide as much detail as you can. This will serve as the foundation for strategic planning and assist in identifying possible areas for improvement. Every function that your library exposes, along with information on expected input and output values, side effects, and the library's goal, should be included in a reference page.

Examples of its implementation should be included as well. Reference documents may be created automatically, or they may contain many lists of solutions to a single issue. Giving each reference a textual explanation is preferable, though. The purpose of the Customer-Focused Library grant is to investigate library services and patron attitudes from a retail standpoint. Best practices from retail were applied to library space utilization, service philosophy, and service visibility. The consultants hired for this project evaluated the ways in which the libraries serve their customers, with the goal being the development of a customer-focused service model for member libraries.

2. Sources for Funding Public Libraries in Nigeria

In Nigeria, public libraries are funded mainly by the state government. This is usually done through the special fund and taxpayers' money. Ebiwolate (2010) notes that public libraries are part of government agencies; thus, the administration and budget are their responsibilities. Other sources of funding for the public library include:

Gift and Private Contribution: This comes in the form of cash and book donations from corporate bodies, philanthropists, and international organizations.

Endowment: This is a kind of benefaction that is slightly different from a gift. It is a support given to particular projects as some libraries gain prominence due to the services rendered.

International Aid: This is a kind of help offered by international bodies and agencies; such bodies include UNESCO, the British Council, and the World Bank.

Miscellaneous: These are internally generated revenues that come from library activities and the activities of patrons. Some of the revenue may come from sales of books, stationery, bindery services, patrons' registration fees, fines for late returns of loaned library materials, photocopying, and literature searches.

3. Public Library Services

Various services are offered in public libraries. Ibe (2014) defined public library services as those jobs performed by public libraries for the benefit of the general public whom they are meant to serve. IFLA (2011) emphasized that public library services include the loaning of books and other media, the provision of books and other materials for use in the library, information services, including print and electronic media, and readers' advisory services, including reservation services. Public library services according to IFLA (2011) include:

Educational services Public libraries provide a variety of resources and services to support education at all levels. IFLA/UNESCO (2001) pointed out that access to information is a basic human right. Today, there is more information

available than ever before in the world's history. Public libraries acquire, process, organize, and disseminate free information to all citizens.

Information Awareness Services: Public libraries provide information awareness services by spreading authentic information on current issues such as COVID-19 and other health matters. They also provide information on politics and governance. As a public service that is open to everybody, the public library has a key role in collecting, organizing, and disseminating information, as well as providing access to a wide range of information sources. The public library has a particular responsibility to collect local information and make it readily available.

Children's Library Services: Public libraries expose children to information resources as early as possible. They provide picture books, storybooks, cartoons, games, poems, children's magazines, textbooks, fiction, and non-fiction for children and young adults. The idea of children's library services being taken care of by the public library is an age-long phenomenon. These services are presented in a colorful manner to educate the children and help them imbibe a reading habit.

Other services provided by public libraries include reference services, storytelling hours, information literacy services, discussion groups/talk shows, circulation/lending services, reading promotion campaign/competition, mobile library services, library book/week, cultural services, recreational services, public library-community center/public enlightenment center, exhibitions, and extension services.

4. Challenges to the Provision of Public Library Services in Osun State to Suit Best Practice

Some challenges are facing public libraries in their efforts to provide services to their users. Ebiwolate (2010), in agreement, revealed that numerous problems are bedeviling public libraries in Nigeria in their bid to provide effective services to their users. Some of the challenges include inadequate funding, inadequate and outdated stock, bad location, lack of adequate and qualified staff, lack of staff motivation, and insecurity about library materials.

Inadequate Funding: Inadequate funding significantly hampers the operations of public libraries in Nigeria by leading to poor service conditions, shortages of professional staff, poor human resource management, extreme dilapidated structures and facilities, obsolete resources, difficulty extending services to rural areas, inadequate ICT facilities, and others. Insufficient government funding for public libraries has resulted in numerous challenges. It hinders effective and efficient service delivery. This problem, according to Ebiwolate (2010), can be likened to a lack of political will. He observed that lack of political leadership leads to negligence on the part of the government to fund the public library properly, non-approval of the budget, and non-release or non-implementation of the budget (where approved).

