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## Delivering Community Library Services and Adult Library Education for the aged in Nigeria's Rural Communities

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**Delivering Community Library Services and Adult Library Education for the aged in  
Nigeria's Rural Communities**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the provision of community library services and adult literacy education for aged people living in rural communities in Nigeria by public services librarians who are in charge of overseeing the library's programs and services geared toward the aged. The researchers adopted a conceptual framework for the study to determine the literacy objectives and the significance of the topic for people of advanced age who live in rural communities. The difficulties encountered by librarians in providing library services to the aged were discussed. The paper recommended strategies to help aged people in Nigeria who live in rural areas learn to read and write.

**Keyword:** Aged, Community library, Literacy education, Rural communities, Services delivery.

## **Introduction**

The provision of community library services and adult literacy education for the aged in rural communities in Nigeria is pertinent, and the public services librarian needs to take strategic actions in order to achieve the intended result, which is literacy education for the aged in rural communities. A strategy is a plan that is designed to achieve a purpose, and it is possible to construct such a plan by developing a sense of action for the purpose of reaching the goal (Hornby, A. S., Wehmeier, 2005). It entails taking the steps necessary to achieve the vision by expertly and intelligently utilizing the many human and material resources that are at one's disposal. A community is a group of people living together or working together in the same area. They are a unified body of individuals. According to Mokgaboki (2013), community libraries can be regarded as community information centres, both for the illiterate and the literate. The library service aims to uplift the living standards of the aged through its cultural, health, educational, and social-political information resources. Over the course of their history, public libraries, also known as community libraries, have proven to be an effective tool for the generation, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge. Public libraries have done this by promoting and ensuring effective library services for the aged in order to enhance cultural practices and values that have been passed down from one generation to the next (Onoh et al., 2017). These services should be adapted to the needs of a particular rural community. It should be established with the assistance of the community for the success and progress of the community library.

In the words of De Vries & Van der Merwe (2013), to improve the quality of literacy education for older people, community leaders, users, and staff members should all be included in the decision-making process about the kinds of literacy-related services and collections that should be developed for older people. Literacy and its basic meaning is the ability to "read and write". UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2009) identifies literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying content." A literate or aged person is able to read and understand the local language at the community level. Bawden (2001) stated that it involves listening, speaking, reading, writing fluently, and critical thinking. Literacy education for the aged in rural communities means that the aged expand their knowledge of reading and writing in order to

develop their thinking and learning for the purpose of understanding themselves and the world. An understanding of literacy for the aged and its historical approach will ensure success and the ability to be determined in learning within rural communities in order to improve community conditions and bridge educational disparities (Freire & Macedo, 2005).

The approach of this paper, besides empowering and supporting the aged in our rural communities, is to access information in the libraries that will assist them in solving their health issues. and knowing how to access literacy documents that will assist them when needed. Ratzan et al. (2000) posit that the issue of literacy for the aged is to help them obtain information and knowledge that have the capacity to be obtained, processed, and provided with basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions and other spheres of human endeavour. The aged need literacy, and the National Policy on Education emphasises that in order to eradicate illiteracy at the shortest possible time,

- ❖ There should be a nationwide mass literacy campaign for the aged based on various strategies through empowering community techniques and other innovative approaches.
- ❖ State agencies for mass education should be responsible for the regulation of all adult and non-formal education classes.
- ❖ Mass literacy, adults' and non-formal education shall continue to be under the supervision of ministries of education.
- ❖ Mass literacy programmes should be free to the beneficiaries.

In order to promote and achieve these objectives, community libraries must be put in place to help the aged be part of a mass literacy program. Nigerian community libraries are regarded as the local gateway to knowledge, providing a basis for life long, independent, decision-making, and cultural development of the individual and social group (IFLA/UNESCO, 1995). It has historical, literacy, and learning collections, etc. The public or community librarian is at the centre of it all in discharging its duties, which are effective service delivery to the aged. This could be achieved by knowing what the information needs of the aged are. Barker et al. (2012) stated that cultural services like lectures, films, shows, grammar phone recitals, and posting readings are some of the caring services that support the aged in reading and learning.

The first challenge of serving the aged is the inability to listen to their voices during planning, implementation, and evaluation of services. Another problem is the inability of the community librarian to reach out to the aged. Shehu & Gabasa (2019) emphasized that librarians should collaborate with caregivers even though they provide effective mobile library services. It is a challenge to reach out to home services in addition to having the mobility to develop a good collection that will catch the minds of the aged. To ameliorate these challenges, community libraries should grant access to their community library buildings to those who are sick and weak. Kendall (2009) suggested that historical collections should be the major collections in the library. Hence, Nigerian cultural content that will target the aged audience should be generated, preserved, and disseminated. Okore, A.M., Ekere (2009) emphasize that community knowledge should be preserved for future posterity, while civic engagement and music should be re-introduced into library services for the aged to attract them. Therefore, the key to improving effective library services to the aged is to embed community locally generated knowledge, owned by the community, adopted by them, their experiences, and relevance into the community's situation just for the aged.

