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An Assessment of the State of Public Library Services in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

The research assessed the state of public library services in of the South-East Zone of Nigeria. It covered the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The research was based on four critical research objectives. A proportional stratified random sampling technique was employed to secure a sample of 458 from a population of 2,290 respondents made up of public library users, Directors of Library Services and Heads of relevant Units or Departments in the library. A combination of questionnaire, interview, physical observation and checklist were used to collect data. Findings reveal that many infrastructural facilities are available in the public libraries but are largely in dilapidated condition. The research further reveals that public libraries are largely funded by state government with a mean score of 3.56 of the respondents indicating so which invariable means general inadequate funding. Notwithstanding the funding issues, public libraries in the South-East are still viewed as an institution that provides access to relevant information. The paper recommends the active participation of private and multinational companies in the funding of public libraries to ensure optimal efficiency in service delivery.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Assessment, Library Services, South-East of Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

Functional public library services in all parts of the world are indispensable to societal development, effective e-governance strategies, organizational and individual transformation. Public libraries function at varying degrees of service emphasis in different regions of the world, but the unifying factor is their essence of information provisioning to all segments of society and the citizenry to scaffold daily living in the new economy. Today's information society has witnessed a more deeply-rooted altruistic disposition to service delivery by public

libraries. To this end, public libraries seek to deploy knowledge in a more engaging way to serve the information needs of a diversified range of information users in various settings, and through highly customized service delivery for the purposes of survival, enlightenment and development. They engage in the provision of free access to knowledge in print, digital and oral formats (IFLA, 2022) and in addition bridge digital divides through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources and training (Jaeger *et al.*, 2021) among other critical services.

The challenges of public libraries in

the developing countries of the world, lie in the many factors that obviate their effectiveness in transfusing this lifeblood of change to their user communities through effective information and other related services. One of the most debilitating of these challenges is the continuous economic downturn in recent years as enunciated by Taylor *et al.* (2012). This study seeks to carry out an assessment of the state of public libraries in Southeast Nigeria to elucidate their challenges and proffer possible solutions to the identified challenges.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Public libraries are established to support their host communities with information towards multiple forms of development - individual, organizational and societal. As agents of civic literacy such as in e-governance and education for citizens (Jaeger, & Fleischmann, 2007; Jaeger & Bertot, 2009) and also, intellectual and character transformation, these libraries are expected to perform optimally consistently in providing the needed information and services. However, the perennial problems faced by Nigerian public libraries in meeting their information service obligations are well-documented, such as in Opara (2008). The recession and depression in the Nigerian economy, coupled with stakeholders' negligence, appear to have worsened the case of public libraries in South East of Nigeria, according to Nwokocha (1998).

There is therefore, a deep concern that this dilemma may continue to orchestrate a deep disconnect for the public libraries from their roles as change agents in their different host communities of South East Nigeria, if nothing is done urgently. However, for any meaningful intervention to yield the desired impact, the full extent and dimensions of the incapacitation of the public libraries needs to be understood in its current context. This understanding is presently amorphous given that there are no recent studies chronicling the

dilemma. Providing the empirical data to solve the problem of farcical understanding of the full extent of the dilemma of public libraries as change agents in the South East Nigerian society, is the crux of this research.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the state of public libraries in South-East Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the infrastructure and services available in the public libraries in South-East, Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the nature of funding for public libraries in South East Nigeria
- iii. Establish the role of staffing in the performance of the public libraries.
- iv. Evaluate the contributions of the public libraries to the needs of their user-communities

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What are the infrastructure and services available in the public libraries in the South-East States of Nigeria?
- ii. What is the nature of funding for public libraries in south-east Nigeria?
- iii. What is the role of staffing in the performance of public libraries in the South-East, Nigeria?
- iv. What are the contributions of public libraries to the needs of their user communities?

2.1 Literature Review

Public libraries are part of a social system which serves and caters for the needs of people, helping them to live, learn, develop and act as part of the social adhesive which holds communities together in perfect harmony (Brophy, 2006). According to Bopape *et al.* (2017), public libraries have become indispensable institutions by contributing towards the socio-economic development of all citizens in every country through providing free access to, and unimpeded utilization of information. In the same vein, Pyati (2009)

avers that public libraries play critical roles in national and international development. In fulfilling this role they partner with other agencies such as museums, archives, family history centres, childcare centres, learning centres, universities, health services, leisure facilities, local government offices, tourist information centres, theatres and community space (Sidorow, 2012).

