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PRISON INMATES' CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING LIBRARY MEDIA RESOURCES IN
PREPARATION FOR SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the prison inmates' challenges in accessing library media resources in preparation for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination in Nigeria from 2009 to 2013. Three regional prisons in Nigeria that prepare and register inmates for these Examinations were randomly selected for the study. These are Abakaliki prisons in the South-East, Ikoyi prisons in South-West and Kuje prisons in North-Central Nigeria. Five hundred questionnaires were administered on the inmates registered for SSSCE in the various prisons sampled, namely: Abakaliki 160 inmates with a response rate of 142, Ikoyi 240 inmates with a response rate of 209 and Kuje 100 inmates with a response rate of 87. Thus, 438 questionnaires (87.6%) were duly completed and returned, and found useable for the study. The study revealed that 77.4% of the inmates had access to photocopying services, 76% had access to inter-library loan services, 56.8% had access to book loan services and 50.9% could access past examination questions among others. On the other hand, 50.5% of the inmates claimed that their cell was far from the prison library, 57.5% claimed that the general library reading materials were not accessible to them, 59.1% equally claimed that the prescribed (recommended) textbooks by the West African Examinations Council were not accessible to them and 88.8% of the inmates claimed that they do not have free access to the prison library resources. Recommendations were made accordingly as deduced from the findings.

Keywords: Accessibility of library media resources, Prison inmates in Nigeria, Senior Secondary

Introduction

The Nigerian Prisons Service organises formal education classes designed to take care of the educational needs of those who were in school before they ran into trouble with the law. In the Prison yards, fresh opportunities are given to them to reconnect with their truncated studies if so desired. When they have become trained, the Nigerian Prisons Service, in collaboration with the Local Government Authorities, arranges for them to take the First School Leaving Certificate Examination. No fewer than 3,000 of these prisoners are presented for the First School Leaving Certificate Examinations each year (Ogundipe 2008). Some of them go to the next stage of their education while others, usually the older ones, take the educational attainments back home on discharge.

Therefore, for meaningful learning to take place in the prisons, the inmates must be provided with a functional library, well stocked with relevant and current reading materials, both the general library reading materials and the recommended (prescribed) reading materials by the prospective examination bodies. The inmates who are the beneficiary of these library resources must have unhindered access to them to maximally utilise them for better academic performance.

Review of Literature

Accessibility to 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. The more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used. Readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access. These observations have been validated by empirical studies such as Slater (1963), Allen (1968), and Rosenberg (1967). The user may encounter five possible types of inaccessibility problems. These are conceptual, linguistic, critical, bibliographic, and physical inaccessibility.

Aguolu and Aguolu note that availability of an information source does not necessarily imply its accessibility, because the source may be available but access to it prevented for one reason or the other. Olowu (2004) identifies natural and artificial barriers to free access to information. The library's poor reputation was attributed to lack of accessibility of information sources. Iyoro (2004) examines the impact of serial publications in the promotion of educational

excellence among information professionals receiving further training at the University of Ibadan. The study looks at the perception of how serial accessibility has contributed to students' learning process. Serials were found to play a significant role in the acquisition of knowledge, because the serial collection was easily and conveniently accessible.

In a similar study by Oyediran-Tidings (2004) at Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, low use of the library by students was observed. This was attributed to expressed accessibility problems. Neelamegham (1981) identifies accessibility as one of the prerequisites of information use while Kuhlthau (1991) argues that the action of information seeking depends on the needs, the perceived accessibility, sources, and information seeking habits. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) reveal that efforts are being made worldwide to promote access to information in all formats. They lament the attendant underdevelopment, such as power failure, machine breakdowns, and lack of spare parts and technicians, which intermittently stall the performance of the modern gadgets of information storage and transfer in developing countries.

Access to library media resources will, no doubt, influence the academic performance of prison inmates in examinations. A good book is a good friend, teacher and company says Ephraim (2011). The library, which is a centre where good books and other information resources are made available for use, can build the emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing of people who find themselves in incarceration or work in corrections. Arua (2011) in a related finding on use of library resources by staff and students of secondary schools in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State observes that the information resources which are highly accessed by students were textbooks (52.1%) and novels (33.6%). This has implication that textbooks and novels provision to all secondary schools is of a great importance. This will encourage reading habits of students, enhance students' independent learning and hence, improve their school academic performance. It equally means that textbooks and novels are highly accessible in school libraries compared to other Information resources. This is probably because of their availability, accessibility and its relevance to their academic discipline.

