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Abstract

A public library is a library that is accessible by the general public and generally funded by the government through public success such as taxes and levies. This study examined public library services in Ogun state from the perspective of identities of users, their perceived benefits, and impacts of the library on the socio-economic wellbeing of the users. The descriptive research method was employed and a questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. Three thousand copies of the questionnaires were administered in the four zones of the state where the library has headquarters and braches. Two thousand one hundred copies (70%) of the questionnaire completed, returned and found useful for the study. Findings revealed that majorities of public users are school leavers and graduates who are searching for information for personal and professional development in the area of sports, politics and economic affairs. The benefits and perceived impact of using public library were also reported.

Key Words: Public Libraries, Users, Evaluation of Public Libraries, Benefits

Introduction

The public library is the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994). Public libraries in the view of Eze, (2012) are libraries made by the government for the use of the populace. International Federation of Library Association and Institution IFLA (2001), as cited in (Eze, 2012) stated that “the public library is an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local government, state government, or national government or through some other form of community organizations”. The public library is generally funded from public sources such as taxes.

It is operated by librarians and library paraprofessionals, who are also civil servants. There are five fundamental characteristics common to public libraries: they are funded through taxes; they are governed by a board to serve the public interest; they are open to all, and every community member can access the collection; they are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided, and they provide basic services without charges. Public libraries are distinct from research libraries; school libraries, and other special libraries in that their mandate are to serve the general public's information need rather than the needs of a particular school, institution, or research population. Public libraries also provide free services such as preschool story times to encourage early literacy, quiet study and work areas for students and professionals, or book clubs to encourage appreciation of literature in adults. Public libraries typically allow users to borrow books and other materials, i.e. take off the premises temporarily; they also have non-circulating reference collections and provide computer and internet access to patrons.

In the same thought, the public library provides access to knowledge, information and work of imagination through a range of resources and services. This is more reason why Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu, (2012) remarked that "it is concerned with the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of recorded information for the purpose of reading, studying and consultation". The public library, however, is established to provide materials, which communicate experience and ideas from one person to another and make them easily and freely available to all people. It is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age gender, religion, language, disability, employment status and educational attainment. Saur (2001) states that the primary purposes of the public library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. They have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas, and opinions.

In the light of the above, there is a need for all age groups to find materials relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental. Material available in the library needs to reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavor and imagination. Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressure. To this end, this study focused on identifying the demographic information about the users of public libraries in Ogun state and to find out the perceived impact and benefits of the libraries on their socio-economic lives.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims at analyzing the users of the public libraries in Ogun state, demographically and to find out their views on the relevance of the libraries to their social economic and educational lives. The specific objectives are to find out:

- the demographic distribution of the respondents;
- information sought by the respondents in the libraries;

- respondent's activities during library visitation;
- means of accessing library resources;
- library resources used by the respondents; and
- respondents' level of satisfaction with the libraries' services

Research Questions

1. What is the demographic distribution of the respondents?
2. What are the specific pieces of information sought by the respondents in the libraries?
3. What are the respondent's activities during library visitation?
4. What are the means of accessing library resources?
5. What are the library resources used by the respondents?
6. What are the respondents' levels of satisfaction with the libraries' services?

Literature Review

The public library in Ogun state was inaugurated in 1976 shortly after the creation of Ogun state on 7th May, 1991. The edict establishing Ogun state library board was signed into law by then Military Governor of the state: Navy Captain Oladeinde Joseph in order to Ogun state government to promote reading culture of the people. Ogun State House of Assembly through resolution No. 70 of November, 2003 approved the creation of libraries and information centers in twenty local government area of the state. Public libraries in Ogun state and their locations are Simeon Adebo libraries, Presidential Boulevard, Kuto Abeokuta (Headquarters); Salimotu Kuku memorial library, Itoro, Ijebu – Ijebu-Ode (Branch Library); Sagamu Zonal libraries, Makun Sagamu (Branch Library) and; Ilaro Zonal library, Ilaro (Branch Library).

Some studies had been done on public library services in Ogun state. Simisaye (2009) assessed the use of acquisition of books of Simeon Adebo Public Library, Abeokuta using records of acquisitions and library use kept by the library from 2004 to 2008. The study was carried out to assess how the library has fared following some recent effort by the Ogun State Government to renovate and equipped the library in the year 2003. Findings of the study revealed among other things that most of the books acquired (98.8%) came in as gifts and only 2.2% was actually purchased. Subject analysis of books consulted and borrowed showed that books in class 500 (pure sciences) were most consulted and borrowed by the library users. Also, more male patronized the library in both the junior and adult sections and level of use by children is low. He made the following recommendations: library needs to beef up its collection without relying on donation of reading and library usage among the general public in Abeokuta and its environs. This campaign should be taken to schools; primary and secondary schools; civil servants, marketplaces and higher institutions in the areas the library serves; the library also needs to enlighten its users on how to maximize usage and increase the library as record shows their low patronage in relation to the male counterpart; the library should be mounting programs specifically for the promotion of reading among children in the areas the library serves as their schools in the state, among others.

