
Repositioning Public Library for Economic and Educational Enhancement in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The study analysed repositioning of public library for economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria. Libraries are the repositories of recorded knowledge. They are thus fulcrum for social, economic, education and cultural growth of a nation. The intellectual attainment of a nation can be gauged from the coverage and quality of its library services. Public libraries have remained underdeveloped in spite of continuous call on the government and private individuals to improve and reposition these libraries for better services. The deplorable nature of these libraries has affected the quality of service rendered by these libraries, leading to poor perception of the public libraries by the society. Primary data were the main sources of data. 25 copies of questionnaires were duly completed and returned by the respondents (Librarians). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings showed that the condition of public libraries in Nigeria was bad and inadequate infrastructural facilities were the major challenge facing public libraries in Nigeria among other challenges. It also found that a collaborative strategy is the best strategy for repositioning public libraries in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends that the federal government should partner with state government to better the condition of public libraries in Nigeria. Adequate and functional modern facilities should also be put in place to improve performance. A collaborative strategy should be implored were federal and state government, stakeholders in education, international and local bodies to give these libraries the desired attention. When the libraries are repositioned for better services, the perception and image of public libraries by the society will change leading to economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Repositioning, public libraries, economic, educational, enhancement.*

1. Introduction

Information is the bedrock of every nation's development. In this era of abundant information production and utilization, "information for all" is a slogan common to every nation. Public library is a people's university and one of the props of democracy. Information is indispensable. Yusuf (2007) asserted that "it bridges the gap between knowledge and ignorance". Berezi as cited by Onu (2005) averred that "information has been recognized as the fifth factor of production". He further posited that "increasing the information component of the input factor mix definitely improves productivity". Enlightened citizenry is a prerequisite of democracy and libraries are the biggest beacons of enlightenment. Libraries are the repositories of recorded knowledge. They are thus fulcrum for the social, economic, education and cultural growth of a community or a nation. The intellectual attainment of a nation can be gauged from the coverage and quality of its library services. A public library is an entity that is established under state enabling laws or regulators to serve a community, district, or region and that provides at least the following:

- 1) An organised collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof.
- 2) Paid staff
- 3) An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the public.
- 4) The facilities necessary to support such a collection.

5) Is supported in whole or in part with public funds.

A public library is one that is accessible by the public and is generally funded from public sources and operated by civil servants. There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries.

- (1) Public libraries are supported by taxes. They are governed by a board to serve the public interest; they are open to all and every community member who can access the collection; they are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and public libraries provide basic services without charge.
- (2) Public libraries exist in many countries across the world and are often considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population.
- (3) Public libraries are distinct from research libraries, school libraries and other special libraries in that their mandate is to serve the general public's information needs.
- (4) Public libraries also provide free services such as preschool story times to encourage early literacy, quiet study and work areas for students and professionals or book clubs to encourage appreciation of literature in adults.
- (5) Public libraries typically allow users to take books and other materials off the premises temporarily; they also have non-circulating reference collections and provide computer and internet access to patrons.

Public libraries should address all primary information and access to information; they should not be superficially "open to all" (Fourie, 2007). Although the important role of public libraries have been stressed in literature, practical steps have not been taken to harness its potential in developing countries. In order to enhance the economic and educational well-being of the citizenry there is an urgent need for government to harness the potential of public libraries. In a bid to improve the information services in Africa, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) recommended a system of public libraries and resource centres, supporting communities of all sizes and recognised them as a vital component of the national strategic information management framework (Amonoo and Azubike, 2005). It is important to recognize the library as a vital organ for national development. This will promote economic and educational enhancement of the society. Economic and educational enhancement of public library can as well be explained from the economic impact of various libraries across the world. The iconic Seattle public library opened in 2004 and generated \$16 million in new spending in its first year of operation. The free library of Philadelphia economic impact study concluded that the library created more than \$30 million in economic value in 2010. The public library is a local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of individual and social groups. The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is common knowledge that the elements of economic and educational enhancement as identified are the major occurrence in Nigeria. Government and private organization have made efforts to eradicate these problems, but how often do they recognize public libraries as the key factors in solving them?