IFLA/UNESCO (2001) avers that the public library should play active roles in education and knowledge in the society, by supporting literacy campaigns, as the anchor to societal development. Nwokocha (1993) had earlier extolled the roles of public libraries in providing opportunities for adults to read texts that could exert positive influence on their lives and the way they interact with their societies.

For the less developed countries (LDCs) of the world, and particularly sub-Saharan Africa, illiteracy rate is still high and underdevelopment is reported as a persistent decimal. Unagha and Ibenne (2011) assert that the level of illiteracy in Nigeria's rural communities poses difficulties in the provision and utilization of information for any meaningful development. This factor reflects the lamentation of past President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, that in Africa, we are still trying to reach the villages, while others are trying to reach the moon.

Hoq (2014) notes that though most of the countries in the world have been experiencing urbanization at fast rates, majority of people in the continents of Asia, Africa and South America still live and will continue to live in the remote communities. The author further avers that public libraries in rural communities play veritable roles in educating, informing and empowering the rural populace. For example in the United States, Alemanne *et al.* (2011) advocate that the rural public library plays a vital role in the provision of broadband services to the rural populace. This position validates the belief of

Amadi's (1981) seminal postulation, that true African libraries have the capacity for being the dynamic force behind a preponderant and comprehensive cultural revolution and being the agents fostering the psycho-social renaissance of individuals, clans, towns, communities and entire nations

In order to achieve this onerous expectations, public libraries have engaged increasingly in a variety of policies, programmes, methods and models of service delivery in a bid to satisfy the needs of their respective user communities (Smith, 1994). One of such variety of services is the delivery of e-government services and transforming communities through with innovative partnerships (Bertot *et al.*, 2013; Jaeger & Fleischmann, 2007) and the establishment of virtual library services (Ejedafiru, 2015). As Unagha and Amanze-Unagha (2012) similarly note, one institution that provides information to the rural populace in the way, context and language they are likely to understand and relate with their own experiences is the rural library. The information-seeking behaviour of the rural dweller is often deeply steeped in the oral and aural form, where there is an almost, if not, zero inclusion of the textual form of information reception and use; whereas, a large chunk of potentially very useful information is tucked away in the textual formats such as pamphlets, guides, manuals and books often only utilized by people in the social class of the literate or educated persons.

Pateman and Vincent (2010) and Mehra *et al.* (2016) note that the existence of public libraries falls within a wide strategic context which encompasses broader activities that include community empowerment, equality and diversity, equity and excellence, identity and integration of social classes in information provision. The said strategic contexts of services delivery in the view of Houghton (2014), affords the local library across the digital and physical city, the opportunities for contributing towards people's

economic development. Similarly, IFLA/UNESCO (2001) aver that the public library plays important role in the society by providing individuals with access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas and opinions.

These services rendered by public libraries as enunciated in the foregoing, engender changes in the lives of people within their respective communities, and should be adequately supported as a way of achieving the SDGs. This support needed by public libraries in Nigeria have been influenced by the problems enunciated in Kedir *et al.* (2017) about the growth and development finance required for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa, where there is a yawning gap between what is needed and what is made available to African agencies, including libraries for adequate performance of their roles. In a study by Uzoagba & Okoye (2020), findings show that 80% of rural communities in Anambra State lack awareness of library services obviously limiting the developmental impact of public libraries.

Examining the state of library services in Nigeria, Okafor & Njoku (2023) surveyed 15 public libraries in Ebonyi and Imo States and established that 87% of them lacked functional computers, and 93% had no internet access while most of them relied on books donated by spirited individuals of which majority were outdated. Similarly, Ibe (2023) in his study reported that 78% of libraries in Abia State had irregular electricity supply and leaking roofs which make public libraries unconducive for users during rainy seasons. The situation is not different from the findings by Onyebuchi (2022) who noted that digitization efforts in Public libraries in South-East failed due to unreliable electricity and absence of technical support teams. This situation is also corroborated by a report by the National Library of Nigeria (2024) indicating that South East libraries receive less than 10%

of their annual budget requests making collection development impossible.

Out of 400 users surveyed in Enugu State by Eze & Ugwuanyi (2023), 68% rated their services to be poor, citing outdated books and facilities as main reasons for the low rating while *The Guardian Nigeria* (2024) attributed the decline in the use of public libraries to perceived irrelevance by the public and stiff competition from cyber caf  s. According to Nwokocha & Onuoha (2021) in their study, 95% of public libraries in the South-East depended on government financial allocations with near 100% absence of private-sector partnerships. Ubogu (2019) investigated the mobilisation and use of alternative Funds by University Libraries in Nigeria. The study revealed that fundraising is necessary in university libraries because the institutions have limited options of coping with financial stress. The study concluded that there should be intensive effort to intensify fundraising efforts by university librarians. Librarians also need to utilise a wide array of fundraising approaches. There is also need for an appropriate structure to facilitate successful and well-organised fundraising efforts by libraries.

