

# Use of Information Resources in Four Branches of a State Public Library in Nigeria

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***Abstract:** A survey study was carried out on the use of information resources and services in community public libraries in Nigeria with particular reference to Edo State. The study revealed that the majority of users were students and youths whose information needs were basically for examination and for personal enlightenment. The available resources in the libraries were found to be inadequate and in most cases, inappropriate. This situation was credited to poor funding of the libraries as well as to lack of local content in the collection of the public libraries. It was also revealed that the libraries lacked Internet facilities. In terms of service delivery, the libraries also lacked the capability and competence to provide translation services to the non-literate group of the communities.*

## **I. Introduction**

Libraries are seen as repositories of human experiences and knowledge. Although libraries have changed significantly over time, their cultural roles have remained essentially the same. Libraries are still responsible for acquiring and providing access to books, periodicals, and other media that meet the educational, recreational and informational needs of their users. In order to effectively sustain their cultural roles, libraries have been categorized into different types to render their services better and to

satisfy more patrons. Public libraries are a world-wide phenomenon. They exist in different societies, in differing cultures and at different stages of development. Although the varied contexts in which they operate inevitably result in the differences in the services they provide and the way those services are delivered, public libraries have some commonalities in shared characteristics. According to the *IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto* (1997), public library is the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for life-long learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

Public libraries are non-for-profit organizations, established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. They provide access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services that are meant to be equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, and educational attainment. In other words, public libraries are locally based service organizations set up to meet the needs of the local communities and to operate within the context of the communities while contributing to the creation and maintenance of a well-informed and democratic society. Public libraries help to empower people in the enrichment and development of their lives and that of the communities. According to Parvathamma and Reddy (2009), public libraries have been noted to improve literacy through various information and educational services they render over time. They are also well known to stimulate imaginative thoughts and expand personal horizons while making the empowerment of citizen, and provision of access to a common cultural heritage a reality.

As a repository of human experience, not subject to the barriers of space and time, the major purpose of the library is to provide information. According to Lawal and Udofia (1994), the library meets the information needs of the users in the following four categories:

1. Education -- to develop society, adults, children and to fill gaps in memory.

2. Information -- to develop executive activities such as economics, social and commercial development.
3. Aesthetic – to cultivate appreciation for culture, art, truth and judgment.
4. Recreation -- to provide amusement and hobbies.

The function of the library, therefore, is to implement, to enrich, to vitalize and humanize the educational programmes, as it strives to attain excellence in content, process and product.

Library systems in Nigeria have been noted for adopting foreign models with little or no adaptation to local content. Over the years, public libraries in rural settlements have been characterized by low patronage, which some authors attribute to the inappropriateness in the library collections and the lack of consultation between the library and the existing and potential clients. Stilwell (1991), for example, pointed out that the public libraries in Nigeria were established without prior examination of the information needs of those who were to use the services.

## **II. Literature Review**

A lot of studies have been carried out all over the world on library use and service. Okiy (2003) asserted that Nigeria is a developing country where the majority of the population live in rural areas. The majority of these rural dwellers are either non-literate or semi-literate. The need to involve them in the national development process cannot be overemphasized. This can be achieved through the identification of the information needs of rural dwellers and the provision of innovative rural public library services to improve their level of literacy and education and to enhance their ability to use practical information relevant to their daily lives.

Banjo (1998) observed that African countries are still mainly oral driven, with the natural consequence of largely undocumented information and the fact that cultural traditions are diversified. Owing to the multiplicity of linguistic and social groups, Banjo (1998) argued in favour of a convergence between the print-oriented public library services and

multimedia-oriented community/rural information services. Considering that one of the reasons for the failure of the services provided by public libraries in Africa is in the replication of the Western library models in cultural and social terms, public libraries in Africa are hardly used, and when they are used, the majority of users are pupils who use them as reading rooms. One reason is that the majority of the populace in African countries is non-literate.

Emojoroh (2005) conducted a study on the roles and effectiveness of public libraries in nation-building in Nigeria and found that Nigerian public libraries are performing poorly in most aspects due to appalling resources.

Opara (2008) examined the challenges of public libraries in Nigeria and discovered that the tempo of public library development in the country in the years immediately after independence and after the Nigerian civil war could not be sustained due to inadequate financial support by the establishing authorities, demoralized and inadequate workforce, and inadequate accommodation, etc.