Nigeria position on public libraries

In the 1st conference organized by the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (2015), the Minister of Education Barr. Wike stated that the Federal Government would partner with State Governments in its turnaround programme for the public libraries. The "Federal Government is planning many strategic interventions in the library and information science sector," he said. According to him, "Plans are underway to work with State governments to reposition public libraries in Nigeria as Public Access Venues. He said, libraries will engage with communities to provide such services as E-Learning Services, Skills-for-Life Services, Community Enlightenment and Civic Education Services, Health and Gender Information Services, Career Counselling Services, Youth Collection and Gaming Stations and Small Business Counselling, among others.

The Registrar/CEO of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria, Dr Victoria Okojie in her address at the occasion said in an effort to fast track the transformation of public libraries into public access venues, LRCN surveyed all public libraries in Nigeria with a view to determining the state of the libraries. Dr Okojie said that 21st century library services are characterized by advancement in the use of information and communication technologies in accessing, retrieving and disseminating

information to the public. “ICTs have changed the face of public libraries in many developed countries of the world. For Nigeria to attain the vision as enunciated in the Vision 20:2020 document, concerted efforts must be made to ensure that the potential of Nigerian public libraries are deployed maximally in order to connect Nigerians regardless of their physical locations to the global economy. “A database of over 300 public libraries in Nigeria has been created for the first time in the history of Nigeria. “Justifying the need for turning libraries into public access venues in Nigeria, Dr Okojie further hinted that although access to the internet by Nigerians is put at about 41 per cent of the population, internet access in the rural areas where more than 70 per cent of the Nigerian population lives is less than 20 per cent.

In addition to this, many Nigerian families, according to her, cannot afford end user devices necessary to access the internet, while the cost of home internet is beyond the reach of average families. “In this regard, Nigerian public libraries in the digital age should, among others: provide universal access to online resources for reading, information and education. and the resources provided must be consistent and customer focused which help to build vibrant communities by encouraging community based activities which target social capital creation and civic engagement. It also helps to promote social, financial and digital inclusion as well as support learning in the information society,” she said. The Registrar equally noted that LRCN has through its programmes prepared librarians for this transformation as the number of certified librarians keep increasing annually. She cited that researchers have demonstrated the impact of public Internet access in public libraries on the communities and individuals that the libraries serve and concluded that public access computing and Internet access in public libraries function as a first choice and last resort in offering the citizens access to a range of services. Delivering the keynote speech, wife of Vice President of Republic of Ghana, Mrs. Matilda Amissah-Arthur, a librarian, called on the library and information science professionals to reposition themselves for the digital revolution taking place in the country. She said Librarians have really no choice now than to refocus, retrain and embrace the changing dynamics of librarianship.

Statement of the problem

Public libraries in Nigeria have remained under developed in spite of continuous national and international efforts by the government. Over the years public libraries have not been included in the implementation of government programmes and policies aimed at meeting the economic and education needs of the people. This may be as a result of under estimating the potentials of public libraries to meet the needs of the society. Public libraries services have declined dramatically over the past years due to the effects of economic, educational and political situation in Nigeria. This has affected the quality of service rendered by these libraries, leading to poor perception and patronage of the public libraries by the society. Public libraries in Nigeria also lack well defined programmes and policies. The public libraries need to be repositioned to render effective and efficient information services to enhance economic and educational development in Nigeria and that is what this study intends to achieve.

Scope of the study

The scope of this study will cover aspects of public libraries which include; infrastructural development, management system, fund disbursement etc. The characteristics of all public library system in Nigeria are the same. Therefore, this study geographically was limited to Abia state public library which is in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to present how public libraries can be repositioned for economic and educational of enhancement of Nigeria society. Specifically, the aims are to;

1. ascertain the current condition of public libraries in promoting economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria.
2. examine how government programmes and practices aimed at enhancing public libraries performance are assessed.
3. investigate the challenges militating against public libraries ability to promote economic and educational enhancement.
4. determine the appropriate repositioning strategies for public libraries in Nigeria.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the stated objectives the following questions were raised;

1. What is the current condition of public libraries in promoting economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria?
2. How are government programmes aimed at enhancing public libraries performance assessed.
3. What are the challenges facing public libraries ability to promote economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria?
4. What are the appropriate strategies for repositioning public libraries in Nigeria?

