LAFIA JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
Volume 2, Number 1, 2022.
https://lalibjournals.org/index.php/LJLIS
ISSN: Print - 2814-0702, Online - 2814-0710
LJLIS

NECESSITY FOR RE-ENGINEERING PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Public library services stand at a vantage point of driving growth and development in the society. An enlightened and educated society is potentially a developed society. This paper discusses the necessities for re-engineering public library services for national development and integration. The aim is to unravel ways to improve the quality of services in public libraries in Nigeria through a thorough review of related literature. It reveals areas of concern in public libraries which includes; poor condition of public libraries, inadequate provision of funds for library development, lack of engaging the community in activities that can improve their well-being politically, economically, educationally and otherwise and inability these libraries to measure up with the best global practices among others. The paper discusses ways to achieve the goal of promoting national development and integration through promotion of education, agricultural extension services, democratic practices, information literacy skills coaching, peace education, development of health sector and the likes. It is recommended that existing public libraries in Nigeria should be well funded and equipped with modern facilities so as to provide access to myriad information sources. Enlightenment and public education about libraries should be taken to the doorsteps of the communities. Librarians working in public libraries should be trained and retrained. Government at all levels should partner with other donor organisation, enlightenment and public education should be taken to the doorsteps of the users.

Keywords: Re-engineering, public libraries, development, integration, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is a diverse society- multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural in nature. It is said to be one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with well over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa. The need to foster unity and love among the people cannot be overemphasized. Meaningful development cannot take place without the people coming together to share common ideas and opinions and public libraries are built for such occasions. Edewor, Aluko, and Folarin (2014) buttressed that national integration in Nigerian context has been an attempt to forge "unity and diversity", seeking to wish away socio-cultural differences and imposing uniformity in spite of complex cultural diversity.

Information and acquisition of knowledge are critical for development and integration of the society. Libraries being centres for processing, flow and management of information have been playing central role in making information resources available for users in different formats to enable the citizens of Nigeria to be well informed. Abdulsalami, Okezie and Agbo (2013) affirm that indeed, the availability and free flow of information bring about knowledge which has great potentials to provide impetus for the social, cultural, spiritual, political, economic, scientific and technological advancement of a nation. It is a unifying factor for the community and the nation at large. For meaningful development to take place in any society, organisation or business enterprise it is always necessary to look for the best ways to enhance productivity.

Development is said to be an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications (Gboyega, 2003, cited in Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2017). The development that is most critical in the society is the development of the human mind. Feeding the mind with knowledge and information has the capacity to transform every other sector of the economy. For development to take place, knowledge creators, custodians and facilitators must ensure that access is granted for everyone. That is called information democracy where there are not restrictions accessing resource and every user is at liberty to visit the library.

The term re-engineering is said to have been introduced in 1990 by Michael Hammer in the Harvard Business review article titled "Re-engineering work: Don't automate obliterate". Re-engineering has to do with total or subtotal change of operational process for optimal output in an organisation. Hammer and Champy, cited in Frances and Kabir (2008) defined re-engineering as a fundamental rethinking and re-design of business process to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost,

quality, service and speed. While Mahesh and Jayamma (2020) see re-engineering as a swift and essential restructuring of practice, information service, strategies and institutional restructure. It is about smart ways of presenting information services using the right tools at the right time. It is the right time for this process to take place in public libraries.

National integration is described as situation in which citizens of a country increasingly see themselves as one people, bound by share historical experiences and common values and imbued by the spirit of patriotism and unity which transcends, primordial diverse tendencies (Jega, 2002, cited in Edewor, Aluko, & Folarin, 2014). Public libraries provide equitable access to information for all without discrimination. It is one of the most democratic public institutions in the world that is capable of uniting people.

Public libraries are public institutions often referred to as the people's university. To stay relevant, public libraries [and librarians] must develop strong relationships with their communities and meet their information, education or leisure needs (Schneur, 2022). Also, knowing the community's socio-economic practices will go a long way to give direction on how libraries can help them realise their goals.

The continues improvement in technological discoveries and application in libraries and information centres has richly improved information accessibility and retrieval. There is no doubt that technology is equally dynamic, there is constant improvement on its make. Therefore, this paper aims at suggesting best ways to raise the operational standard of public libraries in Nigeria for effective service.