In another related users' study in India, Ghosh (2005) viewed the public library's role in an information society, the value of information they offered, and the use of the library resources. He also went on to discuss in detail new technological developments, which invariably have the potential to change public libraries in rural areas.

In view of the effective use of information resources and services in public libraries, Parvathamma and Reddy (2009) advocated that public libraries need to take proactive approach in motivating users to use their resources and services. On the other hand, they stressed that public libraries need to enrich their information resource collections, provide access to the Internet and offer community-based services including literacy programmes.

The issue of staff incompetency prompted Issak (2000) to advocate the training and retraining of library personnel on a regular basis in order for them to stay relevant to the needs of their communities.

Banjo (1998) presented some illustrative examples of the contributions of rural libraries and community information centres to the promotion of the African cultural heritage.

Those libraries were founded as alternatives to the conventional model of public libraries, and their main focus is on the needs of rural people. The information they provide has accelerated self-help development of consciousness in the rural dwellers. Projects on social, economic, cultural and health areas were successfully implemented through the dissemination of information.

As the development of society has a direct link to access to information, Banjo (1998) did not hesitate to add that rural areas need information to achieve meaningful stage of development.

Uhegbu (1997) maintained that although information-seeking in rural areas of Nigeria is still embedded in oral tradition, rural dwellers in Nigeria are becoming increasingly information-conscious and they can be compared with their urban counterparts. His comparison could be misleading, as rural dwellers have always been information conscious, giving their monumental recorded achievements in the areas of traditional medicine development and applications, weaving of all kinds, wood carving, farming, fishing, and trading, to mention a few. The rural libraries were charged with inefficiency because they adopted the Western model without adapting to the unique situations of African countries. A positive attitude is not to criticize Western models ad infinitum for the failure of public libraries in Africa in providing the requisite services to the people but for the professionals of African origin to come up with a solution that will ameliorate the observed inefficiencies. This way the critics could make good the proposed evolution of public libraries to reflect a true African model.

An information service is concerned with identifying and meeting users' need or as an ability to satisfy real information needs (UNESCO 1997). Rural people do have information needs that are not met, but the information support required is harder to define. Nevertheless, people in the rural areas can benefit maximally from the use of library information resources and services when they actually use them continuously for information and updating of their skills. Adeleke (2005) asserted that library must not only provide the resources but also ensure effective use of the resources by its clientele/community. Okiy (2000) corroborated this and posited that for the library to

perform its role adequately, its resources must be effectively utilized. Thus, access to relevant information resources is very necessary.

Accessibility of information sources is an important recurring theme in the literature. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), resources may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one's subject of interest, but the user may not be able to lay hands on them. Readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access.

Olowu (2004) attributed natural and artificial barriers to free access to information as the problem that makes the utilization of library difficult. The library's poor reputation arose from the lack of accessibility of information sources. Neelamegham (1981) identified accessibility as one of the prerequisites of information use while Kuhlthau (1991) argued that the choice of information seeking depends on the needs, the perceived accessibility, sources, and information seeking habits. They further noted that in seeking information, the user is usually confronted with five possible types of inaccessibility, that is, conceptual, linguistic, critical, bibliographic, and physical inaccessibility. This inevitably leads to low use of library services. Iyoro (2004) examined the contribution of accessibility to learning processes and reported that respondents made use of the library when information was easily and conveniently accessible to them.

### **III. Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to find out the information resources and services that are available in public libraries in rural Nigeria in general and the Edo State in particular. To achieve the general objective, the following specific objectives were formulated:

1. To find out the characteristics of the rural dwellers using the public libraries and their reasons for the library use.
2. To find out the various resources available in the libraries and the frequency of use.
3. To determine the adequacy of the information resources provided by the public libraries.

4. To find out the services being rendered to the community by the public libraries.

#### IV. The Profile of the Communities and the Public Libraries under Study

The communities under study were those of Ekpoma, Uromi, Irrua, Ubiaja and the surrounding rural settlements. Judging by the nature of available and predominant occupations in the area, primary occupation as against tertiary occupation employs the highest proportion of the population. Although streaks of urbanization are noticeable in a patchy pattern, following the political status foisted on Ekpoma, Uromi, Irrua and Ubiaja as local government headquarters to facilitate their transition to appreciable towns or urban centres, one could still conveniently classify them as rural communities.

