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Library Extension Services as a Strategy for the Development of Effective Information Societies in Nigeria

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explore on the role of Library Extension Services for the Development of Effective Information Societies in Nigeria. It therefore, seeks to identify areas where library extension services can support the development of Effective Information Societies and suggest ways by which these services can be strengthened. Information gathered to actualize this paper was obtained from textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, online sources etc. This involves reading meaning into materials consulted for purpose of achieving a reliable conclusion. The paper further explains the concept of Information Societies, Strategies for Library extension services as affect the development of information and the challenges associated with library extension services. In addition, the paper concludes that transformation of Nigerian society into information society will provide opportunities for the satisfaction of needs and aspirations of her teeming population because information is regarded as the life wire and intellectual heart of every society and library Extension Service which is about the communication of useful information to people, assisting them to learn how to use the information with view to enhancing a better living condition for themselves is extremely imperative. Hence, it is necessary to recommend that, all public libraries in Nigeria should improve on the use of the highlighted strategies to transform their community of users into what is term Information society.

Keywords: Library Extension Service, Information Society, Nigeria

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1.1 Introduction

There has been a general feeling among Nigerians that information poverty has been as a result of missing link between the vast information services provided by libraries and the inadequate awareness of such services by the Nigerian communities. This inadequate awareness of the services provided

by libraries renders the library potential and actual users to misuse their time which is supposed to be utilized for satisfying their information need. For instance, students reading time in Nigeria, has now been taking over by watching home videos, browsing internet for games, social interaction with foreign friends and less beneficial

indulgences (Ogwu, 2010). The existence of this gap usually become worrisome for societal development and possess serious problem in the country as it will lead to continuous high rates of information poverty, high rate of illiteracy, production of unskilled man power for the country, frustration and lose of self-esteem.

Nigeria is endowed with different types of libraries and other information centres that provide required information services for the citizens which could be used for harnessing socio-economic development of the nation. But unfortunately, most of these library services are still largely untapped due to inadequate awareness of such services provide by the libraries. However, with the library extension services, users are helped to redefine their information needs and are encouraged to focus on analyzing information and sharpen their critical thinking skills.

Public Library Extension Services is viewed as the process of reaching out to the people in communities and proving them with information materials either on a weekly or monthly basis. This type of service is rendered mostly for users who claim to be too busy to come to the library

Edoka (2000) cited Harolds Librarians' Glossary defining library extension services as the activities, such as lecture societies, discussion groups, reading circles; and the provision of books for prison, clubs, hospitals, literary society etc., which are undertaken with the objectives of reaching out to group of people who might otherwise be unaware of the library. Traditionally, libraries offer services to users only when they visit the library. In modern times, these services are sometimes extended to users who are unaware of the existence of the library, there by extending the services of the library beyond the confines of the library building. Hence, Nwachukwu, Igwesi and Eke (2010) viewed library extension services as the services that users can enjoy outside the library building.

According to Swanson and Clear (1984) as quoted by Oladoja (2008), extension is an on-going process of getting useful information to people and assisting those people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to effectively utilize the information. Gupta (n.d.) added that, Library Extension Services involves an attempt to interact with the people by informing them about the resources and services of library as well as its importance to them. Library Extension Service is therefore, about the communication of useful information to people, assisting them to learn how to use the information with view to enhance a better living condition.

Therefore, in the recognition of the importance of library extension services as a means of shaping the role of a library in achieving its objectives of information dissemination, it is expected for Nigerian libraries to contribute for the promotion of effective information societies. Considering the library extension services as the provision by a library of materials and services to individuals and organizations outside its regular service area, especially to an area in which library service is not otherwise available. It could include those activities which are undertaken with the objective of reaching the group of people who might otherwise be unaware of the library services and book stocks (ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science, 1983). Library extension services may be of internal extension service which includes orientation programmes and the external extension service includes the mobile library service, publicity programmes etc.(netugc.com).

However, the quality of information services is largely dependent on the quality of instructions provided by the library extension services staff, hence the need to pay proper attention to the improvement of extension strategies for achieving a desired information society in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, seeks to identify areas where library extension

services can support the development of Effective Information Societies and suggest ways by which these services can be strengthened in Nigeria.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of the paper is to review literature with the aim of highlighting on the relevance of library extension Services for the development of effective information societies in Nigeria and suggest ways by which these services can be strengthened in Nigeria.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

2.2 Concept of Information Society

Information society is a term for a community in which the creation, distribution and manipulation of information has become the most significant economic and cultural activity. According to Aniogbolu, Ubogu and Ejitagha (2010) the term information society implies an oriented society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and people to achieve their full potential in promoting the sustainable development and improving their quality of life. Library extension service helps transforming the environment in which the information society is developed.

Moreover, Gouveia, (2003), remarked that society has always been an information society if it has always been dependent on information. Information society means the latest stage of an economically developed society, the main activities and institutions of which are based upon use and development of information and communication technologies. An information society is the one that enables most of its members to engage in productive pursuit that are knowledge-intensive, knowledge generating and knowledge-based, has a communication network that freely circulates information so

that this information is consistently, effectively and efficiently acted upon in the making of choices (Gouveia, 2003).

