LIBRARY SERVICES TO THE VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes librarianship and its services to school children, and grassroots. It sheds light on the functions of a school library as an abode for meeting the information needs of school children. It further explores mobile library services as a veritable tool for extending library services to the people from the grassroots and vulnerable groups and the need to treat them as peculiar people who should, in no excuse be neglected because of their inability to avail themselves the opportunity of benefiting from the conventional library services. The study recommended that community advocacy programme should be organized to bring the people closer to the library. Additionally, funds earmarked for training and acquisition of resources should not be altered and should be released promptly when the need arises. The paper submits that librarians should make efforts towards reaching these groups to clear their doubt of being served with the necessary library services mostly in this era of ICT where services can be rendered from the comfort of their homes.

Introduction

The dominant ethics in librarianship is 'service'. Librarianship in its entirely is therefore, service oriented, service to individuals and community, twenty-four (24/7) hour round the clock service delivery to learners in a defined classroom setting. Allthese were made possible, much easier and faster by the invention of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which ostensibly is shrinking the world gradually to a global hamlet. It is against this background that librarians are seen as a group of professionals, who relishes and value great deal in serving their clientele, thus, become a propelling force that inspires them to serve.

Librarians as a group of professionals, governed by a common underlying culture of services to humanity; which without mincing words is devoid of any pecuniary benefits; but rather professionals are obsessed with satisfying their clientele needs. Bashorun, Raji, Aboderin and Idogun-Omogbai (2021) noted that librarians should embrace technologies to facilitate and promote library service provision. Library services refers to both availability and accessibility of library services to the users. In the context of this paper however, library services are concerned with the provision of facilities to a large number of small unrelated, independent group of individuals, who have been denied access to easily use them.

As noted by Ogar and Dushu (2018), service delivery refers to how a particular message is being packaged and offered to a target audience; it is an arrangement of how policies and programmes are communicated to meet the needs and yearnings of the grassroots. Librarians must of a necessity strive to defend their profession and be at the peak of meeting the information needs that suit the demands of school children, people from the grass root and the vulnerable ones in our society. There is need therefore to ensure that they continue to soar high in this era of ICT. The study therefore, aims to investigate library services rendered to school children, people from the grassroot and the vulenerable.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the library services rendered to school children, people from the grassroots and the vulnerable. The specific objectives are to:

1. discuss the functions of school library as it relates to school children;
2. explore library services to people from the grassroots and the type of library that serves them; and
3. find out who the vulnerable ones are? And the kind of library services they enjoy.

Methodology

This study adopted the conceptual analysis and systematic literature review to address the issues critically as it related to library services.

Library Services to School Children

Educating school children in this instance means informing them what library services entails; school children will be looked at within school library environment. The question is, what is school library? To provide answer to the question, it must be made clear that there are different types of libraries from which school library forms an integral part. The school library are the types of libraries found in the secondary schools and all other types of libraries function independently and collectively to promote the acquisition of knowledge at all levels. However, the focus of this paper is the school library. School library is defined as an information centre located in a school environment or a school system whose responsibilities and tasks are to identify and collect, process, organize, store, retrieve and disseminate information to the members of the school community, mainly teachers, students/pupil and non-tutorial staff, with a view to satisfying their respective changing information needs.

School libraries according to LIS Education Network (2023) are dedicated space within a school that houses a collection of resources, including books, magazines, newspapers, journals, audio-visual materials, and online databases, specifically selected to support students' learning and research needs, teachers, and staff. School libraries are libraries in primary and secondary schools whose collections are mainly for the young ones. So, all the educational policies and objectives towards the general effectiveness of learning and teaching of the child must be very formidable and sustainable. It is only in this way that maximum success in the higher levels of the educational pursuit of the child can be guaranteed. Oraekwe and Emenari (2010) corroborated this position by reporting that schools are expected to strive to collect and make relevant and appropriate materials for literacy development.

Therefore, to develop the literacy ability of the child, there is the need for a standard school library that has sufficient and accessible library materials which National Policy on Education (2014) mandated school proprietors to provide functional libraries in accordance with established standards. Library materials, according to the National Institute of Open Schooling (2023), are records of human knowledge on paper/online for easy handling, storage and use. To that extent, the school library would have to do well to collect and make accessible relevant and appropriate materials for the child's literacy development. To a large extent, the school library is the backbone of the school activity. This is because much of what goes on each day draws from or occurs around the resources and space within the school library. School libraries are as important to children as the education itself.

Functions of a School Library

The fact that school libraries are places for storage and quiet, they, in the broadest sense work hand in hand with the classroom and complement the public library. It should not have the appearance or environment of the classroom nor should it be a carbon copy of the public library unit. It is a substitute for either one of them. Library services imply both availability and accessibility of library facilities and services to the user as well as the willingness/ability of readers to use the facilities and services. Some important functions of an effectively designed school library include the following:

Supporting Literacy Instruction

One of the functions of a school library is to support reading and writing instruction in school and out- of- school children. To this end, school libraries should be filled with books and other media materials to support student learning in all of the days' subjects to include materials relating to science, health, mathematics, history, economics, geography, music, art, drama, dance, languages, grammar, spelling, literature, computers, and other topics. They are also to build an adequate collection of fiction and non-fiction materials enough at different levels to accommodate the interests and abilities of students designed to check out books for take-home reading.

