

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE FOR OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the library and information services for the out of school children. Information provision to the out of school children in Nigeria have suffered a complete neglect over a long period of time and this has led to the situation whereby the out of school children are starved of information. This paper therefore, discussed the role of libraries and information centers in the provision of library and information services to the out of school children in the national development, challenges militating against the provision of library and information services to the out of school and the way forward. The major recommendations were include; adequate funds should be made available for the acquisition of information resources and the provision of quality library services to the out of school children; information and communication infrastructure should be given urgent attention and appropriate to the present global in information economy; there should be enlightenment programs to enlighten the citizenry and government on the important of libraries; establishment of libraries especially in the rural areas.

Keywords: *library and information science, information services, and out of school children*

Introduction

The term “library and information science” is understood to be concerned with recordable information and knowledge and the services and technologies to facilitate their management and uses. Library and information science encompasses information and knowledge creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization, and description, storage and retrieval, presentation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination and management (Fourie & Dowell 2014).

Libraries are synonymous with the education and can have multitudinous effects to stimulate economic, social and cultural development. Besides, lending books libraries are encompassing in rendering material for research goals. All cannot procure each book or journal for their educational objectives. Thus, their dependence is on the library and its services. Libraries play a pivotal role in the nation’s development and also, viewed as gateways to information and culture. Libraries through its resources and services proffer various possibilities in learning, assisting literacy, education and aids in molding the innovative thoughts and views help to shape the new ideas and perspectives which are

crucial to imaginative and modern society. The idea is to ensure the provision of trustworthy information that is generated and collected by preceding generations. The non-existence of libraries can't be imagined in a world as it would create difficulties in advancing research and preserving the world's accumulated information and traditions for upcoming generations. (Gupta 2017)

The pre-eminent postulates of exercise for librarians and libraries are to assure that all persons despite their identity such as age, gender, disability, religion, caste, creed, socioeconomic status and so on can access the libraries and its services without any distinction. However, not everyone has access to it; these people may be referred to as "disadvantaged people". These people may have a disadvantage from the rest due to physical conditions and ailments, age-related disorders or the economically weaker section (below the poverty line, reserved categories like SC/ST). Disadvantage people/out of school children should not be treated as a lost cause. With the right kind of support and motivations, they can prove to be assets rather than a liability for the nation and can lead to self-development and play an active role in societal progress. These people prove that disability is just in a state of mind. Concentrating on the economically weaker section mainly covered under the below poverty line category; these people have a very bleak and dismal future as they have limited or no access to education and its premises like schools and libraries

Concept of Out of School Children

Out of school children (OOSC) as defined by Educate A Child (EAC) (2019) are children of the official primary school age-range or older, usually below the age of 18 years, who are not participating in primary or secondary level education programs. According to Ikiyei Donkemezuo, Precious and Seribofa (2022) they are school dropouts and those who are not privileged to attend schools at all or engage in any meaningful skills that can prepare them for a better future.

Types of out of school children (OOSC)

- **Children who do not have access to a school:** These children will never attend unless they gain access.
- **Children who have access to school but who are not enrolled:** These children either never enter school or will enter school late.
- **Children who have access and have enrolled in school but who do not attend.**
- **Children who have dropped out of the education system.**
- **Children who are in emergency and/or crisis situations and not participating in any organized education program.** These children may be displaced and in temporary living conditions with no schools or organized educational opportunities available.

Concept of Library and Information Services

Library and information services entails all the efforts to assist users make use of the library collection and its databases. Libraries are service oriented institutions. This confirms the

fourth Law of Library Science as propounded by Ranganathan that “Books are for Use”. The followings are some the services provided by a library to out of school children/special groups.

1. **Bookmobile service:** Bookmobile services can also be called mobile library service. Eastwood as cited in (Akanwa cited in Anyanwu & Joy 2023) defined the mobile library as “a road vehicle especially equipped and furnished to provide a professional library service direct to the people”. The mobile library is one of the main avenues through which the public library provides library services and resources from the main or central library to clients that live far away from the library.
2. **Library services to children:** this service is provided by public and school libraries. The library is very essential in the psychological, social and emotional development of the child. Children department of the library is decorated with pictures and other audio visual materials to make it amusing, interesting, warm and appealing to children.
3. **Services for special groups:** Special groups like the visually impaired, deaf, dumb, lame etc. are also part of the library clientele. As a result, special facilities like braille books and talking books (recordings of books and articles) are provided as they cannot use ordinary books because of their visual impairment. For the paralyzed or other handicaps, ramps are provided for those who are confined to wheelchairs and anyone who has difficulty using the staircase. Other people that need special services are adolescents and the senior citizens.
4. **Outreach /extension service:** this service is usually carried outside the library to those who may not come to the library or are not aware of library resources and services. It could be an avenue to inform the rural populace, local schools or artisans on the importance of sending their wards to the library and making use of the library themselves. Extension service is a service provided by a library, which delivers library materials to members of the community that are unable to visit the library.