Information society is *global* in principle, because geographic borders are not recognized by the flow of information. Nath (2009) remarked that, over the last half century, there have been several efforts to conceptualize the essential characteristics of an information society in which direction according to some thinkers, the society will evolve. In various definitions that have been proposed over the years, there are five underlying characterizations of an information society: technological, economic, sociological, spatial, and cultural. Nath further opined that, the wide ranging innovations in information and communications, from cable and satellite television, personal computers to internet, since the late 1970s, have been purported to revolutionize our way of life in such a way that it will define a new social order. Distance learning facilitated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has not only benefited people in developed countries but also in developing countries (like Nigeria). In personal life, keeping contact with family and friends, making friends, even finding matrimonial matches have been greatly influenced by these innovations. The exchanges of information in these instances through an ICT infrastructure, or a more radical idea of information superhighways, largely facilitated by technology have been the basic tenet of an information society. This argument of information society accords the primary role to technology for social change.

The structure of the economy and its recent changes, in which information has come to play a defining role, have been described to constitute the information economy. This term is used to describe a phase of the post-industrial economy that is increasingly based on information-related activities. It involves certain degree of

vagueness as information activities are difficult to define and measure. *Knowledge economy, new economy, internet economy* are some of the terms alternately used to refer to the same or a part of the same idea as is information economy (Nath, 2009). sociologists have conceptualized the information society in terms of changes in occupational structure and consider the preponderance of information work in occupations to have created a new social order.

The thinking on information society also builds around the notion of space, although not completely detached from the economic and social aspects. We can think of a society in which people are connected through the information networks, the *wired society*, that operates at the local, regional, national, and global level to provide information accessibilities as Barron and Curnow were quoted by Nath (2009).

In the same vein Nath (2009) added that, the cultural conception of an information society is closely related to the information environment in which we now live. There has been an extraordinary increase in information in social arena due mainly to technological advances and access to a wide range of news and analysis, entertainment, personal and community help from across the globe through various media: radio, television, internet, newspapers, and magazines, almost anywhere and anytime, has ushered the coming of a media-laden society. Therefore, there is a need for managing the information contents of the various ways that we try to convey or communicate signs, information. Concept of extension services is not discussed. It should have followed that of information society. Forms of extension services should have come under discussion of extension services as a concept.

3.1 Research Methodology

Information needed to actualize this paper

was gathered from secondary sources of data which were obtained from textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, online sources etc. The content analysis was employed since the paper is a desk paper. This involves reading meaning into materials consulted for purpose of achieving a reliable conclusion.

4.1 Strategies for Library Extension Services for Information Society Development

For the achievement of effective information society development through library extension services, it is expected that the library should have a good collection to support all extension activities, in addition to trained and experienced staff. The library possess audio-video equipment i.e. LCD projector, slide projector and mike arrangement. The librarian concerned should be a good organizer, should understand the needs of the different categories of the community and be knowledgeable about the collection of the library, the library should have a lecture hall, an exhibition hall for holding meeting of different groups as **prerequisite** among others (Gupta, n.d.).

Some of the main forms of extension services are identified by Isazadeh (2004) as follows:

i. Library Orientation/Library Tour: In this strategy, libraries inform the public of what materials are available in their collections and how to access that information. Library extension staff may orient the user either in formal way or informally as many potential library users do not know how to use a library effectively. This can be due to the lack of exposure, shyness, or anxiety and fear of displaying ignorance.

ii. Reading Circle: Persons with common interest may be brought together by the library to a reading circle. Each reading circle should be given necessary facilities that will attract

such users to embrace library at all times.

ii. Forming Friends of the Library Group:

The library can also think of forming “Friends of the Library Group”; such group can assist the library through fund raising, volunteering, and advocacy. Publishers can also hold book sales at the library.

iii. Reading to Illiterates: Reading hours for adults who cannot read should be arranged by public libraries. Once they become neo-literates the public library then should take upon itself to see to it that they do not lapse into illiteracy again.

iv. Public Lectures and Talks: A library should organize public lectures and talks by eminent persons and by library staff. This could improve the process of mass contact methods of extension which enables library extension staff to reach a large number of persons directly or indirectly providing equal opportunity to every citizen and providing available information equal to everyone without any restriction, control or filtering provides equal opportunity for all citizens of information society (Isazadeh, 2004).