**Table 1: Profile of the Community Libraries under Study**

| Particulars                              | Ekpoma Branch | Uromi Branch  | Irrua Branch  | Ubiaja Branch | Total         |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Year of establishment                    | 1980          | 1984          | 1995          | 1991          | --            |
| Average number of visitors per day       | 50<br>(27.2%) | 62<br>(33.7%) | 40<br>(21.7%) | 32<br>(17.4%) | 184<br>(100%) |
| Average number of books borrowed per day | 20            | 25            | 15            | 20            | 80            |
| Reference books                          | Yes           | Yes           | Yes           | Yes           | --            |
| Newspapers subscription per day          | 3             | 3             | 2             | --            | 8             |
| Internet services                        | No            | No            | No            | No            | --            |
| Reprography services                     | Yes           | Yes           | No            | No            | --            |
| Translation services                     | No            | No            | No            | No            | --            |
| Textbooks in various subject areas       | Yes           | Yes           | Yes           | Yes           | --            |
| Tools for accessing and reading CD-ROM   | No            | No            | No            | No            | --            |

In line with the traditional profile of libraries in Nigeria, all the public libraries stock reference books and textbooks. Only three of the libraries subscribe to daily newspapers, and only two of the libraries offer reprographic or photocopy services. With complete absence of Internet connectivity and services, and tools to access and read CD-ROMs, the libraries could hardly reflect a touch of post-modernism in their characteristics or profiles. With daily average of less than 70 patrons, the libraries are low in terms of utilization. As the librarians attested to, lack of adequate professional staff constituted

one of the major reasons that the libraries were not able to embark on an awareness campaign in and around the communities to stimulate an increase of use of the libraries and their information resources.

## V. Research Methodology

The survey research design was adopted in this study with an emphasis on the use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire while secondary data were obtained from relevant literatures and library records. There were 2,406 registered users in the libraries selected for the study. Systematic random sampling was used to select the users from each library because the user population at the various libraries was unevenly distributed by category. The sample size, proportionately drawn from the four selected public libraries, was 240 library users, accounting for the 10% of the total user population. The 10% sample size was considered representative enough based on Alreck and Settle's (1985) assertion that a sample size of 10% is usually adequate as representative sample.

Table 2 shows the population and sample size. The data collected with the questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study was conducted within a period of three months that lasted from early June to early September 2010.

**Table 2: Population and Sample Size**

| <b>Branches</b> | <b>User Population</b> | <b>Sample Size</b> |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Ekpoma branch   | 780                    | 80                 |
| Uromi branch    | 896                    | 90                 |
| Irrua branch    | 405                    | 40                 |
| Ubiaja branch   | 325                    | 30                 |
| Total           | 2406                   | 240                |

## VI. Findings and Analysis

This section contains the presentation and discussion of results obtained from the study that investigates the use of information resources in four branches of a state public library in Nigeria. The data generated were analysed using non-parametric statistics.

### 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Male   | 144       | 60             |
| Female | 96        | 40             |
| Total  | 240       | 100            |

Table 3 shows that 144 respondents were males, representing 60% of the sample population, while 96 respondents (40%) were the female library users. This finding indicates that the females are not using the library as much as the males. The disparity in information literacy known to exist between adult male and female population in Nigeria is replicating itself among the youths. Information literacy is an indispensable skill needed for a lifelong learning in the information society that is fast evolving in Nigeria.

### 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age

**Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Age**

| Age Range | Number | Percentage (%) |
|-----------|--------|----------------|
| 10-19     | 56     | 23.3           |
| 20-29     | 100    | 41.7           |
| 30-39     | 48     | 20.0           |
| 40-49     | 16     | 6.7            |
| Above50   | 20     | 8.3            |
| Total     | 240    | 100            |

Table 4 shows the age range of respondents. 204 respondents (85%) were between the ages 10 and 39 while 36 (15%) were 40 or above. This indicates that the majority of the people using the libraries are youths. The interview conducted and the comments by the respondents reveal that most of them were students and unemployed youths.

