

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Summer 11-21-2020

Transposing Public Libraries for Effective Information Services Delivery and Rural Development: The Nigerian Focus

Chukwuemeka Chukwueke

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, chukwuekechukwuemeka@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>



Part of the [Development Studies Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Chukwueke, Chukwuemeka, "Transposing Public Libraries for Effective Information Services Delivery and Rural Development: The Nigerian Focus" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4660. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4660>

Transposing Public Libraries for Effective Information Services Delivery and Rural Development: The Nigerian Focus

Chukwuemeka Chukwueke

Department of Library and Information Science
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike
chukwuekechukwuemeka@live.co.uk

Abstract

As day go by, the issue of information services delivery becomes very vital to the survival of the human race. However, the libraries remain the only avenue through which effective information services can be delivered. As to whether most of these libraries, especially, the public libraries, are living up to the expectation in terms of the delivery of effective information services and rural development attainment, remains a major issue. Sadly, it could be right to say that most public libraries in Nigeria are not what they should be, compared with their counterparts in the developed nations. However, the negligence of public libraries in rural communities by the government has resulted in few public libraries, poor library structure and scanty shelves. These contributed in making the public libraries of no effect in terms of information services delivery and rural development. It now seems that the people no longer understand the roles of these public libraries in development. To this end, this paper critically looked into transposing and reforming the Nigerian public libraries for effective information services delivery as a means of achieving rural development.

Keywords: Transposing, Public Libraries, Information Services, Delivery, Rural Development

Introduction

Public libraries are concerned with the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of recorded information for the purpose of reading, study and consultation. In order for these libraries to attain this goal, many activities are performed, which translates to library and information services (Aina, 2004; Anyalebechi & Udo-Anyanwu, 2016). However, the fundamental aim of public libraries is to deliver timely, accurate, pertinent, and reliable information to their users. According to Olowu (2004), these libraries are devoted to improving access to information, and satisfying the user is paramount. Thus, they serve as fulcrum for the social, economic, education and cultural growth of a community or a nation. Reitz (2004) opined that public libraries are now acknowledged to be an indispensable part of community life, as promoters of literacy, providers of

wide range of reading for all ages and as centres for community information services. Hence, Edom (2012) acknowledged that public libraries are library institutions established by the government to enhance independent and continuing education of people. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that library services particularly in public libraries are an integral part of national socio-economic development and improvement of the general quality of life.

Public libraries in Nigeria are part of the government, in terms of administration and budget procedures. The establishment of this type of library in Nigeria, however, has been mostly limited to urban areas, and that has resulted in illiteracy and ignorance among young people in rural areas (Issa, 2006). From this scenario, one can easily observe the fact that the public libraries have an important role in handling the issue of illiteracy and ignorance among the populace in the rural areas. However, this role can only be effectively carried out with well-structured and well-planned information services in public libraries. This is to say that, a good public library with relevant information services has the ability to provide props for rural man to stand erect on his two feet and face the world in its brutality and force. Ogbonyomi (2007) observed that public library should provide for the intellectual, cultural, occupational and religious information needed of all Nigerian society irrespective of their race, culture and occupation in their society. Onyenachi (2012) strongly affirmed that through public libraries, people can discover knowledge and learn new skills, get informed about personal health and well-being, find out about government and local authority service and seek information about employment and business development.

Nonetheless, it has been observed that public library services in Nigeria have declined dramatically over the past years, owing to both the political and economic situation of the country. The financial crisis has particularly had a strong impact and has affected the structure and maintenance of public library buildings, the size and content of the collections and the overall provision of services. Most public library in rural communities in Nigeria, where available, now

serve as reading and study rooms for students and other users who, in the majority of cases, use their own materials and do not consult the library collection. To compound the situation further, not much effort seem to be coming from the various tiers of government in this regard; as necessary support ingredients from these governments, which could go a long way in ameliorating the situation, are for most lacking. This paper therefore focuses on repositioning Nigerian public libraries for effective information services delivery and rural development.