Odili (2021) investigated the interrelationship between library collection and financial strength of the library to determine the impact of financial constraints on the acquisition of library materials and how research libraries are providing needed services to users. Findings from the study revealed that both research libraries were operating at a level of mediocrity due to poor funding which has impacted negatively on their collection growth and the nature of information services delivered to users. The libraries rely heavily on old collections and local journals and have witnessed a decline in users' patronage. Also, it was discovered that, the factors responsible for libraries underfunding in Nigeria have persisted for decades; there have been additional causes in

recent times such as the world economic recession and the plummet in prices of crude oil.

Bamidele, Adesina, Akalawu and Ike (2025) examined the relationship between staffing and communication in provision of library services to the undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The result showed there was a very high relationship between staffing and provision of library services to undergraduates in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria, there was a very high relationship between communication and provision of library services to undergraduates in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. Also Obi (2016) assessed the influence of staffing on users' services, in colleges of education libraries in eastern states of Nigeria. The result of the hypothesis test indicated that only the issues of Staffing had a significant relationship with users' services respectively.

Saad, Muhammed, Ibrahim, Sule, Bello, and Ibrahim (2024) worked on enhancing public library services for community development and transformation Centres in Adamawa State-Nigeria. The study reveals that libraries enhances students' academic abilities. The major challenges confronting the libraries include Inadequate funding, Poor ICT Skills by Staff, Poor Conditions of Service, etc.

Chukwu, Njoku and Abanum (2022) worked on a study titled towards effective community participation in sustainable development goals in Nigeria: The academic library perspective. The study found that academic libraries possess some potentials in delivering sustainable development goals to the rural communities. It also listed some strategies that will help in actualizing this programme to include organizing sensitization campaign on the different SDGs to rural communities, Partnering with health-related NGOs for health activities and Repackaging information for user. The study also identified

some challenges affecting the accomplishment of these programmes by academic libraries to include administrative bottlenecks from university management, inadequate finance to cater for logistics and implementation, poor relationship between university and rural communities, societal and environmental threats.

3.1 Research Method

The research adopted both the quantitative and qualitative techniques involving the ex-post facto type of descriptive research, with document analysis, questionnaire and the interview methods. The study area is limited to the public library services in the five states of South East, Nigeria, namely; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States.

Documentary data include policy, personnel, operations and fiscal documents, while the interviews were conducted with Directors of the Library Services in the five states and other relevant personnel. Other instruments for data collection including a validated questionnaire tested for reliability was administered on the library users, and a checklist adapted from the Public Library Standards developed by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), was used to assess the physical facilities of the State Libraries.

The study employed a proportional stratified random sampling technique. The population consisted of 2,290 respondents distributed across five states in the South-East Geo-Political zone of Nigeria: Abia (415), Anambra (508), Ebonyi (397), Enugu (496), and Imo (474). A sample size of 458 respondents, representing 20% of the total population, was proportionally allocated to each state based on its share of the total population: Abia (83), Anambra (102), Ebonyi (79), Enugu (99), and Imo (95). Within each stratum, respondents were selected using simple random sampling.

4.1 Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Distribution and Return of Questionnaire

S/N	States	Number of Distribution	Number Returned	Percentage (%)
1.	Abia	83	79	18.0
2.	Anambra	102	101	22.0
3.	Ebonyi	79	75	17.0
4.	Enugu	99	95	22.0
5.	Imo	95	93	21.0
	Total	458	443	100

Table 1 shows that out of a total of 458 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 443 (96.7%) were duly filled out and used for the study. The remaining 15 copies (3.3%) were mortalities in the study. The return rate of 96.7% was considered adequate to serve as the basis for the analysis.

Research Question One: What are the infrastructure and services available in the public libraries in the South-East States of Nigeria?