2. THEORETICAL NEXUS

A library is an agency which engages in the collection, processing, preservation and dissemination of recorded/electronic information in the various format convenient to its target users(Olanlokun and sanusi,1993).A library is not just about bricks and mortar or even smart technology. They are places where people from all walks of life gather to read, browse, watch, examine, research, share ideas ,learn, engage and debate(says Lawrence Yule, president of local government new Zealand).Libraries open the door to education and opportunity and those two things are invaluable for enriching one's life. Libraries play an important role in all aspect of human endeavour especially when viewed against its users, which consist of all categories of people in the society. Public library as defined by Crates (1976)" is that authorized by law, supported from general public funds or special taxes voted for the purpose of administration, for the benefit of the citizens of the country, town, or region which maintains it on the basis of equal access to all." The public library offers lot of opportunities for members. Firstly it affords people the opportunity to read books for free(there is only a charge if books are returned late, not returned at all, or returned with substantial damage).Yet libraries also offer people the chance to experience community drives ,classes on crafts , literature and much more. Public libraries provide free services ,such as pre-school story times to encourage early literacy, quiet study and work areas for students and professionals, or book club to encourage appreciation of literature in adults(Rubin,2010).

Public libraries also provide materials for children (often housed in special section), child-oriented websites with online educational games, braille materials, books and tapes, young adult literature and other materials for teenagers, materials in foreign language and computer and internet access to patrons (IFLA, 2009) .A survey of recent literature on public libraries reveals that libraries are more than just repositories for books. They have historically helped many segments of the population develop literacy skills. For example, librarians at the turn of the century helped the large influx of immigrants acclimate to their new life in the United States. These early librarians were "pioneers of literacy training" (Marcum and Stone, 1991), and were called upon to "Americanize" both adults and children .According to Lyman (1977), libraries has always seen literacy for all people as a major objective. Libraries throughout the country have worked over the decades to direct educational resources, human and material, towards helping every child, young person, and adult to learn to speak, read, write and compute. To achieve this legacy of literacy training, libraries have had several tasks:

- 1 .to provide services, materials, and opportunities for those who need them to develop literacy skills;
2. to become part of the educational system;
- 3 .to extend traditional library functions (support and resources) to patrons with developing literacy skills;
4. to try non-traditional ways of serving newly literate populations;
5. to interpret resources;
6. to be proactive in education, dissemination of information, and promotion of resource use;
and
7. to collaborate with other agencies in literacy programming.

Weibel (1992) looked at the role of the library in promoting literacy. Libraries provide access to information about culture, society, economy, and history. The librarian serves as a “reader advisor” by suggesting and interpreting resources in the library. In addition, the library offers learning facilities and materials and promotes public discussion through the resources in their collections.

2.1 Importance of public libraries

Public libraries perform important function to the development of any economy which includes among others as;

- 1) rich source of information
- 2) supply educational materials to both the young and old patrons.
- 3) deliver recreational activities that instil positive values and useful information to community members.
- 4) common place for cultural exercise that entertains and educates people.
- 5) public libraries offer a lot of opportunities for members to read books for free.
- 6) public libraries offers people the chance to experience community events such as charity drives, classes on crafts and literature and much more.
- 7) public libraries open the door to education and opportunity and those two things are invaluable for enriching one’s life.
- 8) public libraries provide a warm, safe, conducive environment where people can go to quietly read, do homework etc.

2.2 Economic benefits of public libraries

Cassel (1994), defines economics as the science of the production and distribution of wealth, the condition of a country, community or individual with regards to material prosperity. Although the establishment of a library is regarded as a social science, it is an investment which does not produce tangible goods .However, public libraries play important role in the economic well-being of the society as it provides information on goods and services. It also distributes films and books within the state. Public Library at this level is making its contribution to the economic development of the modern society. They could also develop local economic capabilities by making available necessary information on income generating projects. Self-employment activities, credit facilities, state assistance scheme, etc. Therefore, public libraries identify its self with the aspiration of economic development of a nation. Public libraries are access to enhance quality life. Public libraries benefit the entire community by providing lifelong learning opportunities to enrich, educate, and entertain. They are also catalysts for economic development. Libraries provide valuable materials, programs, and services to get people back on the feet and skilled staff to help them find what they need.