The Public Library: An Overview of the Earlier Stage

Public libraries are said to have existed between 39 and 28 B.C in Ancient Rome (Esterguest, as cited in Nnadozie, 2007). Coming down to Nigeria, the pressing need for public libraries was realized only in the 1940s. Indeed, the first public library in Nigeria was established in Lagos as far back as 1932, being the result of a generous grant of \$6,000 from the Carnegie Corporation. This library, founded at the time of Sir Alan Burns, was largely under European influence and control. Moreover, its location within the premises of the Government House made it very much inaccessible to the majority of Nigerian people, which consequently minimized the impact of library development consciousness among the people (Nnadozie, 2007).

The Second World War, however, created the much-desired forum for the actual growth and development of public libraries in Nigeria. This was the time when there arose the great and urgent need for information/propaganda to be made freely available and easily accessible to the colonized. The need therefore arose for an agency that can effectively carry out this onerous task. It was this need, which brought into focus the issue of public library provision in Nigeria (Mambo, 2008). The need to keep people informed about the war and to disseminate information as widely as possible led to the setting up of “reading rooms” or “public libraries” or better still, “public reading rooms” as they were then variously referred to (Mambo, 2008). However, most of these public libraries were then new, to the extent that they were part and parcel of those institutions,

which received great attention. This continued until after independence. In other words, at the time when the country was just emerging from the colonial past, public libraries, undoubtedly, enjoy government support, especially in terms of good funding, and were also provided with international support with particular regard to funding, book and equipment donations and human resources (Mambo, 2008). Mchombu (2001) contended that libraries received as much priority as other essential services like hospitals and schools”, as they were developed purposely to educate people on the importance of independence and how to maintain it, due to the growing nationalistic tendencies. Left with no better choice as at that time, both governments and former colonial powers could not but offer significant supports to these public libraries (Mambo, 2008).

It is also important to remark that government’s assistance was made possible then by the fact that, at the time of independence, the country had enough resources to establish and maintain its numerous emerging institutions, including libraries. The start of public libraries and their branches throughout the country was a clear pointer of a developmental trend. Above all, the overriding factor was situated within the context of the postulate made by Mchombu (2001) that at independence, there was hope that libraries would help to spread information and advance the pace of development. It was also believed that libraries would help to achieve the best education, as it was the only hope for Africa (Mchombu, 2001). All these have however, changed considerably overtime as Mambo (2008) noted that given the circumstances such as economic crises, deterioration of donor support etc., since independence, the situation has changed greatly and in a negative direction. It is a thing of surprise that after many years of public library existence in Nigeria, most of its objectives are yet to be achieved due to several problems militating against them. Some of these prevalent problems according to Anyalebechi and Udo-Anyanwu (2016) is the government neglect of the role of the public library to the society. To this effect, they were faced with a lot of challenges and obstacles. Oyedum (2005) stated that there was lack of

recognition of the state librarians by the government decision makers. One can confidently say that public library system in Nigeria then was characterized by poor status in collection, facilities, human resources, modern information facilities like information and communication technology (ICT), and poor quality services followed by poor ICT skills among library staff (Oyedum, 2005). Mostly, if not all, these problems emanated from the mother of them all – poor funding.

Nigerian Public Library System in Perspective

Central to most of the definitions of public library is the fact that it is “a collection of books and other forms of records housed, organized and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of the people for information, knowledge, recreation and aesthetic (Maigari, 2002). Reitz (2004) defined public library as a public institution supported by taxation, one that opens its collection, facilities and services without distinction to all citizens. In a more technical sense, Harrod (as cited in Edom, 2012) holds that it is a library provided wholly or partly from public funds, and the use of which is not restricted to any class of persons in the community, but is freely available to all. He stressed further that the public library is a major agency of enlightenment of adults, provided wholly or partly from public funds, and the use of which is not restricted to any class of persons in the community, but is a major agency of enlightenment of adults, providing also for children, the recorded experience of others, which will help them to grow into adulthood.