Inadequate funding has led to poor service conditions, shortages of professional staff, poor human resource management, extreme dilapidated structures and facilities, obsolete resources, difficulty extending services to rural areas, inadequate ICT facilities, and others. Aina (2004) posits that the services of public libraries in Nigeria are grossly inadequate, with outdated collections coupled with a lack of sufficient professional librarians. The level of patronage of the existing public libraries is low; less relevant materials are acquired; awareness and understanding of the public library concept by the community are poor; bureaucratic in-orderliness, poor funding, and a lack of zeal to introduce new services. Unfortunately, the Internet facilities installed in some public libraries cannot be maintained. Consequently, they are no longer functional as a result of inadequate financing for sustenance and maintenance.

Insufficient ICT Infrastructure and Staff with ICT Skills: The majority of the public library staff have limited ICT skills. Studies have consistently reported inadequate levels of ICT literacy as one of the major problems facing libraries in Nigeria as they move into the 21st century. Challenges such as underdeveloped ICT infrastructure, insufficient funding for ICT development, and a lack of staff with ICT skills have been identified as significant obstacles.

Ethnicity (tribalism) and Religion: This problem exists in different degrees globally, not only in Nigeria. Today, people are not employed based on confidence and merit but on "connections." This causes drawbacks in action and inefficiency in library organization and administration, bearing in mind that one cannot give what he does not have.

Poor Conditions of Service and Prospects: Some public libraries struggle to retain staff due to inadequate working conditions, leading to staffing shortages that can hinder service delivery. Young librarians usually prefer employment in federal government-owned establishments for the following reasons: better salary, frequent promotion, and study leave with pay, which is not obtainable in public libraries. Poor conditions of service lead to poor staff employment, which can hinder service delivery.

Library Location and Difficulty in Extending Services to Rural Areas: In Nigeria, public libraries are located in urban areas. As a result, their services are limited to people who live in urban areas. Rural dwellers are not benefiting from public library services, hence bookmobile services. Bookmobile was established, according to Bioks and Papadimitrion (2018), to serve the public and disseminate knowledge to all, especially to those who find it difficult to resort to standard libraries due to social or geographic reasons, health issues, or old age. Ebiwolate (2010) reported that government initiated bookmobile services in the '60s and '70s, but their

sustainability in Nigeria was hindered by factors such as poor road conditions, long distances, and the use of unreliable vehicles. The suspension of these services had adverse effects on public library operations, leading to reduced outreach and limited access to knowledge resources and hindering efforts to provide services to underserved populations.

5. Strategies for Enhancing the Provision of Public Library Services in Osun State to Suit Best Practice:

Public library services have declined dramatically over the past years as a result of adverse economic, educational, and political situations in Nigeria. Poor quality of service delivery has equally led to poor perception and patronage of public libraries by the citizenry. Agodi, Eberechukwu, Obasi, & Ozoemelum (2016), in their study of strategies for enhancing the provision of public library services, pointed out the following strategies for enhancing service delivery in public libraries: collaboration, service classification, staff training, and user focus.

Collaboration: By collaboration, Agodi *et al.* (2016) emphasized that the federal and state governments, international bodies, and other stakeholders in the education sector should partner in a synergic manner to help change the image of public libraries in Nigeria. On the other hand, this will enhance the economic and educational status of the Nigerian citizenry. The government should provide adequate infrastructure, improve funding, create a conducive environment, and encourage staff motivation for greater performance and improved service delivery. The provision of ICTs for easy access to information through the Internet by users both inside and outside the library building is another strategy for enhancing service delivery in public libraries.