### **The concept of community library service delivery**

Community libraries are also known for providing information online. They emerge with modern solutions to meet the information needs of both literate and illiterate people. Mayer (2015) stated that they provide services to all members of the community. Its collections stem from cultural, educational, socio-political, health, and recreational collections. Mokgaboki (2013) noted that people thought of community libraries as being community-oriented since they were structured around the requirements for information held by the community as a whole. They were places where people might go to talk about issues affecting the community and get information about such issues if they asked for it. They were also utilized for service awareness, with the library staff making users aware of the library's sources and services and the librarian being contacted directly to provide direct services.

Morgan et al. (2015) added that the aged need survival or health information, daily life challenges information, and certain skills information for their age. The main feature of a community library is to support the input of members of the community in its service delivery. Community libraries provide unrestricted access to library resources and their services are free of

charge (Enamudu et al., 2021). Iwhiwhu (2012) posits that community libraries are so integral because their priority lies in ensuring effective service delivery and ensuring the satisfaction of the information needs of their users.

### **The benefits of community library services to the aged in rural communities in Nigeria**

Community libraries aim at providing and enhancing literacy education among the aged and all ages in rural communities in Nigeria to create the ability to read and write. IFLA/UNESCO (1995) added that the essence of community libraries is to promote community life, promote literacy and also provide a wide range of education for the aged and all ages. Community libraries identify, acquire, process, preserve, and disseminate information as packaged knowledge for life-long learning. De Vries & Van der Merwe (2013) emphasize that community library services are based more on mobile library services, outreach programs, current awareness programs, referral services, and the provision of Braille materials for aged users, who are usually impaired.

IFLA/UNESCO (1995) opined that community librarians can make the aged abreast of the societal trends and trending service which is a basic human right. Community libraries create the ability to have access to and an understanding of information. Community librarians support active literacy campaigns that encourage self-conducted education by the aged, satisfy the information needs of the aged and also their reading interest which will help the aged to live independently and remain actively involved in the world of learning.

### **Applying social inclusion theory to community library services for the aged**

The social inclusion theory, according to Atkinson & Marlier (2010), states that social exclusion can be considered in relation to the different dormant norms of society and the roles of the state. Hence, Atkinson & Marlier (2010) reaffirmed in contrast that voluntary inclusion in rural areas should be practiced.

- ❖ There should be a provision of mainstream library services to the excluded groups like the aged in rural communities.
- ❖ Information needs of the excluded library users in the community should be prioritized.
- ❖ Community library services librarians should target the aged and the disadvantaged socially exclusion groups in the community.

- ❖ The community librarian should be open to all users which will help incorporate library services and consultancy.

### **Challenges**

The challenges faced by public library services in Nigeria are largely a function of the peculiarities of our environment. Issa (2018) termed these challenges as people and environment-specific and they include:

- ❖ Inadequate funding; lack of interest by the stakeholders; absence of public library development policy; low patronage; poor staffing and conditions; irrelevant library sticks; unstable educational policy; misplacement of societal priority; book-oriented nature of public libraries; oral nature of society; and misunderstanding the public library's role in society are some of the reasons for this.
- ❖ Other hindrances associated with the services of public libraries to the aged are: lack of adequate manpower; insensitive attitude of government towards education; lack of adequate information resources; poor library facilities; non automation of library operations; poor funding; gap between services and real information needs; poor power supply; poor attitude to library staff; and inadequate space (Omekwu & Echezona, 2009).
- ❖ In addition, Ogbonna (2018) identified the following challenges, at varying intensities, in the administration of public libraries in Nigeria: Among them are poor funding; inadequate staff in terms of quantity and quality; inadequate space and accommodation; lack of or inadequate operational vehicles; inadequate government recognition; inadequate power supply; and inadequate resources, including e-resources.
- ❖ In addition, Issa (2018) opined that a lack of professional leadership, government legislation, backing and financial support in certain states, staffing problems, and the difficulty of extending services outside of urban areas were some of the challenges that were faced in Nigeria. The country was also subdivided into smaller internal units.
- ❖ Finally, the differing designations in the public libraries in Nigeria are a problem. Ogbonna (2018) enumerated these designations as follows: Director of library services; Executive Director of library services; Director of state library; and Executive Secretary.

The placement of the heads of the public libraries also varies, such as: Contiss 15, GL 16, GL 17, with differing consolidated salaries. This shows that there is no uniformity in the salary system of the public library sector in Nigeria. This to a great extent invariably affects service output.

### **Strategies to enhance community library service delivery for the aged**

Curbing the hindrances of adequate community library service delivery to the aged is important because it will bring about lifelong reading and positive change. Akidi (2018) has the conviction that reading liberates man; reading maketh a man; reading widens horizons and lifelong development; readers are leaders; reading brings wisdom; reading is living; and reading emancipates, among others. The following three missions of public libraries are itemized in the public library's service guidelines for development. Ogbonna (2018) further emphasised the importance of public libraries to the aged as follows:

- ❖ Citizens are provided with guaranteed access to all aspects of the community.
- ❖ The provision of sufficient information services to local businesses, associations, and interest groups.
- ❖ Adequate Aid for Participatory Literacy Programmes and Activities for All Age Groups, and Their Initiation, If Necessary.