Helping Students Learn About Books

An effective school library provides a place for teachers to teach and children to learn about

books and book selection. Here, children can experience a variety of book genres and other reading materials in a smaller and more controlled environment than in the school or public library. You can also use the school library to teach students how to take care of books and set up a book repair area for instruction on repair, and display a poster with clear directions on how to mend torn pages, remove marks in the books, cover frayed edges, or fix broken bindings. The classroom library is also a great place to teach students effective strategies for selecting relevant, interesting and appropriate reading materials. A good classroom library helps students locate books easily and gives them room to be comfortable.

Providing a Central Location for School Resources

School library can also be as an organized central storage location for classroom instructional resources. Here is additional space for organizing science equipment, audio players, DVDs, computers games, magazines, and materials that support learning. In this respect, the classroom library mirrors the organization of media centres at the individual and district levels.

Providing Opportunities for Independent Reading and Curricular Extensions

Another important function of a school library is as a resource and location for independent reading, personal exploration, project research, and individual assessment. Every good comprehensive reading program provides students daily time to read independently. The school library is typically the resource that supports children's daily independent reading of self-selected books that meet their personal, recreational reading interests. The school library also provides students with readily accessible print materials, expository books, computer technology, and media for conducting research or completing curricular extension projects. Further, an in-class library offers a setting for students to quietly read aloud and discuss a book with a peer or the teacher. This provides an ideal opportunity for you to plan individualized instruction.

Serving as a Place for Students to Talk About and Interact with Books

The effective school library also functions as a gathering spot where students and teachers can express their lives as readers. Think of it as a place that makes books exciting, that sells reading. It should be a place where students cannot wait to get to where they can talk about their reactions to books, write a critical review and share it with peers, or draw a poster to advertise a favorite book. A few other ideas are as follow:

1. The Library can be a place where students can contribute to a list of "The Top Ten Books This Week I Grade".
2. It may also be place where students can advertise a "book swap" with other students.
3. It can be a place where students plan a dramatization of a book with a small group of peers.

Ebitwolate (2010) asserted that school children in Nigeria need library services for lifelong education and extending library services to children is essential for their future survival.

Library Services to the Grassroots

The opening gambit here should serve to find out, 'who are the people from the grass root or who are the grass root people'? The grass root people are the ordinary people, the commoners, the lowly people within any given community, the flotsam and jetsam majority of the populace at any given community. The idea of grass roots is often conflated with participatory democracy; it gives a deep sense of inclusiveness in policy decision making all geared towards equitable society. Grass root is a term mainly used by the politicians meant to keep close to the local people.

From the definition, the grassroot people are not restricted to rural community alone. This is because wherever you have people, there must exist a segment that is referred to as the grass root. Its central focus is on all-incisiveness, down-to-earth involvement of local community.

There were times when the slogan 'education-for-all' was a catch-phrase on the lips of Nigerian Government. What that simply connotes then was essentially to deliver education to the Grass root i.e. all classes of people domicile within any community. People in the grass root needs adequate information to leverage them from ignorance and poverty which has become a major challenge to their livelihood. The information need of these groups of people varied to their location and preoccupation. Such all-inclusive form of education if to be effective could only be delivered through public library services and mobile library services which can be delivered through their local government councils and community heads or establishing direct contact with them. Rural library service is a public library that is located in the rural community that provides the inhabitants of the locality with services that are provided by the public library. Public library by implication is a library that is meant to serve members of the reading public irrespective of age, gender, or status in the society.

The public library can as well be regarded as library for the grass root people since it is meant to serve the generality of the people within the locality of domiciliation. As stated by the Department of Mass Education and Library Services (2023), public library is considered as people's university. It acts as centre for all round socio-economic and cultural development which in turn leads to a source of quality education of the commoners. According to Akamwa (2013), a rural library is a branch of the public library, which has the same rules, functions and services like it master. It is a library basically set up to benefit all classes of people who live in the rural area. In this case, both rural and the public libraries are partners in bringing information in a trickle down manner to the grass root. The importance of these rural libraries cannot therefore, be overstated because they are regarded as a factor in the development of rural areas as providers of information. This down-to-earth dissemination of information is the hall mark of library services to the grass root people.

For information and education of the grass root people these two libraries – the rural and the public libraries should synergize and collaborate among them to assist in collection, organization and dissemination of information and thus translate them into indigenous and local dialects which form part of the communities' innovative capacity. Grass root people should be adequately exposed to modern facilities in order to increase their pace of information

consumption. From the foregoing, the public and rural libraries are the two main drivers and agencies of enlightenment and cohesion to the grass root people. So for library services to get to the grass root, these two agents must serve as a meeting point.

