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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY IN FOSTERING NATIONAL INTEGRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF PORT HARCOURT LITERARY SOCIETY (PHLS) LIBRARY, PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.

Mercy Echem

echemmercy@gmail.com

Patience Ebisemen Lulu-Pokubo

ebisemen@yahoo.com

Eberechi Ejuh

ejuhebere@gmail.com

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**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY IN FOSTERING NATIONAL INTEGRATION
FOR DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF PORT HARCOURT LITERARY
SOCIETY (PHLS) LIBRARY, PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.**

BY

Mercy Ekenma Echem
Rivers State University
echemmercy@gmail.com
08035771925

And

Ebisemen Patience Lulu-Pokubo (CLN)
Port Harcourt Polytechnic
ebisemen@yahoo.com
08032060648

And

Ejuh, Eberechi
Rivers State University
ujuhebere@gmail.com

Abstract

The relevance and role of public library in fostering national integration for development has received wide study but little or no similar review have been conducted or carried out in PHLS library hence, this study seeks to investigate the various areas it has contributed in integrating various groups within its host community and the public for development using four research objectives. Descriptive survey research was adopted for the study with a population of 62 comprising of 10 staff and 52 current registered users. Questionnaires were administered and the data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. The results revealed that various information resources were available for use except the absence of functional e-library; various services were also carried out. The major challenges identified were inadequate fund, manpower, power supply, lack of e-library, among others. It was recommended among others that the management of PHLS library should endeavour to equip the e-library in order to meet up with the provision of access to digital information as to enhance its services delivery in this era of ICT.

Keywords: Public Library, National Integration, PHLS Library

1.0 Introduction

National integration is crucial to the development of any meaningful nation. For any meaningful society to advance and flourish it must embrace national integration. The idea behind national integration is simply unity, oneness not minding all our differences as a people. In other words, it's unity in diversity. To foster this unity, it requires a corporate effort of all concerned if the goal or objectives must be achieved in any country and Nigeria in particular. Egbefo (2015) maintains that national integration remains the cardinal objective of every multi-ethnic nation. National integration is a conscious process of creating an interlocking and vertical relationship between and among hitherto separate nations, after an understanding and reconciliation of the fundamental differences and an establishment of an acceptable consensus (Folarin, Olanrewaju & Ajayi, 2014).

In the bid to attain this, the library as a social oriented institution with the goal of providing information for dissemination becomes increasingly important in the role to foster national integration for development. Library as a concept is charged with the collection, availability and accessibility of information necessary for effective and efficient use by its host community and the society at large. Sobalaje & Ogunmodede (2015) are of the view that the general role of library is to provide information about its community while its objective is to serve as a centre for information where people acquire the needed knowledge to reduce their ignorance about their environment.

Public libraries as community service organisation exist to provide and give access and services in order to meet the various information needs of the people of the host community and general public for free irrespective of their race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, and educational attainment. The United Nation Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) manifesto (2004)

defined Public Library as a library established and financed out of public funds. Uwa (2014), outlined the objectives of public library to include: to assemble, preserve and administer books and related educational materials in an organized collection to promote, through guidance and stimulation, the communication of ideas, enlightened citizenship and enriched personal life of the community; to serve the community as a centre of reliable information; to provide opportunity for recreation through the use of literature, music, art forms and internet accessibility; to support educational, civic and cultural activities of groups and organizations, serve continually in order to identify community needs and provide programmes of services to meet such needs; and to cooperate with other organizations, agencies and institutions in order to provide programmes or services in order to meet community needs etc.

According to IFLA (2001), users of public libraries include children, young adults, adults, people with special needs like those with hearing and visual impairment, prisoners, the aged, nursing mothers, organizations and people in government. Public library in its role has provided a platform where people irrespective of their diversity can unite as a result of the change-oriented information thereby helping to fostering national integration for development (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Dublin, 2013).

