



Rejuvenating Public Library Services in Delta State for National Development

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Abstract

This paper discussed the need to rejuvenate the public library services in Delta State for national development. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study covers sixteen (16) communities where public libraries are established using purposive sampling method to select 480 respondents and the entire 42 library staff. A total of 522 library users and staff were used as samples for this study. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire and observation through personal visitations by the researchers. The paper highlighted the present situation of public libraries in Delta State of Nigeria which is associated with lack of government financial support for public library development, irregular power supply and inadequate manpower. The paper recommended that adequate personnel, funding, infrastructural development in the aspect of good structural building, facilities and regular power supply that befit public libraries in order to enhance national development should be provided.

Keywords

Public Library, Services, Rejuvenating Public Library, National Development, Delta State

Subject Areas: Information Science, Library, Intelligence and Philology

1. Introduction

The development of a nation and its human capital is dependent on the availability and use of information at its disposal. [1] opined that every nation requires information that satisfies their socioeconomic objectives. Nigeria as a nation needs to provide its citizens with the right information at the right time irrespective of geographical location, whether it is urban or rural settlement. Information could be passed to the populace through public libraries. Public libraries exist in many countries across the world and are often considered an essential part that

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has both educated and literate population [2].

The public library is a local centre that provides all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users [3]. Public libraries are predominantly used by local people to access information that affects their daily activities in the area of education, employment, health, politics, economics, religion and agriculture. It is established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other forms of community organizations [3]. [4] affirmed that the fundamental aim of libraries is to provide timely, accurate, pertinent, and reliable information for its users. [5] noted that public libraries offer services to the public free of charge and also provide educational, social and political information to people in a particular community. The specific importance of public libraries as captured by [6] in Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA's) briefing paper, is to:

1) Make significant contributions to formal and informal education, including lifelong learning and various forms of literacy by providing facilities, resources and services designed to ensure access to relevant information in appropriate formats, language, content and contexts;

2) Ensure social inclusion and cohesion by providing access to information and knowledge to all women, men, and children. This critical access, when used by the disadvantaged—such as the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and the unemployed—forms the foundation of poverty reduction, since information poverty is often the root cause of economic poverty;

3) Preserve and promote cultural heritage and diversity and foster mutual understanding and respect among cultures and peoples;

4) Create citizen awareness and engender social values for democratic governance and traditions, by opening multiple windows to the world and its alternate possibilities through their collections, facilities and programmes; and

5) Harness information and knowledge for economic development through professional processing, storage and dissemination to stimulate innovation and human capacity for efficiency and productivity.

From the above, it could be deduced that citizens of Nigeria who are not privileged to attend post-primary education can develop themselves through the use of public libraries that are equipped with modern facilities.

[7] noted that public libraries play an indispensable role in the community; they promote the reading of literature among grown-ups, adolescents and children; they provide familiar information and reference centres where the citizens can secure reliable and interesting advice on practical matters as well as where he is helped to get to his bearings in the complexities of modern community life. In addition, [8] sees public libraries as the peoples' university, the local gateway to knowledge, providing opportunities for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural developments of individuals and social groups.

However, the enunciated functions of the public libraries can be achieved when public libraries are well equipped with modern facilities such as good reading environment with fully air conditioners, good lightning systems, recent information resources, and information communication technology tools to render services to its patrons. However, [4] and [9] observed that the establishment and development of libraries across Nigeria are mostly limited to urban settlements, academic and research institutions that are predominantly located in the urban areas: a situation that has resulted in high level of illiteracy and ignorance among the people.

Moreover, even in the urban areas, public libraries are not able to provide the necessary services needed by its clientele due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of government support. Several studies in Nigeria [8] [11]-[13] have noted that the Nigerian public libraries are yearning for improvement as their services suffer one form of neglect or the other due to lack of fund, inadequate infrastructure and lack of manpower. This paper is set out to address the challenges of public libraries in Delta State as it affects national development.