Mobile library service is yet another veritable tool for extending library services to the grass root people. Mobile library according to Allison (2013) refers to library services and materials that are available 24 hours a day on any type of device. Mobile library service did not start early in Nigeria but took off quite early in the United States of America (USA) as it were, mobile library is an appendage to the public library when we look into history. In a bid to reach out to the library service to the grassroots people. Titcombs in 1904, a librarian of the Washington free library hired a horse and concord Wagon sent books to rural residents of Maryland. In her quote "Before we rest content, every home in the country must be recipients of its benefits. To this end, we need more branches, home libraries for clusters of homes remote from the central library, close relation with schools and more particularly work with children" Titcombs was therefore a major proponent of delivery library services to the grass roots with information that will help them with their information needs.

Mobile library services have always been an exhilarating experience for all those who have benefitted from it, because it is a scam less way of bringing information to the grass root people, matchmaking of people and books together. That is why Akanwa (2013) succinctly describe the experience as the most dramatic of all commonly used type of library service and are indispensable adjuncts to library services. Library service delivery is expected to promote grass root development in Nigeria but in a system where devolution of power is being adhered to and various organs of government are doing their bit, service delivery at the local administration level will position the local people to benefit adequately from government policies and programmes (Ogar, Dika, & Atanda,2018).

Library Services to the Vulnerable People

The concept of library services has been explained at the beginning of this article. Here, the focus is essentially on the vulnerable people.It is noteworthy to remark that most reviewed literature has not given a clear-cut definition of who are "the vulnerable people"? However, a generic concept of vulnerability has been alluded to in the reviewed literature as each discipline tends to view the subject in a slightly different manner. Each discipline uses different outcomes as its primary focus and concerned with different forms of risks. Vulnerability is thus understood to begin with the notion of risks. Risk is characterized by a known or unknown probability distribution of events. Such events are characterized by their magnitude, their frequency, duration and their history all of which affects vulnerability.

'Vulnerability' and not vulnerable people has therefore been defined as the degree to which a system, or part of it, may react adversely during the occurrence of hazardous event. This concept of vulnerability implies a measure of risk associated with the physical, resulting from the system's ability to cope with resulting event. These people become 'vulnerable' if access to resources either at a household, or at an individual level is the most critical factor in achieving a secure livelihood or recovering effectively from a disaster. It follows therefore that the household

with direct access to capital, tools and equipment, and able bodied member are the one which can recover most quickly whenever disaster strikes. Obiozor (2021) posited that to be classified as vulnerable, the person's circumstance must be unable to be altered or by the person's own actions without direct assistance.

From the foregoing, it has become clear that different discipline view vulnerability in relation to their discipline. So to the librarians who do we regard as the vulnerable people? Or what is our concept of vulnerability? To a librarian, 'the vulnerable people could mean or refer to a group who by circumstances beyond their control has found themselves unable to perform or participate in a common order of undertaking some activities not out of their unwillingness but by inability foisted on them by natural phenomenon e.g. poverty, illness, mental/physical disability. In any of these case scenarios, they desire and regard assistance. It is against this background that library services to the vulnerable people should be contemplated. So library services to the vulnerable whether mentally individual or group, the deaf and dumb, physically challenged, the sick patient in the hospital, the sick who have just undergone treatment at a health facility and is recuperating, all should be seen as vulnerable people because for some peculiar reasons they are unable to avail themselves the opportunity of benefiting from the conventional library services.

These groups of individuals must be provided for in this era unlike when library services were manually carried out with constraints, laborious time-consuming routines, slow service delivery. But that era is historical courtesy of ICT. Yet, in that era the vulnerable people were left uncared for; with mobile library services moving to the remotest part of our villages, across the riverine communities all geared towards delivery library services to the vulnerable people who are part and parcel of which every community they found themselves. In all of these situations, a librarian who knows his onions must be committed to unalloyed services delivery to the vulnerable wherever they are found knowing fully well that even the sick need a book. This is because as librarians, one who appreciates the therapeutic healing effect of the right book, considering the frame of mind of the sick and the recuperating patient and so, needs to work in line with UNESCO to promote inclusive education and equitable distribution of resources. So the librarians must be deft in the selection of right materials to the vulnerable at any point in time. They are human who must be treated with utmost care they deserve.

Conclusion

The era of information and communication technologies have brought about leniency in library services to the populace mostly to school children, grassroots and vulnerable people. This means that educational pursuit does not only belong to the rich in the society but to the commoners and the poor as they now have access to the same facilities and services. This being the case, librarians are expected to be proactive in their literacy programmes and mobile library services to unleash the doubt in these groups of people to give them a sense of belonging.

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Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be community advocacy programme to bring them closer to the library. This is because a lot of them might not be aware of what the libraries have in store for them.

2. Funds earmarked for training and acquisition of resources should not be altered and should be released promptly when the need arises.

3. In the face of dwindling budgetary cuts, librarians should intensify effort to minimize their spending on irrelevant things rather concentrate more of rural and mobile library services which could either be online or on site.

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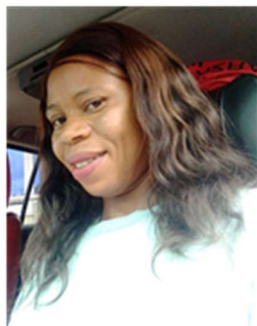
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