UNESCO (as cited in Nnadozie, 2007) referred to public library as one which serves the population of a community or region free of charge or for a nominal fee, noting also that it may serve the general public or special categories of the public such as children, members of the armed forces, hospital patients, employees etc. According to Anyalebechi and Udo-Anyanwu (2016), users of public libraries include children, young adults, adults, people with special needs such as those who have hearing problems and even the blind and the visually impaired. Others are prisoners, the aged, nursing mothers, organisations and people in government. Achebe (2005)

emphasized that public libraries are also referred to as centres for acquisition of knowledge and information. They satisfy people's quest for education and specific information as a solution to problems since all age group must find materials relevant to their needs (Nnadozie, 2007). Agodi and Obasi (2016) believed that a public library is one that is accessible by the public and is generally funded from public sources and operated by civil servants.

Thus, a public library is more or less the information storehouse and the custodian of knowledge for posterity in its community of operation. It is not just the clearing-house for all informational, educational and recreational needs for a nation; it is more importantly, a source of power. Public libraries are primarily saddled with responsibilities bordering on conservation, preservation and of course, transmission of the people's culture. As such, they are not only significant as instrument of social and political changes, but indeed, as the principal guardians of intellectual freedom (Chukwueke, Onuoha & Nnadozie, 2019). According to Agodi and Obasi (2016), public libraries perform important function to the development of any economy which includes: rich source of information, supply of educational materials to both the young and old patrons, deliver recreational activities that instill positive values and useful information to community members, common place for cultural exercise that entertains and educates people, offers of lot of opportunities for members to read books for free, offers people the chance to experience community events such as charity drives, classes on crafts and literature and much more, open the door to education and opportunity, provide a warm, safe, conducive environment where people can go to quietly read, do homework, etc.

Consequently, the Nigerian public library system, by its sheer nature and services provision, has come to be considered as the most easily available and the most independent of all public agencies. It is to this end that the public library was once described as an open door, away of escape from narrow area of individual times into the wisdom and experience of all mankind

with its main objective being educational at first, especially for young people and adults not in school (Esterquest, as cited in Edom, 2012). It is therefore not out of tune to conceive of public library as the traditional and basic community information centre whose purpose for existence is to fulfill societal needs by accumulating information and storing knowledge and by disseminating that information and knowledge (Saka, 2019).

Nigerian Public Libraries and the Rural Community

There is no need over-stressing the simple fact that the public library, by its sheer nature and perhaps, orientation, is the most universal in terms of near absolute reachability and accessibility by members of its community. Indeed, it is against the backdrop of its universal philosophy that making its services available and possible to all irrespective of age, sex, race or creed, remained its cardinal principle (Nnadozie, 2007; Agodi & Obasi, 2016; Saka, 2019). In other words, regardless of their needs and circumstances, the community should enjoy beneficial access to books and other related forms of recorded knowledge. This became, even more pertinent, since public libraries are established to serve the public and that this public is not limited to any one class of person in the community concerned but are freely available to all.

Accordingly, public libraries could be viewed, rightly as major agencies of education and enlightenment for adults while also providing for children, the recorded experience of others, which will assist them, grow into useful adults. It is therefore no coincidence that one of the most significant developments in public librarianship has been the library's effort to reach out to the community (Olowu, 2004). Thus, Saka (2019) underpinned this essence in his observation that a good public library system attempts to serve the entire population with all its dimensions of needs. To this end, it is necessary that the public library makes its availability and accessibility known to the entire community, thus bringing the need for it to undertake extension services. As Oklah (2007) puts it, the value of library extension services came with the consideration of the ways the

public library can perform its functions effectively, one of which is to reach out to all members of the community. Certainly, this is in consonance with the American Library Association Standards for Public Libraries (as cited in Oklah, 2007), which expect public libraries to assist people to contribute to the growth of knowledge, make much use of leisure as well as promote personal and social well-being, develop their creative and spiritual capacities, be more capable in their daily occupation, discharge political and social obligation, become better members of home and community, keep pace with progress in all fields and educate themselves continuously.