Akinola, Apotiade, Ogunmodede, and Oyetola (2013) conducted a survey of the services of public libraries in meeting the information needs of post-secondary school students in three selected public libraries in Nigeria. They examined the services of the public libraries in meeting the information needs of Post-Secondary School Students in public libraries in Nigeria. The study adopted a Descriptive Survey Design and the Simple Random Sampling Techniques was used to select one hundred and fifty respondents (Post-Secondary School Students) in three selected public libraries, which are, Oyo, Ogun and Kwara State Library Boards. The questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data for the study, while descriptive statistics with tables of frequencies and percentages were used in analyzing the data. The study revealed that the information needs of the Post-Secondary School Students were information on academic work, personal development and sports news and recreation. Different services rendered by public libraries were looked into. Inadequate information resources were the major factor militating against the public library services to the post-secondary school students. Various reasons why post-secondary school students use the public library were also highlighted. The authors concluded that the libraries were founded to cater for the information needs of members of the community they serve. This objective has to a greater extent been achieved by the public libraries through the provision of various information resources and services to meet the needs of their diverse users (including post-secondary school students). The public libraries provide services like lending, reference, extension, internet, reading materials and library use instruction services to meet the needs of the post-secondary school students. The post-secondary school students and other numerous users rely on the public library services in order to support their academic activities, prepare for examinations, recreation and entertainment, personal development current affairs and decision-making processes. They further concluded that users encounter impediments like inadequate information resources, inadequate power supply to access the internet, and inability to get useful information from the library. Owoeye and John – Okeke, (2012) regarded public libraries a valuable assets in meeting a community's strategic goals. Their study investigated strategies for development of public libraries in Lagos state, Nigeria, a neighboring state to Ogun state. The major findings were that public libraries in Lagos state were not adequately funded and that the state government has yet to meet the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) standard of public library establishment. The Study highlighted the challenges facing public libraries in Lagos and offered some remedies. These remedies are recognition of the importance of public libraries to the society and provision of strong financial commitment needed to move them forward. Involvement of private organizations in public library development programs to increase and improve their services.

Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) conducted a survey on the state of public libraries in Nigeria. The survey revealed that there are 316 public libraries in Nigeria with 598 qualified librarians. In general, many of the libraries lack the necessary ICT facilities to provide quality service delivery in the information society. This will increase traffic in public libraries which is the "people's university". The rural populace will also benefit as most of them do not have the purchasing power to have these ICT facilities in their homes. LRCN also recommended that access to information is a basic right that people must have for human development and Information Communication Technology (ICT) is the driver of the information economy.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research of ex-post facto design was used in the study. Convenience sampling technique was adopted to select three thousand respondents for the study and the sample was distributed proportionately, according to geographical and population size, in the four zones of public library services in Ogun state. These are Abeokuta 1,000, Ijebu-Ode 750, Sagamu and Ilaro 500 respondents respectively. A questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection. Three thousand (3,000) copies of the questionnaire developed for the study were randomly administered on respondents in the four locations of the library in Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Ilaro, and Sagamu. That is the four zones into which the state is divided. Two thousand, one hundred copies of the questionnaire (70%) were returned and used. See Table 1 for data on the questionnaire administered and rate of return. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies.

Table 1: Questionnaire Administration and Rate of Return

The Public Libraries and their Location	Copies Administered	Copies Returned	% of Copiers Returned
Simeon Adebo Library, Abeokuta (Headquarters)	1,000	695	70.0
Kuku Memorial Library, Ijebu-Ode (Branch Library)	750	578	58.0
Sagamu Zonal Library, Sagamu (Branch Library)	750	500	76.0
Ilaro Zonal Library (Branch Library)	500	327	33.0
Total	3,000	2,100	70.0

Findings and Discussion

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 2,100)

Demographic Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender Distribution	Male	1,302	62
	Female	798	38
	Total	2,100	100
Age Distribution	15 – 20	736	35
	21 – 25	525	25
	26 – 30	49	02
	31 – 35	252	12
	36 – 40	454	22
	41 and above	84	04
	Total	2,100	100
Marital Status	Single	1,179	56
	Married	924	44
	Divorced	000	00
	Total	2,100	100
Educational Background	Masters' Degree	252	12
	First Degree	462	22
	NCE/Diploma/A' level	588	28
	Certificate	798	38
	Total	2,100	100
Employment Status	Paid Employment	252	12
	Self-Employment	273	13
	Unemployed	671	32
	Retired	84	04
	School Leavers	820	39
	Total	2,10	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The respondent's rate of the administered questionnaire is 2,100 (70%). The results showed that 1,302 (62%) respondents were males while 798 (38%) were females. The breakdown of the rate of response in each of the library is presented in Table 1. Majority of the respondents, 736 (35%) were between 15 – 20 years, 252 of them (25%) were between 21 – 25 years, 454 respondents (22%) were between 36 – 40 years and 84 respondents (4%) were within 41 years and above. Analysis of the educational attainment of the respondents indicate that majority of them, 798 (38%) are school leavers, 252 respondents (12%) had Masters' Degree while others had the various qualifications above ordinary level certificate. 1,176 (56%) respondents were single. This is expected as the majority of the respondents are school leavers and young graduates. Furthermore, their employment status revealed that 12% and 13% of the respondents were in paid employment and self-employed respectively, while 671 (32%) and 84 (4%) were retired and unemployed respectively.