### 3. Respondents by Education Level

**Table 5: Respondents by Education Level**

| Education Level | Number | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|--------|----------------|
| O'Level SSCE    | 176    | 73.3           |
| Diploma         | 40     | 16.7           |
| Degree          | 18     | 7.5            |

|               |     |     |
|---------------|-----|-----|
| Higher Degree | 6   | 2.5 |
| Total         | 240 | 100 |

The majority of the respondents had O'Level<sup>1</sup> Senior Secondary Certificate (176, 73.3%), followed by diploma certificate holders (40, 16.7%), degree holders (18, 5%), and higher degree holders (6, 2.5%). The statistics reaffirmed that the majority of the users were youths and school students. (See Table 4)

#### 4. Frequency of Library Use

**Table 6: Frequency of Library Use**

| Frequency of Use            | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Daily                       | 50                 | 20.8           |
| Once in two days            | 94                 | 39.2           |
| 1-3 times a week            | 56                 | 23.3           |
| 1-3 times a month           | 30                 | 12.5           |
| At least once in two months | 10                 | 4.2            |
| Total                       | 240                | 100            |

The majority of the respondents used the library once in two days (94, 39.2%), followed by 1-3 times a week (56, 23.3%), daily (50, 20.8%), 1-3 times a month (30, 12.5%), and at least once in two months (10, 4.2%). This indicates that the registered users did use the libraries quite frequently.

#### 5. Reasons for Visiting the Library

**Table 7: Reasons for Visiting the Library**

| S/n | Reasons for Visiting the Library                                     | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----|--|--------------------|----------------|
| 1.  | To read newspapers and magazines                                     | 44                 | 18.3           |
| 2   | To read and borrow library books                                     | 60                 | 25.0           |
| 3   | To read for examinations   | 26                 | 10.8           |
| 4   | To find information about employment and local government activities | 26                 | 10.8           |
| 5   | To improve general knowledge   | 24                 | 10.0           |

<sup>1</sup> By Senior Secondary School Class 2 (SS2), students are taking the GCE (General Certificate of Education Examination) O'Levels (Ordinary Level) exam, which is not mandatory, but most students take it to prepare for the Senior Secondary School Exam. The Senior Secondary School Exam is taken in the last year of high school (SS3). (Wikipedia, 2011: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Nigeria))

|       |                                       |     |      |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-----|------|
| 6     | Leisure reading                       | 6   | 2.5  |
| 7.    | To use A-V materials for lesson notes | 4   | 1.7  |
| 8.    | To consult the librarian              | 10  | 4.2  |
| 9.    | To do assignment and homework         | 40  | 16.7 |
| Total |                                       | 240 | 100  |

Table 7 shows that 60 respondents (25%) visited the library to read and borrow books, 44 (18.3%) to read newspapers and Magazines, 40 (16.7%) to do assignment and homework, 26 (10.8%) to read for examinations , another 26 (10.8%) to find information about employment and local government activities, 24 (10%) to improve general knowledge, 10 (4.2%) to consult the librarian, 6 (2.5%) for leisure reading, and 4 (1.7%) to use A-V materials for lesson notes.

#### 6. Use of Library Resources

**Table 8 Utilization of library resources**

| Library Resources   | Frequency of Use |               |               |               |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|   | <i>mf</i> (%)    | <i>f</i> (%)  | <i>lf</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%)  |
| Reference materials e.g. dictionaries, encyclopedia, etc. | 106<br>(44.2)    | 50<br>(20.8)  | 12<br>(5.0)   | 72<br>(30.0)  |
| Periodicals e.g. newspapers, journals, etc.               | 44<br>(18.3)     | 156<br>(65.0) | 34<br>(14.2)  | 6<br>(2.5)    |
| Magazines, trade literatures                              | 46<br>(19.2)     | 144<br>(60)   | 50<br>(20.8)  | --            |
| Biographical sources                                      | 60<br>(25.0)     | 24<br>(10.0)  | 104<br>(43.3) | 52<br>(21.7)  |
| Fictions  | 80<br>(33.3)     | 82<br>(34.2)  | 40<br>(16.7)  | 38<br>(15.8)  |
| Non-fictions  | 114<br>(47.5)    | 82<br>(34.2)  | 44<br>(18.3)  | --            |
| Indigenous knowledge resources/ locally made resources    | --               | 10<br>(4.2)   | 50<br>(20.8)  | 180<br>(75.0) |

\*Note: mf = most frequently, f = frequently, lf = less frequently, n = never

Table 7 shows that of the many information resources available in the libraries, non-fiction and reference materials were the most frequently used, accounting for 91.7% combined. Periodicals and Magazines, including other trade literatures, dominated the frequently used library materials under the *f* column. It is noteworthy that Biographical sources and Indigenous knowledge resources were the least frequently used of the

available library resources under the *f* column. As much as 75.0% of the entire 240 libraries users surveyed never used Indigenous knowledge resources. Since indigenous farmers and petty traders were not featured among the library patrons, the use of Indigenous knowledge sources was rare. This may indicate that the community analysis was either not done at all or done haphazardly prior to the establishment of the libraries.