The importance of the public library to the aged as enumerated above is no doubt laudable. This, therefore, demands that the enhancement of public libraries be achieved in the following ways:

#### ***Use of a mobile library***

Mobile libraries are book collections that are organized and housed in vehicles by trained professionals in order to provide library services that are able to be directed to communities located in rural areas. Ashikuzzaman (2016) stated that there are two distinct categories of mobile libraries, which are mobile branch libraries and traveling libraries. The mobile branch library is a vehicle that can range in size from medium to big and has a shelf stock of over two thousand books. It travels over roads that are relatively decent and serves cities and villages. The travelling library is a smaller vehicle with a limited stock used in the service of scattered communities and providing in some cases, a house-to-house service in rural areas. This confirms the IFLA/UNESCO public library manifest (Ogbonna, 2018). Which reaffirms that specific services and materials, as in the case of the linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, or

people in hospital or prison. In the public library, all age groups shall find materials relevant to their needs unhindered, and without any reservation whatsoever. For easy conveyance, therefore, mobile and travelling libraries vehicle is made with specific provision.

### ***Mobile learning***

Any service that provides a learner with general electronic information and educational content that aids in the acquisition of knowledge regardless of location and time is considered mobile learning. Mobile learning can take place anywhere at any time. (Ezema & Ali, 2011). According to Ajiboye & Olatundun (2010), learners have the ability to choose when they want to learn and where they want to learn from. It doesn't matter where they live, what their status is, or what culture they practice; every human being has the right to access information and learning materials that will help them improve their quality of life. As a result, the government ought to initiate a large number of educational programs that make use of the mobile learning technique in order to improve community life services for the aged. This can be accomplished by supplying radios, televisions, electronic generators, and constructing teleconferences in public libraries.

### ***Current reading materials in public libraries***

It is important to note that at this digital age, public libraries can go beyond what they can stick to what they can access by being ICT-driven, and remotely access information resources for their users. As the eleventh mission of the public libraries states thus facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills. the worst hit in the scenario of libraries in Nigeria is the school and public libraries. Most public libraries are stocking very outdated materials that are found not useful for present academic and pleasurable reading (Akidi, 2018). Moreso, the resources are grossly inadequate and this has equally affected extension services of public libraries to cater those visiting the library, not to talk about taking the library services and resources to those, for one reason or the other cannot visit the library. This has invariably affected mobile library services.

### ***Adequate libraries***

Libraries play an important role in sustaining lifelong reading by the aged. Enough libraries should be established in our communities to enhance community library services to the aged. Unlike the present public library system in Nigeria, where there is only one public library established in the state capitals, which is certainly not enough for the ever-growing population in

our communities. It is noted that community library services for the aged are at the heart of critical thinking and widening awareness of social, economic, political, and environmental issues of life and their present community. Murphy (2013) stated that why people read to include the following: for self-understanding, improvement in social relations; for cognitive and academic development; to have therapeutic effect; and lastly, to cultivate the disposition to participate in civic society.

### ***Funding for public libraries***

Public libraries need to be adequately funded by concerned bodies for effective library service delivery to the communities in Nigeria. To accomplish this and the stipulated mission of the public library system, public libraries should be ranked first amongst the stakeholders for funding. This should be so because, apart from the aged, public library services and resources are provided to all categories of individuals free of charge or at a token. recommended with adequate funding. Akidi (2018) recommended that public libraries in Nigeria can assist in sustaining lifelong reading by resuscitating library extension services. This can be done through mobile library service delivery to hospitals, prisons, rural dwellers, and the aged in the communities, among others. These individuals need the public libraries to provide them with diversifying information resources ranging from the primary literature to other high standard reading materials and equally provide newspapers and newspaper stands where most adults spend their days recreating themselves, as most people including the aged cannot afford to buy a daily newspaper. All of the aforementioned resources and services are impossible to provide without funds. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that public libraries are provided with sufficient funding in order for them to function properly, and it is also the government's responsibility to ensure that any funds donated are put to their intended use.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study revealed that adequate library service delivery for the aged will impact on their social, political, educational, and majorly how to tackle their health challenges and help in the dissemination of information. It will bridge the knowledge gap and go a long way towards helping resolve conflicts among rural dwellers. It will affect community road construction and maintenance, reduce crime and increase safety, land tenure disputes, and farmers' information needs regardless of the low knowledge and skills of rural women. The

implication of providing library services for the aged stems from the fact that some aged adults have reading interests. Some are happy, some are friendly, some are depressed, some have health issues like sight impairment, mobility issues, or isolation. The libraries in the rural communities are challenged to reach out to them, listen to them, encounter them and integrate them into mainstream library services so that the aged will access and utilize knowledge and transmit the same from generation to generation through grey literature.

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