Challenges of providing library and information services to out of school children

Libraries in Nigeria are facing a lot of problems and this has affected the way they discharge their duties to members of the society. These problems hinder effective library services and have affected the performance of libraries in achieving their objectives which is satisfying the users. The challenges as identified by Okafor cited in (Anyanwu & Joy 2023) include:

1. **Inadequate funding of libraries:** Libraries have to be appropriately funded if they are to be effective and attractive. But many libraries worldwide are under-funded. Inadequate or total lack of funding is seriously affecting the activities of libraries in Nigeria. Among the various types of libraries, the public and school libraries suffer more neglect from the government than others, public and school libraries receive no funding from their government to buy books. Adequate funding is also needed for the building, for acquiring relevant materials, library furniture, for continuing education, for computers with Internet access and for running costs. The problem of funding is the major constraint of ICT

application in libraries. Funding is required not only for the acquisition of the hard and software but updating and maintenance are very crucial in order to sustain it.

2. Lack of professional/insufficient staff: Many libraries in poor countries are run by nonprofessional staff. It is assumed that any volunteer or teacher can manage a library. But the quality of a library service depends on the professional quality of its staff, and this in turn depends on the quality and relevance of the training that they have received. Running a library with unprofessional staff is like teaching without professional background. Another aspect of the problem is the low pay of librarians and the lack of training opportunities available in many countries. Linked to this is the issue of poor motivation leading to high staff turnover where, for example, librarians in public libraries are paid very low wages compared to university or private sector librarians. Many libraries in Nigeria do not have adequate staff to provide effective and efficient services to their numerous patrons. This has been attributed to the embargo placed on employment by the government at the various levels. Currently, there is lack of staff to man the rural libraries. Some of these rural libraries are no longer offering library services to children and the handicapped or carrying out extension services that will benefit members of the society because they lack the staff to perform the these duties.

3. Non-operation of mobile libraries/mobile library vans: the only way to reach out to members of the society who live in the hinterland is through mobile libraries but it is very difficult to carry out this service because all the mobile library vans are of the public libraries are not functional and some do not have any. They do not have the money to acquire new ones or even repair the old ones.

4. Inadequate information materials: Most Nigerian libraries do not have adequate information materials to go round those who need them. In some instances, where they have, most of them are not current. The academic libraries are better off because of the special intervention funds they receive but the public and school libraries are not so fortunate. They only depend on donations from foreign bodies, non-governmental organizations and philanthropists. If this is the case with the central library, the situation is certainly worse in the rural areas. Some school libraries cannot boast of libraries as what they have are some books packed in cartons. They rely on foreign book donations or simply do not have enough relevant titles in the local language.

5. Inappropriate/inadequate buildings: Books, computers and audio-visual materials are very sensitive and have to be protected from extreme weather conditions, be it rain and humidity or sun and heat. Ideally they need to be kept in a dry, temperate environment. In tropical countries this would require an air-conditioned environment. The building and library materials need to be protected by bars and proper doors. During office hours, ideally, a surveillance person, camera or appropriate equipment should prevent materials from being stolen. Protective measures are very cost-effective and are unaffordable for most libraries. In some cases, libraries are not purpose built and this affects the services

rendered by them as the space is not adequate for the various sections of the library. Most times librarians are not involved during the planning of the buildings.

The way forward

1. **Provision of adequate funds:** Funding is a primary hindrance for libraries. The chief issue is a requirement of appropriate funds for successful implementation of any programme.
2. **Provision of infrastructure:** Providing of infrastructure in villages to take up library initiatives interaction with Panchayats and village people and creating awareness about the importance of education and libraries and winning over their support.
3. **Setting up the model centers:** To set up the model centers at district levels to keep records and statistics of setups.
4. **Regular field visits:** The requirement of conducting regular field visits and inspections to ensure the quality of services and proper usage of resources.
5. **Training of Human resource.** As discussed above, this factor plays the crucial role to achieve maximum by putting minimum inputs. For working among poor people, social bonding is must and time to time we must update and upgrade our personals so that their capacity to produce the outcomes should be at level best. Training of staff must involve attending the conferences, workshops, seminars and short-term training courses.
6. **Establishing social clubs,** discussions groups and peer groups so that they can interact with one another and share their interest's, feelings, problems and opinions and support each other.
7. **Openness:** The staff should have the friendly attitude and a calm and patient demeanor to have open communication with these people so that they should feel free to give their recommendations and opinions to the staff and such should be implemented
8. **Collaboration and discussions with NGO's:** (Non-Governmental Organizations). The purpose of the library can actualize by joining hands with various government agencies, NGO'S and cooperative societies working in the similar direction. Knowledge generation and new forms of potential relationship to the degree, those who don't have access to information remain entirely dominated by those who have the information

Conclusion

Stipulation of vital knowledge to have-nots is consequently crucial. The necessity is to render social equity and is a central human virtue. Thus, in the age of information explosion, it is just not enough to exploit the information in various formats but also providing these information services to users or society, especially paying attention to socially disadvantaged. The provision of accessing the information resources and conducting the training on how to assess these resources should be organized free of cost, especially for disabled and disadvantaged people.

Recommendations

Based on the study the followings were recommended

- 1 Adequate fund should be made available for the acquisition of information resources and the provision of quality library services to the out of school children.
2. Information and communication infrastructure should be given urgent attention and appropriate to the present global in information economy.
3. There should be enlightenment programs to enlighten the citizenry and government on the important of libraries
4. Establishment of libraries especially in the rural areas.

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