1.1. Rationale for This Study

Public libraries exist to acquire, process, provide access and dissemination information to the citizens. Library's information technology (IT) infrastructures are necessary to facilitate access, retrieval and dissemination of information. Other library infrastructures provide conducive working environment for librarians and library patrons. Public libraries in other parts of the world are well equipped with modern infrastructures and technological equipments. Despite changes that are witnessed in information services provision, the public libraries in Delta State of Nigeria are yet bedevilled with inadequate infrastructure. This hinders the effort of the public libraries to provide information services to the library clientele. This paper tries to assess the situation of public

libraries in Delta State as to make recommendations to rejuvenate them for effective service delivery to the library users.

1.2. Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) Does public library in Delta State meet their role to its users?
- 2) What are the information needs of the public library users in Delta State?
- 3) What are the hindrances to accessing information materials in public libraries in Delta State?

1.3. Review of Related Literature

1.3.1. The Ideal Public Library

An ideal public library whether located in urban or rural settlement is expected to be housed in a modern building with enough reading rooms, storage space and offices with air conditioners, internet facilities, good lightning systems, fans, fire extinguishers, good furniture and functional equipment that are durable and complement the architectural style of the building. In addition, public libraries should be equipped with professional staffs that are competent to guarantee effective and quality library services to the citizens. Similarly, public libraries fulfill a number of functions which should be taken into consideration when planning the interior of the library;

- The plan should be flexible enough to adapt to current and future trends.
- Libraries with less than 20,000 sq. ft. (1800 sq. m.) should be on one floor.
- Libraries operating on several floors will need elevators.
- Noisy activities should be near the entrance area and quiet activities further away.
- The children's area, washrooms and cloakrooms should be visible from a service counter.
- Adequate fire and security alarms should be installed.
- Technology infrastructure should address technology needs/goals [14].

However, the current state of public libraries in Delta State is an aberration to an ideal public library.

1.3.2. Services Provided by Public Libraries

1) Borrowing and Lending

The main task of the public libraries is to provide its citizens with information materials such as books and non-book materials. They also provide access to information materials through borrowing and lending services in which borrowers may take books home as long as they return them at a certain time and in good condition depending on the borrowing policy of the public library. [15] sees this role as equity of access to information which "means that all people have the information they need-regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers. It means they are able to obtain information in a variety of formats-electronic, as well as print. It also means they are free to exercise their right to know without fear of censorship or reprisal". No one should be denied information because he or she cannot afford the cost of a book or periodical. Public libraries also provide free services such as preschool story times to encourage early literacy, quiet study and work areas for students and professionals, or book clubs to encourage appreciation of literature in adults [2]. Public libraries equally allow users to take books and other materials out of the premises temporarily; they also have non-circulating reference collections and provide computer and Internet access to patrons [2].

2) Free Internet Services

Part of the public library mission has become attempting to help bridge the digital divide, in which public libraries in developed nations are increasingly providing access to the Internet and public computers for users who otherwise would not personally be able to connect to these services [2]. Similarly, [16] stated that, internationally, public libraries offer information and communication technology (ICT) services, giving "access to information and knowledge" the "highest priority". However, different countries in the world have their own requirement; general services offered including free connection to the Internet, training in using the Internet, and relevant content in appropriate languages [2].

[17] noted that, in developed countries, 91% of libraries offer free wireless internet to their patrons; 76% offer e-books for borrowing; and 90% offer formal or informal technology training. A significant service provided by public libraries is assisting people with e-government access and use of federal, state and local government in-

formation, forms and services [2].

3) Meeting Space for Community

Before the development of the modern public library, subscription libraries were often used as clubs or gathering places; they served as much for social gossip and the meeting of friends as coffee shops do today [18]. However, libraries today are information centers that provide all kinds of information to improve the lives of the people. Public libraries does not discriminate, it serve people of all ages, ethnicity, race and educational background.

4) Reference Centres for Information Resources

Most public library serves as a custodian of historical documents relevant to their particular town, where they are situated. [19] noted that the Queens Public Library kept letters written by unrecognized Tiffany lamp designer Clara Driscoll, and the letters remained in the library until a curator discovered them. However, public libraries in Delta State have not been effective in rendering adequate services to its citizen due to negligence on the part of government authorities.