Location of the Building: To successfully deliver public library services, physical accessibility is essential (Salman & Mugwisi, 2014). Public libraries should be strategically located at the center of community activities. They can share buildings with other services such as arts centers, museums, art galleries, community centers, and sports facilities. This can help to attract users and achieve capital and operational economies.

Staff Training: This involves human resource management in the public library. Brassey, Christensen, and Dam (2019) noted that staff training is a good opportunity for staff to learn and develop new competencies and upgrade their skills, especially in ICT. They further explained that there should be adequate provision of training facilities, with the knowledge that the satisfaction of library users depends not only on the space and the resources but also on the library staff. Through in-house trainings, webinars, workshops, and conferences, library staff are informed about library resources and programs and are guided on the best ways to provide and share these resources with customers through marketing techniques. Boakye, as cited in

Ahenkorah-Marfo and Osie-Boadu (2013), noted that “techniques of marketing are strategies adopted to attract users or customers to use a product or service.” He maintained that products or services should attract users' attention. Library users are customers of the library. By sharing their experiences with non-library users, they can attract them to the library as well. This is also known as a marketing strategy.

Mobile Applications: The public library should introduce the use of mobile applications, through which customers can connect with library services from anywhere, thus allowing them to interact with the library from any location and at all times. Examples of mobile applications are MDPLS iLibrary App, Overdrive, Freegal, Mango Languages, Blio Reader, Ask-A-Librarian, Access My Library, Axis Reader, and Zinio. With all these APPs, library services can be delivered efficiently.

Print Collaterals: The Public Library System should create an internal Graphics Department and Print Shop. This allows for the creation of collateral, including fliers, posters, and brochures, for the promotion of library programs and services. These collaterals are displayed and distributed within the branches and used during outreach events.

Users-focus Strategy: This involves drawing the attention of members of society to the values of the library, especially public libraries. Library users should be allowed to participate in the planning and implementation of public library programs. They should be allowed to express their needs so that the efforts of the libraries and librarians can be channeled towards user satisfaction. Public libraries should provide effective and efficient information services to attract library users and promote library use.

Fee-based Services: As a result of shrinking budgets, it has become necessary for public libraries to find additional sources of funding. Public libraries can charge fees for their services to help with fund-raising. The most common services include reprographic services, bindery, Internet browsing, sales of books, stationery, and consultancy. In support, Anyalebechi and Udo-Anyanwu (2016) advised the public libraries not to depend only on government subsidies but to source for other avenues to generate funds internally. Public libraries can also raise funds by making their collections available for loan to other libraries by participating in the network through a union catalog and by classifying and cataloging their resources according to accepted international or national bibliographic standards.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the public library serves as a hub for information for the general public, offering a diverse array of resources and services that enable access to knowledge, information, and creative works for all members of the community, irrespective of their race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability,

economic and employment status, or level of education. Since the state provides funding for public libraries, they are in charge of the budget and administration. The public library has an obligation to furnish its patrons with up-to-date, precise, relevant, and trustworthy information on a wide range of topics via resources that facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences amongst individuals, making them simply and freely accessible to all.

Recommendations

It is obvious that public libraries in Nigeria have not been able to meet their objectives, let alone meet library best practices. This paper therefore recommends that public libraries be established in every community, both urban and rural, by the Osun State Government; revitalized mobile library services should be redesigned as a strategy to deliver materials to homebound patrons and reach out to the physically challenged in Nigerian society. ICTs should be installed and used in public libraries to render effective and efficient services. In this era of information overload, the application of ICTs in libraries is a necessity.

Non-governmental organizations and philanthropists should be encouraged to support public libraries in Nigeria. It is important to change the monopolistic method of administering the provision of public services and adopt a more pluralist approach that takes into account a large number of agents, including public and private suppliers. Above all, the human resource situations should be reviewed occasionally, such as the staff conditions of service, salaries, allowances, employment process, retirement, and others, to motivate the staff and also make public library jobs more attractive.

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