Table 2: Infrastructure and services available in the public libraries in the South-East States of Nigeria

S/N	Services	A(%)	N(%)	Mean
1	Reference section	5(100)	0(0)	2.00
2	Photocopying Service	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
3	Bindery Service	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
4	Marker space	2(40)	3(60)	1.40
5	Relaxation hall	2(40)	3(60)	1.40
6	Eatery service	2(40)	3(60)	1.40
7	Extension service	2(40)	3(60)	1.40
8	Braille production service/section for the visually impaired	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
9	Materials lending service/circulation desk	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
10	Internet service/Wi-Fi service	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
11	Children section	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
12	Current awareness service	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
13	Audio-visuals	2(40)	3(60)	1.40
14	Rural extension service	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
15	Serials section	4(80)	1(20)	1.80

	Infrastructure			
1	Computer Systems	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
2	Printers	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
3	Photocopying Machines	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
4	Fans	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
5	Air Conditioners	3(60)	2(40)	1.40
6	Sporting Facilities	4(80)	1(20)	1.20
7	Fire Extinguishers	4(80)	1(20)	1.20
8	Braille Embossers	4(80)	1(20)	1.20
9	Rural Extension Vehicle	4(80)	1(20)	1.20
10	Internet Routers/Wi-Fi	3(60)	1(40)	1.40
11	Catalogue Cabinets	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
12	Book Shelves	(100)	0(0)	2.00
13	Reading Carrels	5(100)	0(0)	2.00
14	Chairs in Reading Areas	5(100)	0(0)	2.00
	Environment			
1	Conducive Noiseless Location	4(80)	1(20)	1.80
2	Ornamental	3(60)	2(40)	1.60
	Valid N (listwise)			

Table 2 shows the summary of the percentage and mean of the infrastructures and services available in the public libraries in the south east. 9 items reveal that those services were available, while the remaining 6 items reveal they were not available. Thus, services are available in the libraries studied. Again, the table also shows the availability of infrastructure in the libraries studied; all items revealed that the infrastructures listed were available, such as chairs in reading areas, reading carrels, catalogue cabinets and so on. Furthermore, the same table revealed information on the environment, it reveals that there are conducive, noiseless location and ornamental in the area studied.

Research Question Two

What is the nature of funding for public libraries in South-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Nature of Funding for public libraries in the south-east states of Nigeria

S/no	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	The government funds the library	256	182	1	4	443	3.56	.553
2	Donations from civil society and international bodies	101	307	30	5	443	3.14	.568
3	The library is funded through internal revenue	244	177	21	1	443	3.50	.599
							3.40	

Table 3 shows the summary of the mean and standard deviation of the nature of funding for public libraries in the southeast, Nigeria. The items revealed mean scores of 3.56, 3.14 and 3.50 for items 1, 2 and 3, respectively, indicating that the government funds the library, followed by internally generated revenue and donations from civil societies and international bodies. With a pooled mean of 3.40, we can deduce that different sources fund libraries.

Research Question Three

What is the role of staffing in the performance of public libraries in the South-East, Nigeria?

Table 4: Role of staffing in the performance of public libraries in the South-East, Nigeria

	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	The availability of qualified staff improves the quality of library services	104	131	185	23	443	2.71	.883
2.	Adequate staffing positively affects the efficiency of library operations	83	211	119	30	443	2.78	.825
3.	Lack of trained personnel hinders the performance of public libraries	83	164	115	81	443	2.56	.994
							2.68	

Table 4 shows the summary of the mean and standard deviation of the role of staffing in the performance of public libraries in the Southeast Nigeria. The items revealed the mean scores of 2.71, 2.78 and 2.56 for items 1, 2 and 3, respectively, indicating that the availability of qualified staff improves the quality of library services, adequate staffing positively affects the efficiency of library operations, and also that lack of trained personnel hinders the performance of public libraries. With a pooled mean of 2.68, it can be deduced that staffing enhances the performance of library staff in the Southeast.

Research Question Four

What are the contributions of public libraries to the needs of their user communities?

Table 5: Contributions of public libraries to the needs of their user communities

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	Public libraries provide access to relevant information that supports education and literacy	98	211	50	84	443	2.73	1.011
2.	Public libraries contribute to community development through programs and outreach services	88	235	39	81	443	2.74	.977
3.	Public libraries meet the recreational and informational needs of their users effectively	87	169	104	83	443	2.59	1.006
						443	2.92	