It has been seen or observed that public libraries are indispensable in the role of fostering unity among social, ethnic, cultural, religious and political diversity for national integration for development. However, its pace of development had been slowed. There has been scarcity or no literature in the role of public library in national integration for development with reference to the library studied despite several similar studies conducted in different areas. This is a location gap that this study tends to fill.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

The relevance of public libraries all over to provide access and service in response to the information needs of the community cannot be underestimated. It has been observed that service delivery and sustainability of the library is a challenge. It is on this background that this study is carried out to examine the reason for the setback and ways to overcome the challenges in the bid to fostering national integration for development using Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

The main thrust of this paper therefore is to examine and bring into focus the roles of public Library in fostering national integration for development. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the information resources available in the PHLS Library
2. examine the type of services provided by public library for national integration
3. examine the place of the library in fostering national integration for development
4. identify the major challenges that hinder public library services for national integration

4.0 Brief History of the Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library

The Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library was established and commissioned on October 27, 2016 (PHLS, 2016). The Ultra-Modern Public Library was built and donated by the Shell Petroleum Company of Nigeria (SPDC) to the PHLS. It is a registered Non-Governmental and non-profit association of writers, scholars, lovers of literature, books and the arts. The Port Harcourt Literary Society Library (PHLS) embarked on the Book Centre project as a tribute and permanent memorial to the 2014 recognition of the city of Port Harcourt by UNESCO as the World Book Capital of the Year. This recognition puts Nigeria on the world's cultural map as a major centre of literacy and the book culture.

Objective of the Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library: The Port Harcourt Book Centre was conceived as a creative and world-class cultural centre that will cater for the cultural needs of the oil and gas city of Port Harcourt. It is also a venue for the now famous annual Port Harcourt Book Festival in addition to hosting musical and drama performances by local and international artists and hosting visiting writers from around the world for the purpose of doing creative writing and cultural research.

Facilities: Being the revenue heart of the Book Centre, the collections of the library are made up of about seven thousand collections (7,000) excluding CDs in different fields, 50-seat e-library, a 100-seat children's library, a 20-seat research library and general adult section that accommodates 180 persons. There are conference halls, children's nap and activity rooms and other modern facilities. The library is strategically located with a serene environment along GU Ake Road, beside Air Assault Golf course and behind Port Harcourt Pleasure Park, Rivers State.

Funding Structure: The Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library is a wholly voluntary private Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Its activities are funded by members' contributions and donations from individuals, companies and development-oriented organisation.

5.0 Review of Literature: An Overview

5.1 National Integration

National integration is coming to the knowledge, believe and acceptance that the citizens have a common nationality. National Integration is referred to as a process as well as a goal by which all the people inhabiting a particular territory irrespective of their religious, ethnic and linguistic differences, on the basis of certain shared traditions, experiences, common history and values strive to live together forever with honour and dignity (Vyas, 1993). National integration according to Tersoo and Ejue (2014) is the building of a nation state out of disparate socio-economic, religious, ethnic and geographical elements which

translate the diffuse and unorganized sentiment of nationalism into spirit of citizenship through the creation of policy and programme that are in line with the citizenry.

From the above, it is seen that national integration centres on unity, peaceful co-existence and harmony within a community or locality leaving behind their differences. This in turn creates room for development in all spheres of life. This is why Temitayo, Audu & Lukman (2014) is of the view that national integration is a process and a goal where different communities live together harmoniously by forgoing a common identity that is shared between communities.

5.2 Information Services offered by Public Library for National Integration

Access to information is cardinal to national integration. Public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public libraries are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994). However, some of the services provided by public library as identified by Sokari, Abdullahi & Abdullahi (2017) include information services; outreach programs; library services to children; Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI); Current Awareness Service (CAS); circulation services; reference services; serial services, consultancy services; research services; photocopying services, adult learning or literacy programme services, internet services, recreational services, bindery services, special needs services, interlibrary loan services, community education services, social inclusion, among others. Some of these services are detailed below as:

5.2.1 Provision of Information Services

- One of the information services rendered is in the area of organizing outreach programmes within the host community to ensure adequate publicity as to avail the people of the information resources and services available to them through the library. Various media are also explored to enhance publicity to the grassroots.
- **Special Services and Programmes for Children Education:** Public Libraries organize some weekend mostly Saturdays programmes tagged story hours and relaxation activities which include story-telling, library tour, drama, dancing, riddles and jokes among others. Many public librarians make special effort to conduct film shows, group discussions on library books. Programmes such as inter-school debates, quiz, spelling bees competitions, young writers' book club among other which most times attracts various awards by the organisers and sponsors of such programmes. All these programmes are geared towards boosting their education.
- **Adult Literacy Programme:** Public libraries play an important role in adult education through the provision of information materials for increased leisure-time activity. Health talk on various issues are advanced to reach out to and encourage the general public even on the area of e-health corners where free information on health resources can easily be accessed e.g. family planning, HIV/AIDs, personal hygiene etc, initiative skills in the area of agriculture, entrepreneurship skills, unemployed youths empowerment programmes that will avail them the opportunity of developing the creative minds for the conversion of jobs creations, leisure programmes on "Literacy Evening/Open Mic" for education and knowledge just to mention but a few which in turn leads national integration.
- Other services offered include organizing programmes in recognition of various national and international remarkable events such as World Literacy Day, World