Thus, one of the basic functions of public libraries is essentially to provide public enlightenment in areas directly attracting the attention of the community. This is also aimed at helping to eradicate the high illiteracy rate within any human society as a step towards the attainment of growth and development in the rural areas (Olowu, 2004). Further still, the public library has the task of assisting the public in their reading skills for the development of its community since literacy is considered as the “bedrock of every development” while the public library is seen as the “focal point of people’s inquiry into physical and social phenomena of their environment” or better still, “the People’s University” (Aleyideino, as cited in Anyalebechi & Udo-Anyanwu, 2016). On his own part, Bengé (2000) remarks that “the public library, in under-developed countries, should be regarded as an agency among others, that promotes mass education and eliminate illiteracy,” underscoring further the essence of extension services as the means by which it can become the cultural centre of the rural communities.

Challenges Facing Nigerian Public Libraries in Information Services Delivery

In spite of its lofty goals and laudable aspirations as already enunciated above, public library system in Nigeria suffers most by ways of neglect, lack of recognition, inadequate funding and personnel, all of which have adversely affected on its services provision (Saka, 2019). Consequently, its growth and developmental process had been largely stunted, allowing for its

unabated drift towards irrelevance as attested to by Bankole (as cited in Ogbonyomi, 2007), when she categorically declared that public library services in Nigeria have not recorded much growth. More than any other factor, the contradiction that is inherent in a book-oriented library services to rural communities of oral traditional members remain the greatest challenge faced by Nigerian public libraries in this direction.

To drive home the above assertion, one may recall that the bulk of the public libraries “public”, especially in the rural communities, is represented in the mass of non-literate, down-trodden and rural majority for most part. In fact, argument can also be made to the effect that a substantial part of the urban settlers also fall in this category as it is now common knowledge that other library systems like academic, school, special and research, serve only an insignificant number of the colony of users compared to that of the public library (Issa, 2006). Unlike these other libraries, the public library has the responsibility, and indeed, obligation to provide for wide range of users including the artisans, roadside mechanics, school dropouts, under-graduates and doctoral degree holders as well as professors in the community. But because the non-literate segment of this community of users is in the majority, they are faced with little or no alternatives in their information seeking efforts (Edom, 2012). Also of particular importance is that the public library system had remained the closest to them, as it is the grass-root librarianship. However, it is a wrong assumption for public libraries to always start on the premise that they do not need or appreciate library services when so little has been done to tailor the activities and operations towards meeting with the peculiarities of their circumstances as a people (Olowu, 2004).

Often times, Nigerian public libraries go in pursuit of their book-oriented services as if though their users are all literate in that medium of information transfer. Not only are the materials found to be obsolete in many instances; they contain information that have only slight relevance to the background and socio-cultural milieu (Saka, 2019). Apart from the fact that public libraries

network in Nigeria is still a far cry from the expected, the few ones obtainable have little blends with their communities such that the people hardly find any relevance in them in terms of their architectural designs, their contents (material holdings) and services provision (Issa, 2006). Yet, Adimorah (as cited in Issa, 2006) remained unequivocal in his submission that the onus of getting information down to the grassroots lies with public libraries more than any other group, just as Opara (2008) maintains that public libraries are the natural resource for formal and informal students and for those seeking information and knowledge for self-improvement and other purposes. Chukwukadibia (as cited in Olowu, 2004) drives home the points by underscoring the issue of our historical documents found in different parts of Europe and America. He remarks that these documents could be of tremendous importance especially in tracing the historical background to some of the events taking place in this country today. He concludes that it is significant that we appreciate how important books and non-books materials are in nation-building and enlightenment of the intellect. This is missing, both on the side of the public library managers and the users of the library. Another significant dimension to the challenges before our public library service provision to the rural community is the emerging era of information technology, which has come to transform the entire sphere of human endeavours-not exclusive of the public libraries. The fact is that for as long as information remains the *raison d'eter* of librarianship, we cannot run away from those realities imposed on us by information technological advances (Achebe, 2005). According to Kamba (as cited in Saka, 2019), problems associated with the Nigerian public library are the infrastructural problems such as poor access road, telecommunication, access to information as well as problem of power supply (electricity). To these authors, effective information services cannot be delivered without good access roads (especially, for mobile services), Internet services and steady power supply in rural areas.