Standard Requirements for Public Libraries in Nigeria

No matter the size of the library, it is important that public libraries are guided by standards in order to offer effective and efficient services that meet the needs of members of their communities. In Nigeria, the minimum standards and guidelines for public Libraries are issued by the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria in accordance with LRCN Act 1995. They are specifically issued in pursuant to section 2 (b) of the Act.

The standard requirements for public libraries are: accommodation, furniture and equipment, collection management, services, budgeting, information technology, government and administration. These standards are in accordance with global best practices aimed at ensuring successful delivery of accurate, timely and efficient information to the users. Obviously, public libraries in Nigeria are still battling to meet these required standards. The major constraint

has always been the issue of funding without which hampers the growth of libraries. Much attention is not given to the area of providing resources for equipping the libraries because information is not valued in this part of the world.

The Act has empowered the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria to ensure that these requirements are met. Although public libraries are financed by tax payer through the state or local governments, the supervisory role of the Librarians' Council is brought to question because of the deplorable nature of public libraries. As at the time of writing paper in 2022, the umbrella body of all librarians in Nigeria, the Nigerian Library Association celebrated 60 year of its existence. Therefore, it is old enough to push and probe the way libraries are viewed and treated in Nigeria. It is high time to call for a complete overhaul of the entire system for better services, which is achievable through proper funding of the institution.

Necessity for Re-Engineering Public Library Services

The role of public library is central to the development of a nation because it serves everybody, unlike other types of libraries with specific kinds of clients. Mahesh and Jayamma (2020) see the basic reason for re-engineering in librarianship is to cope with the changes posed by information explosion and to fulfill multidimensional need of information and also to re-design information system of library. Reinventing the means through which this audience can be served is of critical importance. According to Gaur (2003), re-engineering is the concurrent redesign of processes, organisations, and their supporting information systems to achieve radical improvement in time, cost, quality, and customers' regard for the products and services. Process redesign is often an outcome of this evaluation. However, the customer remains at the center of each process, with systems being redesigned to meet customer needs and demands (Karen and Elaine, 1998).

These are some of the reasons why public libraries need re-engineering:

1) **Poor condition of public libraries in Nigeria.** Most of the public library buildings are in a deplorable condition- licking roofs, poor ventilation system, uncomfortable tables and chairs, lack of or dysfunctional air conditioners, old shelves filled with old books, poor electricity supply, and many more. If the mandate of establishing the public library must be achieved, work has to be done at the drawing table.
2) **Inadequate or lack of proper funding.** Until the attention of the government is drawn to the need to fund public libraries, accompanied with constant lobbying and persuasion on the part of the Nigerian Library Association, Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria and all professional librarians in

the country, issue of funding libraries will remain the same.

3) **Lack of engaging the community in activities.** In Nigeria, many community members do not know the functions of public libraries in their communities. The worst case scenario is the lack of availability of the libraries. While they look at the library as just mere store room where books are kept just for the elites. Activities such as seminars, quiz and debates, cinema, games, rental activities, Internet facilities, etc are not known by the community. Creation of awareness for these activities in the community should not be taken for granted.
4) **Disconnecting between our communities and global network.** Many Nigerian communities have not realised how to be connected to the global village using Internet network provided by public libraries. Libraries provide services or direction on how to market their produce and products online using the Internet services e.g. using Google local or yahoo local, e-Bay, and other media.
5) **Inability to meet up with the global best practices.** To be able to compete with other part of the world in the area of information provision and services, public libraries in Nigeria need to be well re-structured and developed. Libraries have to be managed by qualified librarians who constantly monitor the trends in librarianship.

Various Aspects of Library Services that Require Re-Engineering

Taking a look at what is happening in public libraries in more advanced countries of the world, it is obvious that the Nigerian public libraries have a long way to go. For instance, in Medellin, Colombia, Comfenalco public library has developed a website with up-to-date information about the city, including institutions, personalities, cultural events and procedures related to public services (Eze, 2013). Virtual public library in Denmark makes it possible to gain access to the catalogues of all public libraries plus the biggest research and special libraries. People are able to order an item from anywhere in the country and collect it at their local library.