5) Present State of Some Public Libraries in Delta State of Nigeria

Delta State is one of the six States in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. It was created in 1997 out of the old Bendel State, bounded by Bayelsa and Edo States. Delta State is developing very fast with abundant human, capital and natural resources. According to [20] of Nigeria and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) annual abstract of statistics of 2010, Delta State has a total population of 4,112,445 which at present, the population has surpassed the figure. Delta State is made up of 25 Local Government Areas (LGAs) namely, Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Burutu, Ika South, Isoko North, Isoko South, Ndokwa East, Okpe, Oshimili North, Oshimili South, Ughelli North, Uvwie, Warri North, Warri South, Bomadi, Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Ika North East, Isoko North, Ndokwa West, Patani, Udu, Ughelli South, Udu, Ughelli South and Ukwuani.

Public libraries in Delta State are faced with some challenges. The scenario in some public libraries in Delta State as observed during a visit in course of this study needs improvement. [21] had lamented that it is painful to see most libraries lack physical facilities such as internet facility, good lightening system, modern building and space for the collections and sitting arrangements for the patrons. As at the time of this study, the public library in Orerokpe Town in Delta State has five computers with only one connected to the internet through a dial-up modem. Observation showed that the library was recently renovated but was faced with lack of power supply since the independent power generating firm cut off power supply to the library. The library lacks fund to consistently fuel the generating plant.

Albeit, the public library in Warri along Swamp Road has been renovated after a long time of neglect, the information resources it housed are still scanty, obsolete and without internet facilities unlike the public libraries in developed countries. However, the library still stock books that were written in the 60 s, 70 s and 80 s.

2. Methodology

This study investigates the present situations of public libraries in Delta State of Nigeria. This study adopted descriptive research design because it tries to identify, explain, describe and report issues affecting the public libraries in Delta State. According to [20] of Nigeria and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) annual abstract of statistics of 2010, Delta State has a total population of 4,112,445. Out of this population, more than 45% of the total population lives in the rural and remote areas while 55% lives in urban areas who are expected to access and use information materials at the public libraries. Within the 25 local governments in the Delta State, only 16 public libraries were established (see **Table 1**). This study therefore covers the sixteen (16) communities that libraries are established. Purposive sampling was used to select 480 respondents from the 16 towns where public libraries are situated and the entire 42 librarians and library staff respectively as shown in **Table 1** that are used for this study. Therefore, the sample is made up of 522 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to experts in the Department of Library and Information Science, Delta State University, Abraka for vetting and was corrected before it was administered. The researchers physically visited some of the public libraries while telephone calls were made to contact some of the librarians to elicit information about their libraries. The researchers were assisted by three research assistants who before the field work were taught how to administer and retrieve questionnaire from the respondents. A total of 522 questionnaires were administered on the respondents and all were retrieved given a return rate of 100%. Results from this study are therefore presented in tables and figure for clarity and understanding.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to library location.

S/N	Local Government Area (LGA)	LGA Headquarter/Location of Library	Availability of Library	No. of Librarian/Library Users	No. of Community Users	Total
1	Aniocha North	Issele-Uku	Available	3	30	33
2	Aniocha South	Ogwashi-Uku	Available	3	30	33
3	Burutu	Burutu	Available	3	30	33
4	Ika South	Agbor	Available	3	30	33
5*	Isoko North	Oleh	Available	3	30	33
6	Isoko South	Ozoro	Available	3	30	33
7	Ndakwa East	Kwale	Available	2	30	32
8	Okpe	Orerokpe	Available	2	30	32
9	Oshimili North	Ibusa	Available	3	30	33
10	Oshimili South	Asaba	Available	2	30	32
11	Sapele	Sapele	Available	2	30	32
12	Ughelli North	Ughelli	Available	3	30	33
13	Uvwie	Ogborikoko	Available	2	30	32
14	Warri North	Koko	Available	2	30	32
15	Warri South	Warri	Available	3	30	33
16	Bomadi	**Bomadi	-	-	-	-
		Tuomo	-	-	-	-
17	Ethiope East	Oghara	Available	3	30	33
18	Ethiope West	Mosaga	-	-	-	-
		**Owa-Oyibu	-	-	-	-
19	Ika North East	Uteh-Okpu	-	-	-	-
		Akumazi	-	-	-	-
20*	Isoko North	OwehOlogbo	-	-	-	-
21	Ndakwa West	-	-	-	-	-
22	Patani	-	-	-	-	-
23	Udu	-	-	-	-	-
24	Ughelli South	Iyara	-	-	-	-
25	Ukwuani	Umuaja	-	-	-	-
		Total		42	480	522

Source: Field work and Delta State Library Board. *Note that Isoko North appeared twice indicating status of library in the two towns.