However, the information resources which are not accessible were Audio visuals (99.3%), Newspapers and magazines (85.7%), atlases and maps (68.6%), poetry (66.4%), and dictionaries

(54.3%). The findings therefore revealed that audiovisuals, newspapers/magazine, poetry and dictionaries were not accessible by most of the students of secondary schools under the study. These findings are consistent with those of Adeyemi (2009) that students were found not to have access to the use of many resources in the school libraries. This indicates that the government and other related education institutions should provide more funds to secondary school libraries in order to improve accessibility to such resources by students.

It is important for library services to focus more on the use of resources provided for their patrons. According to Whitmire (2002), academic library resources are considered a good measure of an institution's excellence and quality. Popoola (2008) affirms that the information resources and services available in institutional information systems must be capable of supporting research activities among students and faculty members. Iyoro (2004) in his study identifies accessibility as one of the pre-requisites of information use. Ugah (2008) opines that the more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used as readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access.

The areas where libraries can improve access to and use of library resources to library users include improved academic liaison in combining library and information technology support, open access IT area with personal or helpline supports from IT staff. Over the past decade, most libraries in Nigeria have been experiencing much difficulty providing materials to users on account of the alarming rate of inflation in the prices of books and journals as well as depreciation in the value of the Nigerian economy (Ehikhamenor, 1993). Ugah (2008) quotes Osundina (1974), who studied the relationship between accessibility and library use by undergraduates in Nigeria and notes that the problem of Nigerian students is not the question of wanting to use the college library, but whether or not the university library can provide for their needs, and whether there is access to what is provided.

This assertion was corroborated later by Iyoro (2004) and Popoola (2008). In separate studies, Seth and Parida (2006), Ugwu (2008), Nnadozie and Nnadozie (2008) caution that availability of information resources and services do not automatically translate to information accessibility and use. Ugwu (2008) explains further, in his study, that the problems of transmission, storage, and display of information have been combined with the problem of getting information to users quickly. Although online searching and electronic bibliographic databases are now available in almost every field which confirms that as information expands,

the ability of the user to process it remains fixed (Seth and Parida 2006). Library resources, as used in this context, are collections of all text and bibliographic information sources; it also includes information technology such as those that support browsing, authoring and communication like computer and the Internet. In order for libraries to have a great impact of their services on their users, it is necessary for each library management to aim at managing the library accurately and by providing timely information for all library users. This can be achieved by acquiring both relevant library resources in electronic and book materials through donations from organizations and alumni.

Objectives of the Study

This study is out to examine and ascertain:

- (1) The various library media resources that prison inmates access in preparation for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria.
- (2) The challenges encountered in accessibility of these library media resources, if any.
- (3) And to make recommendations for improvement as appropriate.

Methodology

A structured questionnaire was drawn and administered on the prison inmates from Abakaliki, Ikoyi and Kuje prisons that enrolled for and wrote the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations from 2009 to 2013. These three prisons were visited and five hundred questionnaires (500) were administered on the inmates. Four hundred and thirty eight questionnaires (438), representing 87.6% response rate were received and used for this study. The brake-down of responses from the prisons are: Abakaliki 142, Ikoyi 209 and Kuje 87, totaling 438. The results of the findings are as shown below.

Findings and Discussion

Table A: Shows the frequency and percentage distribution of accessibility of library media resources by prison inmates in preparation for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria.