2.3 Educational benefit of public libraries

Investment in education is everywhere under scrutiny. The days are gone when a simple and direct connection was assured between investment in education and national development (Wali,1991).If educators are to reaffirm their belief that education is today not only a basic human right but essential tool for national development .The role of public library in this regard cannot be overemphasised .The public libraries acquires books and other relevant educational materials in line with the demands and needs of different categories of users .It makes the material available and accessible to the users at minimal convenience. Therefore, the public library is an information agency that assists and guides its clientele in the choice of reading materials. Educational researchers have recently shifted away from a focus on reading readiness and are concentrating more on “emergent literacy” a more interactive, holistic approach to reading development which emphasizes the natural reading and writing behaviours exhibited by infants before formal instruction begins. In emergent literacy techniques, children are encouraged to tell their own “stories,” “write” their own ideas, and perform their own “dramas” as a way to foster their early reading skills. Public library also links the immediate community to the outside world as regards acquisition of knowledge. It also enriches the educational development programmes of the society by supporting continuous education programme, such as adult education programme.

2.4 The Role of Public Libraries

The mission of a library is to provide timely, accurate, current, and reliable information to their users. Olowu (2004) posited that “librarians are devoted to improving access to information and satisfying the user’s information needs” “There is a growing recognition that library services, particularly in public libraries, are an integral part of the national socio-economic development and improvement of

the general quality of life” (Kibat, 1990).Libraries have an important role in the advancement of knowledge.

“This role can be effectively carried out with well-structured and well-planned library services, which include the packaging and repackaging of information” (Iwhiwhu, 2008). Libraries are not to be regarded just as a place for reading; they are centres for research. Johnson and Lanre (2002) averred that the library contributes to education in a number of ways such as:

- 1) encouraging reading
- 2) expanding learning process
- 3) developing learning skills
- 4) developing appreciation, attitude and value
- 5) assisting with development task

The public library provides information, inculcates ideas, and develops knowledge that is so essential to functioning successfully in today’s information and knowledge based society. It is fundamental to equip youths with lifelong learning skills and develop in them creative thinking and imagination, and enabling them to live as ideal and responsible citizens”(Library as a Learning Resource Center, ND).

3.Methodology

This research employed a survey design in the study of public libraries in Nigeria. It was carried out in the Eastern part of Nigeria using Abia State public library as a case in point. Primary data was obtained through self- administered questionnaire and were administered to 25 librarians in the state public library which were purposively selected. Questions asked in the questionnaire covered relevant questions that can address the topic under consideration. Pilot test was conducted on the validity of the instrument (questionnaire). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics which includes; percentages and frequencies.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	14	56
Female	11	44
Total	25	100
Age		
20 – 29	4	16
30 – 39	9	36
40 – 49	6	24
50 – 59	6	24
Total	25	100
Educational Background		
Ph.D.	7	28
MLIS	6	24
BLIS	10	40
PGDL	2	8
Total	25	100
Work experience		
5 years	12	48
6-10years	4	16
11-15years	7	28
16-20years	2	8
Total	25	100

Source: Survey data, 2016

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the respondents in terms of sex, age, education level, and work experience. Out of the 25 completed copies of questionnaire by the respondents, 56% were male while 44% were female. There was an even age distribution among the respondents. The age distribution of respondents are evenly distributed showing that both genders are committed in the profession. Generally, the surveyed respondents were highly literate.

Furthermore, (28%) were Ph.D. holders in Library Science (Ph.DLIS), 24% were holders of Masters of Library and Information Science (MLIS), 40% were holders of Bachelors in Library and Information Science (BLIS) while 8% were holders of post graduate Diplomas in Library and Information Science (PGDL) . Also greater percentage of the respondents has put in considerable years in the system.

4.1. Analysis of Some Questions on the Questionnaire

4.1.1. Questions 1: what is the current condition of public libraries in promoting economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria?