Table 5 shows the summary of the mean and standard deviation of the contributions of public libraries to the needs of their user communities. Items 1, 2 and 3 reveals mean scores of 2.75, 2.74 and 2.59 respectively that public libraries provide access to relevant information that supports education and literacy, public libraries contribute to community development through programs and outreach services and finally that public libraries meet the recreational and informational needs of their users effectively. With a pooled mean score of 2.92, one can deduce that public libraries have positive contribution to the needs of the user communities.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The finding from research question one which investigated the infrastructure and services available in the public libraries in the South-East States of Nigeria reveals that computer services and printing services among others are available in the libraries under study. The finding from the study disagrees with that of Okafor and Njoku (2023) who conducted a study titled the state of ICT infrastructure in public libraries: A survey of Ebonyi and Imo States. The study established that 87% of libraries lacked functional computers and 93% had no internet access while most of them relied on books donated by spirited individuals of which majority were outdated. Further, the study also disagrees with that of Ibe (2023) whose study on the assessment of public library services in Abia State: users' perspectives. The study found that 78% of libraries in Abia State had irregular electricity supply and leaking roofs which make public libraries unconducive for users during rainy seasons. In the same line, the study by Onyebuchi (2022) titled digital transformation challenges in South-East Nigerian public libraries in disagreement found that digitalization efforts

in public libraries in South-East failed due to unreliable electricity and absence of technical support teams.

The finding from research question two, which investigated the nature of funding for public libraries in South-East Nigeria, reveals that there are several sources of funding, such as the government, internally generated revenue and donations from civil societies and international bodies. The findings from the study agree with that of Ubogu (2019) whose study was on Mobilisation and Use of Alternative Funds by University Libraries in Nigeria. The study revealed that fund raising is necessary in university libraries because the institutions have limited options for coping with financial stress. The study also agrees with that of Odili (2021) who investigated the interrelationship between library collection and financial strength of the library to determine the impact of financial constraints on the acquisition of library materials and how research libraries are providing needed services to users. Findings from the study revealed that both research libraries were operating at a level of mediocrity due to poor funding, which has negatively impacted on their collection growth and the nature of information services delivered to users. The libraries rely heavily on old collections and local journals and have witnessed a decline in users' patronage.

The findings from research question three, which investigated the role of staffing in the performance of public libraries in the southeast east Nigeria, reveal that staffing enhances the performance of library staff in the Southeast. The study agrees with Bamidele, Adesina, Akalawu and Ike (2025) who examined the relationship between staffing and communication in provision of library services to the undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The result showed there was a very high relationship between staffing and provision of library services to undergraduates in federal university libraries

in South-East, Nigeria; that there was a very strong and significant relationship between staffing and the provision of library services; there was a very high relationship between communication and provision of library services to undergraduates in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria and there was a very high and significant relationship between communication and provision of library services to the undergraduates in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. Also, the study agrees with that of Obi (2016) who worked on the influence of staffing on users' services, in colleges of education libraries in eastern states of Nigeria. The result indicated that Staffing had a significant relationship with users' services.

The finding from research question four which investigated the contributions of public libraries to the needs of their user communities reveals that public libraries contribute to community development through programs and outreach services; hence, public libraries have positive contribution to the needs of the user communities. The finding from the study is in agreement with that of Chukwu, Njoku and Abanum (2022) whose study worked on a study titled towards effective community participation in sustainable development goals in Nigeria: The academic library perspective. The study found that academic libraries possess some potentials in delivering sustainable development goals to the rural communities. It also listed some strategies that will help in actualizing this programme to include organizing sensitization campaign on the different SDGs to rural communities, Partnering with health-related NGOs for health activities and Repackaging information for user. In the same way, the study agrees with the study by Saad, Muhammed, Ibrahim, Sule, Bello, and Ibrahim (2024) who worked on enhancing public library services for community

development and transformation Centres in Adamawa State-Nigeria. The study showed that libraries enhance community development. The major challenges confronting the libraries include Inadequate funding, Poor ICT Skills by Staff, Poor Conditions of Service.

Conclusion

The study concludes that public libraries in the South-East are critical to the educational development of the Zone but lack modern equipment and infrastructure while available ones are in state of disrepair and in dire need of refurbishing. There is need for private sector support in the funding of public libraries which at the present has been left to government alone which has been able to meet their funding needs. Finally, public libraries require adequate and trained/qualified staff to ensure efficiency of library services for the desired societal development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made;

1. The government at the state level should equip libraries in their states with modern day facilities to enhance user experiences.
2. The government should enhance funding for libraries to improve their services to the society.
3. Director of Library Services or State Librarians should ensure that only qualified persons are employed to work in public libraries to ensure they are useful to users and host communities.
4. Stakeholders in schools should ensure there is community and school collaboration to ensure there is outreach from time to time to enlighten host communities on contemporary information needs.
5. Library friendly individuals, organizations and multi-national companies should be lobbied to support the funding of public libraries.

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