Table Three: Information Sought by the Respondents in the Libraries

Information Needs	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Information concerning profession	210	10.0	10.0	10.0
General information or current affairs	210	10.0	10.0	20.0
Information for personal development	861	41.0	41.0	61.0
Information on government activities/politics	210	10.0	10.0	71.0
Information on business and economic affairs	399	19.0	9.0	90.0
Information on sports	210	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	2,100	100.0	100.0	

Considering the above, the information needs of respondents are information concerning profession, general (current affairs) information, information on government and politics and sports, 10% each. 41% of them (861 respondents) sought information on personal development information and 19% wanted information on business and economic affairs. Other reasons for using the public libraries by the respondents are [presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' Activities during Library Visitation

Activities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
For personal/private study	105	5.0	5.0	5.0
Obtaining materials/information on subjects of interests	798	38.0	43.0	
Studying, using my own resources	504	24.0	24.0	67.0
Reading for general knowledge acquisition	210	10.0	10.0	67.0
Avoiding Disturbance	210	10.0	10.0	77.0
To relax	294	14.0	14.0	86.0
Total	2,100	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Means of Accessing Library Resources

Means of Access	Frequency	Percent Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Direct browsing of shelves	882	42.0	42
Use of library catalogue	420	20.0	62
Trough assistance from staff	798	38.0	100
Total	2,100	100.0	

As presented above and equal number of the respondents visited the libraries for the following respective reasons: for personal/private study, obtaining materials/information on subjects of interest, studying using their person resources, reading for general knowledge acquisition, avoiding disturbance and to relax respectively. This shows that users of the libraries do not depend on materials in the library alone; they also make use of their own resources. Furthermore, majorities of the users use library materials by direct browsing of the self (42.0%) which is the most popular means of accessing needed materials as only 38.0% makes use of catalogue and, other sought assistance from library staff. The various kinds of resources sought by this category of users are as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6: Library Resources Used by the Respondents

Resources	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Government Documents	105	5.0	5.0	5.0
Textbooks	798	38.0	38.0	43.0
Newspapers	294	14.0	14.0	57.0
The Internet	210	10.0	10.0	67.0
Encyclopedia	294	14.0	14.0	81.0
Magazines	294	14.0	14.0	95.0
Journals	105	5.0	5.0	95.0
Total	2,100	100.0	100.0	

The most consulted resources in the library are textbooks (38.0%). This finding agrees with the fact that majorities of the users are school leavers as revealed by demographic composition of respondents earlier. It is also an indicator of a wide variety of information sources that are sought after by the users. Analysis of data on the level of user satisfaction with the services of the libraries indicated that majority of the respondents are satisfied with the services of the libraries as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with the Libraries' Services

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Satisfied	798	38.0	38.0	38.0
Satisfied	1,092	52.0	52.0	90.0
Not Satisfied	104	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	2,100	100.0	100.0	

Conclusion

This study examined the concept of public library, public library users, and benefit to and perceived impact on users with particular emphasis on public libraries in Ogun State, Nigeria. The users of the public libraries in Ogun State are diverse, cut across ages, sex, educational qualifications and employment status. They are satisfied with services of the libraries; make use of the libraries' books and other information resources to satisfy their different information needs. They also found the libraries beneficial to the lives and impactful. A public library offers a wealth of resources, space to study or hold events, and a world of books to discover and borrow. In addition, they are also places that encourage scholarship and offer a quiet, peaceful place of study. Public library gives ample opportunity for readers to borrow items of value for their academic and personal development. The impacts of the libraries were examined from the perceptions of the respondents. The respondents were asked whether the libraries have any impacts on their lives. The entire respondents for the study regarded the libraries as beneficial, enjoyable, and recreational in their communities. They also reported that the libraries have an impact on their social, economic, political and academic lives. The impact of the libraries on the life of the respondents cannot be overemphasized. This finding corroborated the finding in the Table 6 where majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the services of the libraries. Furthermore, the observation of the researchers revealed that the respondents have opportunities to borrow books and other resources from the library once they register with them. This has helped to solve the problem of poor access to books brought about by the economic reality of the country, where few people can afford to buy books.

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