3. Results and Discussion

Demographic Information of the Respondents

The sample for this study is made up of 522 library users and library staff as shown in **Table 2**. Out of the total sample, 23 are librarians and 19 are library officers making a total of 42 library staff. A total of 150 of the respondents are young school leavers, 100 of the respondents are adult educated scholars, 70 of the respondents are

Table 2. Distribution by respondents.

Category	Number	Percentage
Young School Leaver	150	28.7%
Adult Educated Scholar	100	19.1%
Business Men and Women	70	13.4%
Teacher	70	13.4%
Farmer	60	11.2%
Teenager	30	5.7%
Library Staff	42	8%
Total	522	100%

businessmen and women, 70 of the respondents are teachers, 60 of the respondents are farmers and 30 of the respondents are teenagers. The respondents are within the age bracket of 13 to 60 years. A total of 82 of them are within the ages of 50 to 60 years. Another 150 are within the ages of 40 to 49 years. Majority of the respondents or 200 are within the ages of 30 to 39 years while 90 of the respondents are of ages 20 to 29 years. The respondents constitute the populace that uses the public libraries in Delta State.

Research question 1: Does the public libraries in Delta State meet their role to its users?

Result in **Table 3** shows that 63% of the respondents in this study are not satisfied with the role played by public libraries in providing access to information materials. This implies that the public library do not really perform their role to provide access to information materials to its users. Result revealed that library users are satisfied with the way reading culture was promoted to the citizen as attested by 61% of the respondents. Result from **Table 3** also revealed that 68% of the respondents are not satisfied on the way information was disseminated to its users while 32% of the respondents had contrary view. Result further indicates that 73% of the respondents are not satisfied as public libraries could not provide them with up-to-date information to meet their needs. This result demonstrates that the public libraries in Delta State did not meet their primary obligation as highlighted by [6]. Another majority or 71% of the respondents are not satisfied with the way preservation of materials and promotion of cultural heritage are handled. The public library serves as a meeting point for the local people where they access information for every activity. The primary aim of establishing the public library is to provide information and services to the people. If the public library is able to achieve these roles (information provision, access and dissemination) to the people, the gap that existed between the urban and rural dwellers would be closed. The implication of this result is that since some of the essential roles of the public libraries are not adequately handled, it may negatively affect the development of the people.

Research question 2: What are the information needs of the public library users in Delta State?

In **Figure 1**, the respondents were asked to indicate what constitute their information needs. Result in **Figure 1** revealed that public library users need information in all area of human endeavour and for numerous purposes. Majority of the respondents, 220 and 183 needs information materials on employment and education respectively. Another majority of the respondents 175 and 152 needs information for health and politics while 140 of the respondents needs information for agriculture. This result showed that employment, education, health, politics and agriculture are the five basic information needs of the public library users in Delta state. However, a lesser number of the respondents 135 and 125 needs information on the economy and religion respectively. This implies that the information need of the people that uses the public libraries in Delta State encompasses all aspects of human endeavour therefore; rejuvenating the public libraries in Delta State would empower the citizens' potentials to contribute to the development of Nigeria.

Research question 3: What are the hindrances to accessing information materials in public libraries in Delta State?

As shown in **Table 4**, public libraries in Delta State are confronted with some challenges. This study revealed that majority or 69% of the respondents agreed that insufficient fund hinders public libraries' effective operation. This finding is supported by [22] who asserted that libraries are vital to education and that current lower levels of proficiency in reading are due to underfunding of libraries and their services.

