

Assessment of the influence of Library Users' characteristics on Management of Public Libraries in the Developing Economies

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Abstract

The study investigates the library users' characteristics in developing economies. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A simple random sampling technique was used to sample the population, which stood at 5,153 respondents. Data collected from the researchers' developed instrument Users' Utilization Skills Library Questionnaire (UUSLQ) was tested for reliability using Cronbach Coefficient Alpha formula, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.66. Weighted mean scores were used for answering research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient independent t-test and Analysis of variance were used for testing the research hypotheses. The results indicate a significant influence of socio-economic and occupational background on the utilization of public library services in the area under study. It was recommended among others that the government should invest in setting up more libraries in the urban as well as in the rural areas of the State and also embark on regular public enlightenment programs on the uses and the applications of library services.

Keywords: Managing, Public Library, Developing Economies

Introduction

Many contributory factors, such as cultural, and socio-economic circumstances amongst others to poor reading culture in the developing economies according to researchers in the field of educational management and library science have been viewed as the bane of the societal growth and development in developing economies. The advents of colonial administration in Nigeria for instance, have made frantic efforts to discourage the lukewarm attitude of the people towards reading as a way of stepping up the literacy level of the people. Such efforts include the setting up of libraries. Subsequently, various governments in Nigeria and other bodies also followed suit in the functions of setting up libraries.

The public library was established in Nigeria to serve the public users at the National, States and Local Government Areas. The public library is operated in many forms, such as in a single building, a complex and through mobile facilities (Mobile library). It is aimed at reducing the rate of illiteracy in the Nigerian communities (Molokwu, 2016). According to the Nigerian National Policy on Education FRN, (2013), among others; states, and local

governments shall establish public libraries and actively promote readership through the use of library services. Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) reported that there are 316 public libraries in Nigeria; urban and rural libraries. According to the body, there is the National Library of Nigeria at its Headquarters, Abuja, and it has 25 branches nationwide. Nigeria Library Association (2011), confirmed that all 36 states in the country have a public library Board, each at the state headquarters. According to the Association, these library Boards also function as urban libraries. There are 253 branches of the state library Boards spread across the rural communities in the county, also known as community libraries and are governed and administered by the state library board.

Archival records and research have revealed the invaluable importance and contributions of libraries to mankind. Library is rooted in the Latin word "Libero" which means a book. Library functions beyond a mere book. It could be described as a collection of graphic materials, such as books, films, magazines, maps, manuscripts, photographic records etc. designed for use.

There are different kinds of libraries, namely, public libraries, institutional library, organizational library, private library and recently Digital Library. This research will, however, delimits to the public library. Before now, owing to the lack of articulate public library laws, public library activities in Nigeria were governed by the National library Acts 1964. Muazu (2014) explains that the National Library Act of 1964 provided the foundation for all public libraries' activities. It aimed to constitute a Library Board as the key authority for library activities, establishment of a public library in each state of the federation, advice the federal government on all libraries matters; assume responsibility for the National Bibliography of Nigeria, and set up National Bibliography centers. The states and local government also carried out their functions in line with the respective laws.

The public library is the local gateway to knowledge, which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development, provides access to knowledge and information through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, gender, religion, language, economic, employment status, educational attainment etc. (IFLA/UNESCO, 2004).

Clifford and Olurotimi (2014), opined that the essence of establishing a library is "use". Maximum use of library resources is important in order to justify the essence, existence and for survival of the public library and its acquisition. Functionality of the public library, therefore, is a function of efficient administration of the library. Governance of public libraries requires the coordination of both human and material resources for effective and efficient dissemination of relevant information (Saleh & Lasisi 2011). The governance of public library is the responsibility of the government as a service institution established and managed with public funds. The question here is, are the public library administration live up to their expectations, in terms of availability, accessibility and maximum utilization of the library services, through full implementation of the laid down policies which also include proper and regular enlightenment of the public on the availability of the resources and the utilization skills. Ogundare (2005) maintained that one of the major objectives of any library is to ensure that maximum use is made of its resources and services. Unfortunately, most public users do not make effective use of library services. This

according to Shaycoft (2007), maybe due to ignorance and inability to access what they want. The author asserts that some potential users do not visit the library at all due to distance, occupational engagements and socio-economic circumstances.

Apart from the occupational, socio-economic circumstances and the like, the emergence of information and communication technologies has also limited the interest of the would-be users of the public library. Today, people can stay at the comfort of their homes, offices, in fact anywhere to access information for their desired purposes. The virtual Library or digital library is at the palms of the users. To curb these emerging threats, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National ICT Policy of 2012, is making frantic efforts, towards filling the perceived gap. The National ICT the Policy (2012) addresses issues such as the policy and regulatory framework, internet and broadband development, local content, and coordinated ICT enhancement across other sectors in the country. The success of the policy is vested in the hands of the administration. An efficient administration ensures the realization of the sustenance of the laudable objectives of the establishment of public libraries.

Statement of the problem

Despite the age-long establishment of libraries in Nigeria, the reading culture of the people are still in dull drums. Enlightenment level, information literacy skills, socio-economic background, occupational engagements, the upsurge of ICT knowledge and so on, constitute hindrances to the success of the use of the public library in developing economies such as Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. With the emerging technologies, brought by the ICT, users may choose to patronize the public library or not. Where the facilities are underutilized, becomes a defeat to the laudable objectives of the establishment of public libraries. This situation is worrisome considering the long existence of the public library in Nigeria, particularly Akwa Ibom State, which is the area chosen for this study. This study, therefore, has been designed to investigate the attitude of public libraries as technology emerges every day.

Objectives of the study.