Book Day, World Poetry Day, National Democracy Day, Nigerian Independency Day etc. These programmes in one way or the other inculcate the spirit of unity in the minds of the children at young stage.

6.0 Public Library as an Engine to foster National Integration for Development

Provision of access to information and knowledge to meet the needs of the community and the public is a basic role of public library. Thus, the provision of access to all forms of useful information and works of imagination by public libraries remain an ingredient to foster community development for national integration. According to Makotsi (2004), libraries go beyond formal education; they encourage and sustain literacy, and support development.

- Public libraries innovative initiatives beyond its basic roles have positioned them to remain relevant in achieving national integration for development. One of these is the role to ensure that those group of people or individuals living with HIV/AIDs and communities who are victims of multiple deprivations and/are socially excluded due to unequal power are meaningfully engaged within its locality by making available and accessible information materials that will educate such citizens on their rights and opportunities and which in turn would inform their contributions and decisions in society.

Public libraries engagement in services geared towards ensuring social inclusion and cohesion is a key role. That is, access to information is provided to men, women and children within its host community who may have been excluded from certain rights. Social inclusion refers to a policy designed to ensure that all people are able to participate in the society regardless of their background or specific characteristics. This means the promotion of equal opportunities to people irrespective

of circumstances and those who are socially excluded politically, economically, socially and culturally (Amonoo & Azubuike, 2005).

For instance, public library in its role of making accessible all forms of suitable information materials and services to meet the needs of special groups thus, those with disabilities in enhancing their education which is the right of every citizen is indeed a key to fostering national integration for development.

- Another role public library plays in fostering national integration for development is evident in the work of Nwosu & Ogbomo (2010) when they emphasized that economic progress of the nation will be dependent on the access to information because national development is very much influenced by the amount of available information. This implies that no nation can see the light of tomorrow (development) without the availability, accessibility and utilization of right information for knowledge which when fully applied leads to its development and that of its citizens.
- Public library through collaborative effort create a platform where Multi-nationals, government and non-governmental agents or representatives such as the on-going Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in collaboration with the Rivers State Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, organizes initiatives and sensitization programmes by engaging various groups in the oil producing host communities within the Niger Delta Region on discussions popularly called “THE CANVAS” to deliberate, sensitize, initiate and educate, especially the youths on matters centred on social and national issues.

The aim of these is on the need for them to embrace peaceful co-existence. Other similar programmes include social forum where information on fight against drug abuse, rape, cultism, health talks among others are provided and disseminated to

the public. All these are geared towards building healthy community and state for fostering national integration for development.

- Through public library resources and programmes, the people are being enlightened on social and traditional values among different cultures. This is seen in the area of marriage, burial rites, cultural, arts festivals etc., by this national integration is enhanced. Another way public library foster national integration is the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and diversity (Amonoo & Azubuike, 2005).
- Recreational services geared towards bringing particularly young children together thus inculcating in them the spirit of one through the provision of information that brings the attention of the children to unity and cohesion can be disseminated in the children section of the public library to foster national integration for development.

7.0 Challenges faced by PHLS Library for National Integration for Development

- Effective and efficient service delivery by public libraries and its smooth operations depends on the adequacy of fund. Unfortunately, the dwindling funding of public libraries in Nigeria is one of the many factors hindering the information sector. It is one thing to establish a public library and another thing is the provision of adequate funding for the support and sustainability of its activities. This implies that proper funding is required if this must be achieved.
- Government should include and increase her budgetary allocation with regards to public libraries. Because of little or no funding from the Government, it is needful that public libraries should go beyond government dependency and embark on collaborating and partnering with good spirited individuals, NGOs, private organisations, literary groups etc. for financial support, sponsorship, donations and even seek international grants in order to promote access to quality information and services for national integration.