Repositioning Public Libraries for Rural Development: The Way Forward

Public library activities are becoming more and more sophisticated as the sources of knowledge proliferate and the devices for the retrieval of specific item of knowledge become increasingly complex (Achebe, 2005). In attendance to this development, the public library should embrace its position as a reception center for the assembly of communications of every description covering the whole spectrum of knowledge. In fact, all forms of media used in the process of recording messages which are represented in the store of written and printed items such as manuscripts, books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals etc. being the most pervasive, should be adequately provided in the public libraries. But in addition to all these, one also encounters a whole range of non-book materials including microforms like films, slides, microfiche, ultrafiche, suprafiche, microcards and audio-video tapes, maps, photographs and now Compact Disks (CDs), should be made available in the public library (Achebe, 2005).

It is worthy of note to remark that some public libraries are making frantic efforts to provide services to its clientele. In other words, services expected to be provided by the public libraries have become a major concern of library and information science practitioners. This prompted Okiy (as cited in Issa, 2006) who observed the essence of mobile library service which was launched in order to extend library services to everyone in the state, irrespective of location. Other mobile services provided by the state library board, which is expected of all public libraries include prison and hospital trolley services. These services provided by some libraries have become the melting point of the present day librarianship and information science (Anyalebechi & Udo-Anyanwu, 2016) and should be widely encouraged. Sadly, public libraries are to embrace the opinion of IFLA (as cited in Anyalebechi & Udo-Anyanwu, 2016) which revealed that the services provided by the public library should include community information services, recreational activities, reference services, loan services, storytelling, reading, career information, customer care, adult literacy education etc. However, for the public libraries to remain relevant and keep up with the many

needs and expectations of their users, they must be proactive, vibrant, and abreast of the latest developments in information dissemination as they play a crucial role in the advancement of knowledge. So also, they should embrace the opinion of IFLA.

Consequently, public libraries must not only provide the resources and services but also ensure effective use of them by its clientele/community. One way of ensuring this is by taking proactive approach in motivating users to use their resource collections, provide access to the Internet and offer community-based services including literacy programs. Also, perceived ease of use may be the occurring factor influencing whether or not a particular information service of the public library is used. To this end, public librarians have to know whether the right materials are acquired, available and used. This can be achieved through systematic evaluation of the library's collection; there need to be proper library orientation to users because without the knowledge of the use of the library's catalogue and the entire library, one cannot retrieve materials easily from the library (Ikenwe & Adegbilero-Iwari, 2014). This is why Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) believed that instruction in library use aims at developing the bibliographic skills of library users so that they can make the most effective use of the library and information resources. However, one way to stimulate the effective use of books and other services of public libraries is to teach public library users how to obtain information from available sources or services and this is usually done through user education or provision of library guides.

Conclusion

Arising from the fore-going discourse are a number of issues central to achieving a reorganization of our public library system for effective information service delivery and rural development. Apparently, these libraries are more or less deficient in the present forms of operational configuration to deliver services as may be required by the teeming colony of its users. At least, not with the conservative approach to service delivery that superimposes the writing and

reading values upon the oral traditional nature of our communities, thereby making irrelevant, library services out of them. Due to the fact that librarians in the public libraries do not expect to change the community from the oral nature before they can make themselves relevant to them as professionals, a proposal for diversifying the services nature of the public libraries is being advocated here as the alternative.

Although with all the trappings of the conventional public library system, the services being proposed here, represents a melting point for a number of information-related activities where a beehive of socio-cultural activities can be conveniently situated. By and large, the contributions expected from library and information-professionals towards achieving rural development, through public library services have been significantly underscored, as the ultimate success of these public libraries will be contingent upon their professional proficiency, commitment to service, and honesty of purpose as well as sound determination to achieve.