Some of the aspects that require re-engineering in public libraries include the following;

•Re-orienting the mindset of the librarians

It takes a librarian who is ready for change to accept the re-invention of the services provided to the users. If the over 316 public libraries in Nigeria with more than 598 qualified librarians (Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria [LRCN], 2017) will be ready to accept and put to use the new technology, then re-engineering will be much easier and faster. The mindset of librarians should be

that of proactive and client focused professionals, anticipating the needs of the users and provides them. The idea and the feeling of being mere support group of the institution should be changed to reflect the fact that without libraries, education in its entire is lame. Librarians should have the mindset of educators, leaders, communicators, researchers, mentors and solution providers among others. Knowing and having this mindset gives the confidence to serve better.

- **Provision of space for creativity.** Space should be reserved for creative minds to evolve in the libraries. It is trending in many parts of the world and should be adopted in Nigeria. For example, Nancy (2013, n.d) defined what is seen as a new movement in libraries called "Maker Space," as providing space and equipment to encourage creativity among the young and old library users in the community. The library supplied resources for the purpose of creativity using equipment such as computers, cameras, and tools such as: editing equipment, green screens, 3-D printers, sewing machines, computer software etc.
- **Re-designing library and information science (LIS) curriculum:** Curriculum is the nerve centre of every educational programme. It makes the learning experience simple and orderly. Library schools should update their curriculum to meet up with the 21st Century demands.
- **Change the pattern of processing and delivering services:** Gone are those days that library users have to be physically present at the library's front desk, facing the reference librarian with a list of books to be borrowed. As the time of writing this paper, the Mohammed Bin Rashid library was built which is said to be the Middle East largest library with a lot of innovations such as self-serving technology using robots to fetch books on request and deliver on mono rails (Tholot, 2022). It said to be an architectural marvel beautifully designed structure to serve as a cultural heritage in United Arab Emirate.
- **Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Cataloguing:** Public libraries should be fully automated. Idiegbeyan-ose, Ifijeh, Adebayo, and Segun-Adeniran (2016) defined library automation as the utilisation of digital means usually computer systems and other information technology tools for carrying out the major house- keeping operations of a library; these housekeeping operations include acquisition, cataloguing, classification, circulation, reference services, serials services, etc. Application of ICT is the way forward.

  Eguaveon (2013) cited in Idiegbeyan-ose, et al. (2016) posited that cataloguing and classification exert much energy, requires great concentration, commitment and application of high intellectual ability; it is also described as being dull and uninspiring. However, to facilitate these

activities, libraries should adopt modern trends.

- **Adoption of Resource Description and Access (RDA):** The creation and subsequent acquisition of digital or electronic resources in libraries have necessitated the introduction of an international standard, to ease the description and accessibility of these resources. RDA is a new standard for description and access designed to overcome challenges observed in AACR2. RDA is a collection of guidelines and instructions used to describe and create access to all kinds of information resources including digital or electronic materials.

Public Libraries for National Development and Integrations

Libraries exist for centuries to serve humanity. Discussions about development in every sphere of life cannot be complete without taking into consideration the role of agencies promoting peaceful coexistence and development in the society and libraries play such an important role.

Development as a concept has been given different definitions by scholars. However, the meanings are geared towards making a difference in the life of the citizens of any given society. Development is a process of enhancing the productivity forces of a country for the actualisation of more prosperous and meaningful life for all its citizens (Igwela & Onyema, 2017).

Integration is a necessary and major driver of development. Development can only take place in a society that peace, unity and tranquility reign. Like the popular saying goes "United we stand, divided we fall" succinctly captures the essence of the word 'integration'. In the words of Daniel (2015), in every society, for effective societal integration to be achieved, people must be aware of, or share knowledge of both their historical past and culture which makes it possible for them to adapt to, and manipulate the situation, and also plan for the future. Libraries being the stop point and reservoir for historical documents help the society to make informed decisions that trigger development.

Public libraries support the development and sustenance of democracy and democratic structures by providing access to information through various means for informed decisions (LRCN, 2015). They are also meant to support formal and informal education. Public libraries are centres where most activities emanating from their communities take place.