Table 2:

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	-	-
Good	8	32
Bad	15	60
Very bad	-	-
Undecided	2	8
Total	25	100

Source: Survey data, 2016

Table 2 shows respondent opinions on the current condition of public libraries in promoting economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria. Among the 25 respondents surveyed, 8 representing 32% agreed that the condition of public libraries were good, 15 representing 60% agreed that the condition was bad, while the remaining 2 representing 8% were undecided. From their opinions, it could be observed that the condition, of public libraries in Abia State was poor and this could hamper public libraries service delivery in promoting economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria.

4.1.2. Question 2: What is your assessment of government programmes and practices aimed at public libraries economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria?

Table 3:

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very satisfactory	-	-
Satisfactory	13	52
Unsatisfactory	12	48
Very unsatisfactory	-	-
Undecided	-	-
Total	25	100

Source: Survey data, 2016

Table 3 shows respondents opinion on government programmes aimed at enhancing public library performance. 52% of the respondents said they were satisfied by government programmes and practices while 48% of the respondents were unsatisfied. The findings show that government is making commendable efforts in programmes aimed at enhancing education. It further indicates that library users' satisfaction should be the main priority of government. Again, government should bring more educational programmes into limelight.

4.1.3. Question 3: What are the challenges militating against public libraries from economic and educational enhancement?

Table 4:

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor funding	7	28
Inadequate environment	4	16
Inadequate infrastructural facilities	12	48
Poor motivation of the workforce	2	8
Total	25	100

Source: Survey data, 2016

From table 4 above it was observed that 12 respondents representing 48% agreed that dearth of infrastructural facilities militate against public libraries in Nigeria, 7 representing 28% said it was poor funding, 4 representing 16% said it was inadequate environment, while 2 representing 8% said it was poor motivation of the workforce. Findings indicate that inadequate infrastructural facilities were

a major challenge militating against public libraries performance in Nigeria followed by poor funding, inadequate environment and poor motivation of workforce. It further suggests that government should put more effort in the area of providing adequate infrastructural facilities, funding, providing conducive environment and motivating staff for greater performance. This will help public libraries render invaluable services to promote economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria.

4.1.4. Question 4: What strategies do you think can be used to reposition public libraries?

Table 5:

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Collaborative strategy	11	44
Staff training strategy	5	20
User-focused sensitive strategy	3	12
Service classification strategy	6	24
Cultural symbol strategy	-	-
Total	25	100

Source: Survey data, 2016

From the table, 11 representing 44%, said collaborative strategy was the strategy that could be used to reposition public libraries in Nigeria, 6 representing 24% said it was service classification strategy, 5 representing 20% said it was staff training strategy while 3 representing 12% said it was user-focused sensitive strategy. Findings indicate that collaborative strategy were a major strategy that could be used to reposition public libraries for economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria followed by service classification strategy, staff training strategy, user-focused sensitive strategy respectively.

5. Conclusion

Public libraries exist in many countries across the world and are often considered essential part of having educated and literate citizens. As would be recalled, the main purpose of this study was repositioning public libraries for economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria. Findings from the study identified four key issues; the first was the current condition of public libraries in promoting economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria. Findings showed that the condition of public libraries in Nigeria is poor, and this requires government urgent attention as it could hamper public library service delivery to users if not addressed. Secondly, government programmes and practices aimed at educational and economic enhancement were satisfactory but government should try and draw up more programmes and policies as these will enhance public libraries in Nigeria the more. Findings in the study also indicate that many challenges militate against public libraries performance. The challenges revealed include; inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor funding, inadequate environment, poor motivation of workers. Among these challenges, inadequate infrastructural facilities were the major challenge facing public libraries in Nigeria. We suggest that government should build modern infrastructural facilities, provide conducive reading, learning and research environment for the users of public library, provide funds for running public libraries and also motivate workers by sending and organising conferences and workshop on the latest information and technology, recognising and appreciating outstanding performance by workers. This will spur workers into more performance. Finally, we studied different strategies that could be used by public libraries for economic and educational enhancement in Nigeria. The strategies studied include; collaborative strategy, service classification strategy, staff training strategy and user-focus strategy. Findings show that the major strategy was a collaborative strategy although other strategies can also make impact. By adopting a collaborative strategy, federal government and state government, international bodies and other stakeholders in education will partner in synergic manner to help reposition public libraries in Nigeria for economic and educational enhancement.

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