S/No	Questions on accessibility of Library Media Resources	Yes	%	No	%
1	The prison library make photocopying services accessible to willing inmates	399	77.4	99	22.6
2	The prison library makes provision for inter-library loan services	333	76.0	105	24.0
3	The prison library allow inmates to borrow books for use for WAEC/SSCE	249	56.8	189	43.2
4	Inmates have access to past examination questions for revision while preparing for WAEC/SSCE examinations	223	50.9	215	49.1
5	Inmates have access to WAEC/SSCE curricula and syllabi for WAEC/SSCE	219	50.0	219	50.0
6	The prison library is far from my cell	221	50.5	217	49.5
7	The general library reading materials are accessible	186	42.5	252	57.5
8	The prescribed (recommended) textbooks by WAEC/SSCE are accessible	179	40.9	259	59.1
9	The prison library staff are unfriendly	181	41.3	257	58.7
10	The prison rules and regulations are too strict/harsh	130	29.7	308	70.3
11	The prison environment is not conducive to reading	115	26.3	323	73.7
12	Inmates have free access to the prison library resources	49	11.2	389	88.8

The findings revealed the areas of strength and weakness in the accessibility of library media resources by Prison inmates in preparation for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria as follows:

The areas of strength, according to the findings are:

- That 399 respondents (77.4%) claimed that the prison library make photocopying services accessible to willing inmates.
- 333 Inmates (76.0%) affirmed that the prison library makes provision for inter-library loan services.
- 249 Inmates (56.8%) agreed that the prison library allow inmates to borrow books for use for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination.

- 223 Respondents (50.9%) claimed that the Inmates have access to past examination questions for revision while preparing for WAEC/SSCE examinations.
- 257 Respondents (58.7%) disagreed that the prison library staff are unfriendly
- Likewise, 308 Inmates (70.3%) disagreed that the prison rules and regulations are too strict/harsh
- Also, 323 Inmates (73.7%) disagreed that the prison environment is not conducive to reading

On the other hand, the areas of weakness revealed in the study are:

- ✓ Where 221 inmates (50.5%) stressed that the prison library is far from their cell
- ✓ 252 Inmates (57.5%) disagreed that the general library reading materials are accessible
- ✓ 259 Inmates (59.1%) disagreed that the prescribed (recommended) textbooks by WAEC/SSCE are accessible.
- ✓ 389 Respondents (88.8%) disagreed that inmates have free access to the prison library resources.

It is heart-warming to note from the above that 77.4% of the inmates had access to photocopying services, 76% had access to inter-library loan services, 56.8% had access to book loan services and 50.9% of the inmates can access past examination questions for preparation for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations. Likewise, 58.7% of the sampled population said that the prison library staff are friendly, 70.3% claimed that the prison rules and regulations are not strict/harsh while 73.7% of the respondents claimed that the prison environment is conducive to reading.

On the other hand, however, 50.5% of the inmates claimed that their cell was far the prison library, 57.5% of them claimed that the general library reading materials were not accessible to them, 59.1% equally claimed that the prescribed (recommended) textbooks by the West African Examinations Council were not accessible to them and 88.8% of the respondents claimed that the inmates do not have free access to the prison library resources.

Recommendations

- ❖ More than fifty percent (50.5%) of the inmates claimed that the prison library was far from their cell. For this reason, the prison management should consider allocating inmates on educational programmes, especially those who are registered for Senior

Secondary School Certificate Examination to cells close to the prison library to ease their accessibility of the library resources.

- ❖ The general library reading materials such as fictions like story books, novels, newspapers, magazines, dictionaries, encyclopedias, journals etc should be stocked in the prison library and made available and accessible to the inmates.
- ❖ The prescribed (recommended) textbooks by West African Examinations Council for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination should be acquired by the prison library, processed, shelved and made available and accessible to the prison inmates to guarantee better performance in their respective examinations, particularly the SSSCE which is a requisite for employment and for admission to tertiary institutions.
- ❖ Ironically, 389 inmates (88.8%) claimed that they had no free access to the prison library resources. The prison librarian should ensure that the prison library resources are on open access for the inmates to freely access. As long as the inmates are registered user of the prison library, they should have unrestricted access to the library resources.

Conclusion

When a library is well stocked with current and relevant books and users are denied access to the resources, then the aim and purpose of such a library would have been defeated. Therefore, as much as possible, the prison library should stock all relevant general library reading materials and also ensure that the recommended textbooks prescribed by the West African Examinations Council for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination are acquired, organised in the library and made accessible to the prison inmates to enhance their performances in their respective examinations. Education of inmates is a rehabilitative measure that should be encouraged and sustained. The role of the prison library in this regard cannot be waived or undermined.

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