Ways through which libraries promote development and integration are as follows;

a) **Promotion of education**: One of the core responsibilities of libraries is to elevate the educational attainment of people. Education is empowerment, it give power and knowledge that enables development. Without education,

whether formal or informal, there would hardly be development in the society. Akingbola (2009) opined that, human capital development presupposes investment activities and processes that produce knowledge, skills, or values that are embedded in people. That any effort to increase human knowledge and skills stimulates human capital development.

b) Promotion of agricultural extensions services: Public libraries are for everyone in the community, irrespective of your class or background. People in the rural communities are mostly into farming or subsistent agriculture with little or no skills on how to produce higher output. Public libraries provide these communities with information and knowledge on how to farm. Libraries provide software that enhance research in agriculture such as; Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA), and The Essential Electronic Agriculture Library (TEEAL), these are databases that provide information to users which in turn uplift the fortune of many. People in the community can explore these avenues for productivity.

c) Libraries promote democracy. In a democratic setting, libraries create great influence on citizen participation in politics. Libraries provide the enabling environment for people to form discussion groups about politics and development, provide information resources on daily basis such as newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, internet connectivity that allows users to access information, etc. Nancy Kranich sees libraries as corner stone for democracy because they assist the public to locate diverse resources and in developing information literacy skills that can enable the individual empowered for greater political participation.

d) Libraries promote development in the health sector. Hospital and other health institutions cannot achieve their goals effectively if records of patients are not properly organised in such a way that they can be accessed in a timely fashion. In some library schools, a course is dedicated to such all-important subject called 'Health Information Management', whereby librarians are trained on the best ways to handle and manage information in the health sector.

e) Libraries support information literacy: Information is needed in every aspect of human endeavour. The ability to know how to harness these pieces of information from different media and use them, gives people the ability to make sound decision about whatever plans they have that will trigger development.

f) Libraries promote peace education: For a nation to integrate and develop, such must live in peace. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2011) defines peace education as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour

change that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level. In the words of Ebele and Nwabueze (2018) in their articled titled "The role of library in promoting peace education in Nigeria opined that, tranquility and harmony evident in peaceful co-existence of people were identified as important features of peace.

g) Libraries bring development through research: *Research is fundamentally important for any meaningful development to take place.* Research libraries located in research institutions conduct research and make them available to the management or policy makers which in turn engender economic development in Nigeria. Oyinloye, Tabawa and Aku (2016) buttressed that Outcomes of current economic researches are reported in books, monographs, occasional papers, policy briefs and in-house journals and preserved in libraries for posterity sake.

h) Libraries create avenue for social interaction: More and more people today appreciate the added value which skilled support can bring to any task or activity, whether it is in the form of a personal fitness trainer, a specialist holiday or pensions adviser, or someone in the computer shop who talks you through the technology you want to buy.

I) Public library partnerships with community and businesses: Another paradigm in libraries is increasing partnerships with community organisations and businesses. Nancy Bolt reported in a paper titled "Seven major trends facing public libraries" in which she cited Christine Hamilton Pennell's work "Public Libraries and Community Economic Development" reports that 97.5% of all US firms have fewer than 20 employees and generate 60-80% of all new jobs in the US in the last decade. Libraries are well positioned to provide this support because of the resources they offer. Another aspect of community development is what is called "embedded librarians" or public library staff assigned to a community or government agency.

j) Libraries provide support during crises. During crises such as pandemic, war or natural disaster such as hurricane, earthquake, flooding, etc, libraries can provide services to people affected. As at the time of writing this paper, war was going on between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine's libraries offered bomb shelters, making camouflage nets, books (Bolibova, 2022). These are areas we need to look into**.**

Conclusion and Recommendations

For meaningful growth and development of any nation to thrive, information is one the best capital required to make it happen. Public libraries provide such opportunities for people to be well informed and educated personally and through life-long learning. Deliberate efforts must be encouraged to bring about structural and content development of the libraries.

Based on the above, the following recommendations are made that;

1. The existing public libraries in Nigeria should be well funded and equipped with modern facility so as to provide access to many information sources.
2. More public libraries should be provided in every community for easy reach by the members of the community they serve.
3. Librarians working in public libraries should be trained and retrained so as to keep abreast with the trends in librarianship and global best practices.
4. Government at all levels should partner with other donor organisation for the provision of information resources to public libraries across all levels.
5. Enlightenment and public education about libraries should be taken to the doorsteps of the community members.
6. All relevant professional bodies/associations in librarianship should push for policies that enhance public library development in Nigeria.

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