Other types of library extension services were discussed by Moore (n.d) to include the following:

i. Celebration of Festival/Events and Arranging Cultural Programmes: Such cultural programmes as what can prove great attraction for the community. It is a good idea to arrange popular festivals and events in the library which may also arrange a drama, a puppet show, a music concert, a film show, a magic show etc. This promotes the development of public library sector in a society and justifies the submission of Moore (no date) that the third characteristics of information society is the development of an information sector within the economy.

ii. Book Fair/Exhibition: Exhibition on local history, local festivals, art, photograph and painting at the time of talk, festival, fair, drama, etc., can offer great opportunity to attract the attention of the community. Periodical exhibition of books which have a bearing on topical theme enhances the chances of books finding their readers. Such exhibitions of books might prove useful for the reader in getting interested in books and using them.

iii. Mobile Service: Introduction of mobile library services to provide service to citizens without access to central or branch libraries has devised an interesting variety of delivering methods. For offering this service, the time for each locality is to be fixed and notified earlier (<http://www.netugc.com>). Mobile libraries are vehicles that can be used to take library resources from the central library to clients that live far away from the library. It is a road vehicle especially equipped and furnished to provide a professional library service direct to the people (Eastwood, 1991). People are always excited whenever the mobile library van comes to their locality. They troop out to get served with the materials in the van. Children in rural areas usually look forward to this service because it is not the common thing they see every day.

iv. Book by Mail and Telephone Request: The public library should also provide library lending service through mail. A public library can also think of delivering books to any home bound person on a request.

v. Library Publication: Publications like annual report, reading guide, library magazine / bulletin and other similar publications are also helpful in attracting user community to transform into information societies.

Publications on library services can be written with a clear message for users and in simple language. (Yahaya & Abba, 2017). Examples of such library publications include: (i) *Library Bulletin* and (ii) *Annual Report*.

v. Propaganda: Propaganda through the newspaper, radio, television can be introduced. Some audio visual materials may also be included, such as, films, maps, slides, projectors, TV monitors, DVDs and computers (laptops). When they get to these locations which maybe the village square or at times the village hall, users are made to line up to be served with these library resources. They can also be advised to register with the public library through the mobile library service. This enables them to borrow books from the mobile library for home use.

With reference to gender equity in the information access, Ogonnah (2011) opined that an information society cannot be complete without engagement and involvement of African women. Also, increasing the use of ICTs in extension will narrow the gender disparities in terms of access to information. Introduction of library website is also a good form of library extension service to achieve this purpose.

5.1 Library 2.0 Application

This involves the integration of web 2.0 technologies into library services. Web 2.0 refers to a wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing, 2012). According to He, Tian, Chen, and Chong, (2016), these are online communication platforms including websites and web applications used for social networking, photo and video sharing, blogging, etc. they are computer-mediated

tools that allow library users to create, share, or exchange information. These online media platforms can be used by librarians to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives etc., with their patrons by facilitating conversations and interactions between them.

Since library extension service has become a relevant and strategic issue for libraries in this age of information technology. Library websites can be created and could help to harness the resources of the library (Igbokwe, Ezeji, and Obidike, 2010). The use of such information communication technology (ICT) is useful to users by widening their horizon in their choice of available information sources and services.

Finally, it is imperative to note that to strengthened the effectiveness of these strategies discussed above, as opined by Nwachukwu, Igwesi, and Eke, (2010), the librarian should ask himself the following: What kind of users am I serving? What kind of information do they need? Do they want this information provided? How do I provide the information needed? How fast do the clients need the information? What can I use to enhance the information provision?

5.2 Challenges associated with library Extension services

According to Igbokwe, Ezeji, and Obidike (2010) over the years, libraries are faced with problems of declining budgets, information explosion and escalation of prices of information materials. The basis of library service should be to help its users to solve their information gathering and processing needs. Libraries have begun to realize that extending their information services to entire populace is an integral part of administration, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of service by current and potential users. Despite all these however,

several factors like information explosion, technological and revolution, declining support and funds, budget cuts and escalating library costs, have been responsible for discouraging the library professionals to develop some extension strategies to win the heart generating maximum utilization of their services. The issue of funding is the worst problem facing libraries in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2004). However, Igbokwe, Ezeji, and Obidike (2010) added that the problem of funding in libraries constitutes set back and highest sabotage to the ability of libraries in Nigeria to design and deliver high profit services.

Other challenges affecting library extension services in Nigeria among others include; Lack of library extension Policies: There is lack of a systematic library extension service policy in most libraries in developing countries which impedes their deployment of for effective user attraction. Inadequate Skilled Manpower: There are dearth of skilled manpower in the area of reference services especially in public libraries in Nigeria. Active library users are lost in some libraries because there is no knowledgeable staff to win their attention. In addition to these there is inability of government to monitor effectively the Policy on library extension services.

Conclusion:

Transformation of Nigerian society into information society will provide opportunities for the satisfaction of needs and aspirations of her teeming population because information is regarded as the life wire and intellectual heart of every society. Though, there has been a general feeling among Nigerians that information poverty has been as a result of missing link between the vast information services provided by libraries and the inadequate awareness of such services by the Nigerian communities. Library Extension Service which is about the communication of useful information to people, assisting them to learn how to use the information with view to

enhancing a better living condition for themselves is extremely imperative for its role of assistance given to users to help them to identify and analyze their information needs and to become aware of the opportunities for satisfying such information needs. Hence, It is necessary to recommend that, all public libraries in Nigeria should improve on the use of the highlighted strategies to transform their community of users into what is term Information society in which the creation, distribution and manipulation of information has become the most significant economic and cultural activity.

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