### 7. Adequacy and Appropriateness of Information Sources

**Table 9. Adequacy and Appropriateness of Information Sources**

| <b>Adequacy of Materials</b> | <b>No. of Respondents</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Adequate                     | 72                        | 30                    |
| Inadequate                   | 148                       | 61.7                  |
| Indifferent                  | 20                        | 8.3                   |
| Total                        | 240                       | 100                   |

Table 9 shows that 72 (30.0%) respondents found the information sources provided by the libraries adequate, 148 (61.7%) found them inadequate, and 20 (8.3%) remained indifferent in their opinions. The 61.7% of the users that found the library holdings inadequate from the interview conducted said that they often came to the library with their own books to read because of the relatively serene environment there.

### 8. Frequency of Use of Library Services

**Table 10: Frequency of Use of Library Services**

| <b>Library Services</b>    | <b>Frequency of Use</b> |                     |                     |                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                            | <b><i>*mf</i></b>       | <b><i>*f</i></b>    | <b><i>*lf</i></b>   | <b><i>*n</i></b>    |
|                            | <b><i>F (%)</i></b>     | <b><i>F (%)</i></b> | <b><i>F (%)</i></b> | <b><i>F (%)</i></b> |
| Reading-room services      | 190 (79.2)              | 26 (10.8)           | 24 (10.0)           | --                  |
| Reference services         | 120 (50.0)              | 82 (34.2)           | 26 (10.8)           | 12 (5.0)            |
| Reprography services       | --                      | 24 (10.0)           | 64 (26.7)           | 152 (63.3)          |
| Book lending services      | 24 (10.0)               | 90 (37.5)           | 24 (10.0)           | 102 (42.5)          |
| Book reservation services  | --                      | 24 (10.0)           | 68 (28.3)           | 148 (61.7)          |
| Readers' advisory services | 64 (26.7)               | 74 (30.8)           | 74 (30.8)           | 28 (11.7)           |
| Translation services       | --                      | --                  | --                  | 240(100)            |

|                   |    |    |    |          |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----------|
| Internet services | -- | -- | -- | 240(100) |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----------|

\*Note: mf = most frequently, f = frequently, lf = less frequently, n = never

Judging by the *mf* column in Table 10, Reading-room services and Reference services were the most frequently used services in the public libraries under study with relative frequencies of 79.2% and 50.0% respectively. Reader advisory services were, however, used by 26.7% of the library users. Reprography or photocopy services and Book reservation services found some levels of use among the services available. Translation services and Internet services were unavailable in all the libraries. The limited services public libraries could offer in Nigeria is a true reflection of the prolonged neglect and poor funding.

Library services remain as such because they have utilitarian values. Although not all services are of high usability because of variation in librarians' skills and competencies, libraries are expected to be able to justify the reason for their existence by striving very hard to satisfy every user that had a need to come to the library.

## VII. Further Discussion

The study has revealed that the majority of the people using the public libraries in rural areas are mostly male students and youths. The information resources in the libraries are adjudged to be inappropriate for the community of users and not readily available. Mostly used sources are reference and non-fiction materials. The use of reading room and references services takes the lead among the resources and services. The study also revealed that retirees and government workers use the libraries mainly to read newspapers and magazines. People used the libraries also for their class assignments and current affairs matter. Furthermore, the majority of the users do not use the materials held in the libraries but use the libraries primarily as a place for study, because libraries are quieter and more spacious than their homes. This is in line with the findings of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) (2000).

## VIII. Conclusion

Public libraries have been lauded as the University of the People. They are expected to provide people-oriented services, aiming at satisfying the general public through the

provision of appropriate information resources and services, such as advisory services, strategic leadership, and information on local content that incorporates indigenous knowledge system into it. However, the current state of the public libraries in rural Nigeria is far from what they should be. Improvement is needed in increasing the funding for such libraries as well as raising the awareness of library services to the populace.

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Submitted to CLIEJ on 26 January 2011.

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Obinyan, Gabriel Aine; Obinyan, Oluwatoyin Oyeyemi; & Aidenojie, Esther. (2011). Use of Information Resources in Four Branches of a State Public Library in Nigeria. *Chinese Librarianship: an International Electronic Journal*, 31. URL: <http://www.iclc.us/cliej/cl3100A.pdf>

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