- Inadequate publicity has also been observed as a major challenge that has slowed the optimal utilization of the numerous information resources and services freely available to the communities and the general public. There is therefore, need for public library heads to partner with media houses and explore other means of communication such as social media to create and enhance awareness and knowledge to various groups within the community of their resources and services.
- Other challenges facing public library are lack of adequate staff, poor staff welfare, lack of functional ICT facilities, inadequate power supply, lack of personnel training and development etc.

8.0 Research Methodology

For the purpose of this study, descriptive survey research design was adopted. A total of seventy five (75) comprising of ten (10) professional and support staff and sixty five (65) current registered users of the library under study formed the target population of the study. The reason for the researcher using the entire population for the study was due to the small number. This is in line with the accretion of Bernard (2012) which states that if a population of a study is less than two hundred (200), the entire number of the population should be used. Instrument for data collection was based on a well-structured questionnaire and interview. Out of the 75 copies of questionnaire distributed, only 62(83%) copies were properly filled and returned. That is 10 from the staff and 52 from the registered users. The data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages.

9.0 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Information resources available in the Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library

S/N	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Textbooks	21	33.8
2	Handbook	5	8.1

3.	Directories	2	3.2
4.	Dictionaries	7	11.2
5.	Magazines/Newspapers/Bulletins	1	1.6
6.	Atlases	3	3.8
7.	Encyclopaedias	4	6.4
8.	CD Rom	3	3.8
9.	Computers	7	11.2
10.	Educational toys and games	9	14.5
11.	E-library	-	-
	Total	62	100

Based on the data analysed in Table 1 above, result shows that various information resources were available for use in the library studied. However, the library does not have a functional E-library.

Table 2: Services provided by the Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library

S/N	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Services to children	19	30.6
2.	Adult literacy programmes	17	27.4
3.	Reprographic services	3	3.8
4.	Reference services	5	8.0
5.	Charging/discharging	9	14.5
6.	Internet services	-	-
7.	Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)	1	1.6
8.	Current Awareness Services (CAS)	6	9.6
9.	Audio-visual services	2	3.2
	Total	62	100

The result in the Table 2 above shows that services such as services to children ranked highest, followed by adult literacy programmes. Others which include charging/discharging, Current Awareness Services (CAS), reference services, etc, were highly offered while reprographic services, SDI and Audio-visual services turned out low. Internet service was not offered in the library studied.

Table 3: Public Library role in fostering National Integration for Development

S/N	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Entrepreneurship initiative programme	6	9.6

2.	Social inclusion/Cohesion	9	14.5
3.	Partnership and Collaborative effort for community education and development	12	19.3
4.	Provision of access to information	16	25.8
5.	Create citizen awareness of social and national values. Recreational activities	4	6.4
6.	Promotion of literacy and the book culture	13	20.9
7.	Preserve and promote cultural heritage and Diversity	2	3.2
	Total	62	100

In response to the role public library played in fostering national integration for development by the respondents, the result in the above table reveals that all the items in Table 3 promoted the spirit of oneness irrespective of their diversity among various groups with a high percentage score except item 5 [4(6.4)] and 7 [2(3.2%)] respectively that had a low score by the respondents.

Table 4: Challenges faced by the Port Harcourt Literary Society (PHLS) Library

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Inadequate fund	17	27.4
2.	inadequate awareness of the library	8	12.9
3.	Inadequate man power	12	19.3
4.	Poor staff welfare	9	14.5
5.	Lack of staff training and development	6	9.6
6.	Inadequate power supply	10	16.1
7.	Lack of functional E-library and internet facilities	-	-
	Total	62	100

In Table 4, some constraints were identified by the respondents. Inadequate fund was regarded as the biggest challenge as 17(27.4%). Another major challenge identified was lack of a functional e-library and internet facilities, etc.

10.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that PHLS library has contributed in fostering the spirit of unity among various groups within its communities irrespective of their

cultural diversity thereby leading to development. However, the following recommendations for the Library are made:

- The management of PHLS library should endeavour to equip the e-library in order to meet up with the provision of access to digital information as to enhance and support its services.
- The management of PHLS library should also consider the training and retraining of its entire staff from time to time and recruit more staff with the required technical expertise to enhance quality service delivery.
- The activities within the library are electricity driven. It is essential that adequate provision for power supply be made.
- Funding has remained a major constraint for PHLS library. There is need for collective and collaborative effort by individuals, organizations, agencies and government to support the financial need of the library if it must be maintained and sustained.

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