Recommendations

Though the paper have revealed the way forward in respect of repositioning public libraries for effective information services delivery and rural development, it is also important to consider the following recommendations.

1. Government at various levels should embrace the establishment of public libraries, both in urban and rural areas. However, adequate attention should be paid on the ones at the grassroots.
2. Public library management should ensure provision of adequate facilities in different forms of information resources and services. To this end, careful analysis should be done on the users to determine the best means of providing these resources and services.

3. Government and public library authorities should ensure the provision of adequate training and re-training of public library staff on the delivery of information services in rural communities. This is based on the difficulties mostly encountered by some of these staff.
4. There should be proper allocation of fund to public libraries. Also, public libraries should engage in lobbying and advocacy or any other means to further generate income.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, N.E.E (2005). The status of ICT facilities in Nigeria public libraries. *Coal City Libraries*, 2(1), 13-31.
- Agodi, J.E. & Obasi, R.O. (2016). Repositioning public library for economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria. *IIARD International Journal of Economics and Business Management*, 2(3), 52-60
- Aguolu, C. C & Aguolu T.E. (2002). *Libraries and information Management in Nigeria: Seminar essays on theories and problems*. Maduguri: Education-Information Science.
- Aina, L.O. (2004). *Library and information science text for Africa*. Ibadan: Third World Information Services Limited.
- Anyalebechi, L.I. & Udo-Anyanwu, A.J. (2016). Public library services and the attainment of the social well-being of users in Enugu State. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 10(1), 37-47.
- Benge, R.C. (2000). *Libraries and cultural changes*. London: Clive Bingley.
- Chukwueke, C., Onuoha, J. & Nnadozie, C.D. (2019). *Libraries as facilitators of intellectual freedom*. A Paper Presented at the 57th National Conference/AGM of the Nigerian Library Association Held at the Petroleum Training Institute (PTI) Conference Centre, Efurrun-Warri Delta State, Nigeria From 28th July – 2nd August, 2019.
- Edom, B. (2012). *Principles of the use of the library*. Owerri: Springfield Publishers Ltd.
- Ikenwe, I.J. & Adegbilero-Iwari, I. (2014). Utilization and user satisfaction of public library services in South-West, Nigeria in the 21st century: A survey. *International Journal of Library Science*, 3(1), 1-6
- Issa, A.O (2006). Information dissemination to rural Areas in Kwara State. Unpublished MLS Thesis. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.
- Maigari, J.A (2002, January 14). Libraries as instrument of mass mobilization. *The Reporter*, P.16

- Mambo, H. L. (2008) *Public libraries in Africa: A critical assessment*. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 8(2), 67-76.
- Mchombu, K. (2001). Which way African librarianship? *International Library Review*, 23, 183-200.
- Nnadozie, C.O. (2007). *Foundations of library practice*. Owerri: Springfield Publishers
- Ogbonyomi, A. N. (2007). The role of public library in universal basic education and learning to live in Nigeria. *Borno Library and Information Science Journal*, 6(2), 33-34.
- Oklah, J.L. (2007) *Bauchi State public library extension services: Problems and prospects*. Unpublished BLS Project. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.
- Olowu, K. (2004). Access to information: Myths and reality. *Nigerian Libraries*, 38(1), 48-55.
- Onyenachi, J. (2012). *Library services and uses*. Aba: Jopflows.
- Opara, U.N. (2008). Public library in contemporary: Challenges and the way forward. *IFLA Journal*, 34(4), 349-358.
- Oyedum, G.U. (2006). *Types of libraries and children literature of Nigeria*. Minna: Mario Press.
- Reitz, J.M. (2004). *Dictionary of library and information science*. West port, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited.
- Saka, K.A. (2019). *Public library services for a truly democratic Nigeria*. A Paper Presented at the 57th National Conference/AGM of the Nigerian Library Association Held at the Petroleum Training Institute (PTI) Conference Centre, Efurrun-Warri Delta State, Nigeria From 28th July – 2nd August, 2019.