This study was carried out to investigate users' awareness and utilization of public library services in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine

1. the influence of users' socio-economic background on utilization and management of public library services in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

the influence of users' occupation on the utilization of library services in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for the study:

1. What are the influences of users' socio-economic background on the utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What are the influences of users' occupation on the utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant influence of users' socio-economic backgrounds on the utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State.

2. There is no significant influence of users' occupation on the utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to obtain data. Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria was the area selected for the study, following the long existence of public library in the area. Public libraries are strategically located in the senatorial districts of the states namely Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene. Eket has one library while Ikot Ekpene has two libraries (Ikot Ekpene and Abak libraries), Uyo has one and recently an e-library has also been established, this research, however, will not include the e-library because it is not fully in operations. The population for the study consisted of regular library users in the areas mentioned, which stands at the time of the survey at 5,153(3,06 males and 2,092 females). A breakdown showed that Uyo library had 2,288 regular users' Eket library had 1,126 users, Ikot Ekpene library had 1,117 users and Abak library had 622(Source; field survey, 2018/2019). The sample for the study consisted of 515 respondents. That is, 307 males and 208 females drawn from the population simple random sampling techniques was used to draw the sample from the population under study. The study was carried out using a 4-point rating scale questionnaire. The instrument, Users' Utilization Skills Library Questionnaire (UUSLQ) was developed for the study. Face and content validity were established and were validated by experts in library Science and Test, Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument was considered reliable and appropriate using Cronbach Coefficient Alpha method, with an average reliability coefficient of 0.66. The two research questions and two hypotheses were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient independent t-test analysis to test the research hypotheses.

Research Question 1

What is the influence of user's socio-economic background on utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: *Weighted means of influence of users' socio-economic background on utilization of public library services.*

S/N	Users' socio –Economic Background	Mean	Remark
1	I am from a wealthy family	2.74	High
2	I have easy access to books and newspapers in the family.	2.61	High
3	We have functional PC at home.	2.63	High
4	We have internet facilities at home	2.46	Low
5	I have regular access to the use of internet facilities at home	2.57	Low
	Average mean	2.57	High

Cut off point =2.5

Table 1, shows a high level of public users' socio-economic background in the state, as shown in the mean scores of items 1, 2, and 3. However, the means scores of items 4 and 5 are low and below the cut-off point of 2.5

Research Question 2

What is the influence of users' occupation on utilization of library services in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: *Weighted means of public library users' occupation.*

S/N	Users' occupation	Mean	Remark
1	Civil Servants	2.14	Low
2	Businessmen	2.31	Low
3	Applicants	2.93	High
4	Students	3.84	High
5	Company workers	2.46	Low
	Average mean	2.75	High

Cut off point 2.5

Table 2, indicates that applicants and students make more use of public library services in the area under study.

Hypothesis 1

Table 3: *One-way analysis of variance of the influence of socio-economic background on utilization of library services in Akwa Ibom State*

Groups	N	X	SD
Low	257	10.81	1.65
Middle	149	12.22	1.41
High	99	15.10	1.38
Total	515	12.71	1.48

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Rf	Mean	Square f
Between groups	1961.11	2	1.38.282	13.11
Within groups	1854.15	511	4.728	
Total	3815.26			

$P < 0.05$; $DF = 28511$; Critical f – value = 3.00

The calculated F-value of 13.11 was greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 at 0.05 alpha level with 2 and 511 degrees of freedom. This implies that there exists significant difference in the influence of socio-economic background on the utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant influence of users' occupations on utilization of library services in Akwa Ibom State. Independent t-test analysis was used in comparing the mean scores of the two independent groups.

Table 4: *Independent t-test analysis of the influence of users' occupations on utilization of library services*

Groups	N	X	SD	t
Students	351	12.85	1.73	3.63
All workers	164	10.10	1.12	

Significant at 0.05 level; DF = 513; Critical t-value= 1.96

Table 4 presents the calculated t-test value at 3.63. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value, at 0.05 level of significance with 513 degrees of freedom. The obtained t-test value of 3.63 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies a significant difference between students and workers in their utilization of public library services in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of findings

The findings in hypothesis one corroborate Dervin (2007), who asserts that an individual's interaction with information is profoundly affected by his/her context which is impacted by social, cultural and economic factors. Socio-economic conditions of an individual can be a strong determinant factor for his/her degree (zest) for information, especially, library services. The economic status of user communities will have impact on individuals' information needs, for instance, poorer communities may have a much more profound need for access to information creation and publication profoundly affect the way in which users can access information.

Public library contributes immensely to the socio-economic development of the communities, this directly help in complementing the government's interventions to eliminate illiteracy which negatively influences the socio-economic conditions of the people. This statement is in agreement with McClure, Fraser, Nelson and Robbins (2000) study results indicating that patrons/users of the library believe that libraries contribute to their financial well-being, provide economic benefits to local businesses and support the prosperity of the community. Investment in human capital is the key to socio-economic development (Xavier, 2003). This has direct bearing to the existence, access and utilization of public library. Usman (2022) exertion, buttresses the role of public libraries as national infrastructural institutions which are established to facilitate national development.

People's daily engagement can influence their abilities to utilize library services. Those who are public servants or factory workers may not use the libraries frequently, except for urgent needs. Students have more need for libraries considering the amount of information and materials they need at a given time. This corroborates, Whitemire (2001), who observed changes in library users' patterns and note that students use the libraries more than workers.

Conclusions

The result of this study revealed that accessibility and utilization of the public library in Akwa Ibom State are challenged by certain variables such as socio-economic and occupation factors among others. However, the emergence of ICT has played down such challenges. Information rules the world. Therefore, no reason is tangible enough not to seek information and knowledge.

Recommendations

1. Regular enlightenment programs through print, electronic and social media and motivation by the government through public library administrations and structures are encouraged.
2. Government should digitalize public libraries at all tiers of government.

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