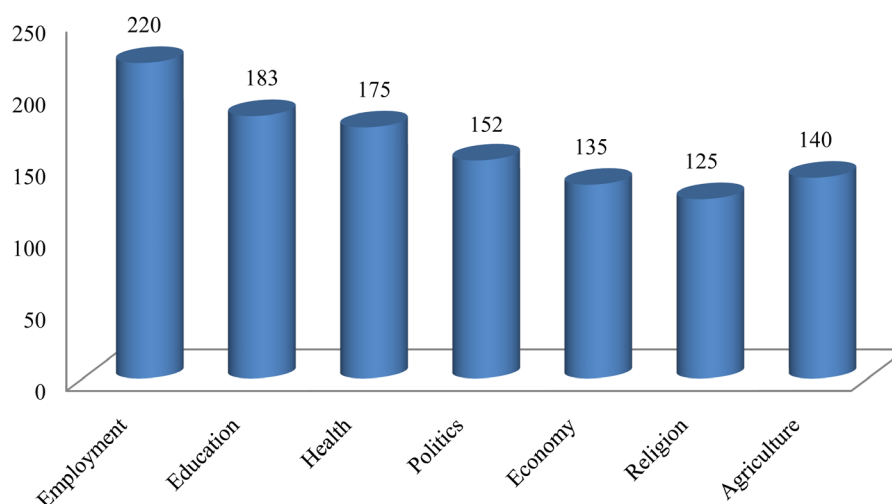


Figure 1. Information needs of public library users.

Table 3. Level of satisfaction of users with the roles played by public libraries in Delta State.

Statement	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Provision of access to information materials	192 (37%)	330 (63%)
Promotion of reading culture to the citizens	320 (61%)	202 (39%)
Serve as centre for information dissemination	169 (32%)	353 (68%)
Provision of current and up-to-date information to its citizens	142 (27%)	350 (73%)
Support in educating users on use of library materials	330 (63%)	192 (37%)
Preservation and promote cultural heritage	150 (29%)	372 (71%)

Table 4. Hindrances to use of information materials in public libraries.

S/N	Problems	Strongly Agree/Agree	Diagree/Strongly Disagree
1	Insufficient fund	360 (69%)	162 (31%)
2	Inadequate infrastructural facilities	410 (79%)	112 (21%)
3	Irregular power supply	380 (73%)	142 (27%)
4	Insufficient library staff	390 (75%)	132 (25%)

This study equally showed that inadequate infrastructure hinders public library operations as attested by majority or 79% of the respondents. This means that library infrastructure such as good building, air conditioners, chairs, conducive environment, internet facilities, good lighting, fans and fire extinguisher that are needed to enhance the public library services are not adequate in the libraries under study. Absence of these infrastructures would negatively affect the services of the library. Similarly, another majority or 73% of the respondents agreed that irregular power supply is a hindrance. This finding is supported by [21] who lamented that the most painful aspect is the fact that most libraries lack physical facilities such as internet facility, good lightening system, modern building and space for the collections and sitting arrangements for the patrons. Result from the study revealed that insufficient staff is also a problem affecting the smooth operations of public libraries in Delta as confirmed by 75% of the respondents. This result is substantiated by [21] that, professional librarians are relatively scared to judiciously carry all the tasking job of gathering and providing information which is the basis for all meaningful development programmes.

4. Conclusion

Public libraries are vital institutions in any society. It helps and supports the citizen to access information in various fields of human endeavours and in different formats. Delta State needs to rejuvenate its public libraries (public institutions) to better lots of the citizens and to improve information dissemination which would engender development in all sectors in the States and the nation in general. Delta State needs to recognize and improve services that are provided by public libraries in order to reduce high rate of illiteracy and other forms of social ills that are associated with juvenile in the society. A literate society is an informed society. Functional modern public libraries are needed for socio-economic growth of Delta State. It therefore behoves on the government at all levels in Nigeria to formulate policies and strategies to improve the quality of public libraries.

5. Recommendations

To rejuvenate the public libraries, the following recommendations are proffered:

- Effort should be made by the government at all levels to allocate sufficient fund annually and ensure its utilization to improve public libraries. This will enable the public libraries to have modern infrastructures and equipments which would encourage users.
- Government should ensure that a committee is set up to monitor public library activities from time to time to ensure that public libraries play their role effectively in the society.
- Librarians in public libraries should be sent for training and retraining in librarianship both within Nigeria and overseas to ensure adequate service delivery to the library users.

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