

Developing Effective Library Services for Children and Young People in Public Libraries: A Structured Review

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Abstract

Public libraries play fundamental roles in providing children and young people with free and open access to knowledge, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Toddlers come for story times, teachers and day care providers bring groups of children to find books and information, to be instructed in information literacy skills, and to hear stories. School children drop in for after-school programming or homework assistance. Hence the role of public libraries in the life of children and young people cannot be overemphasized. This paper focuses on different innovative services and programmes in public libraries for young people in the digital age; library services for children and young people and strategies for effective library service delivery. It concludes by recommending that Public Library should make a concerted effort to improve its collections, resources and services in other to meet the ever increasing need of children and young people.

Keywords: Public Library, Library use, Library Services, Children and Young people.

Introduction

Information is power and its importance to the success of every aspiring individual cannot be underestimated. Valuable information determine to a very large extent one's success and future development. Every person, be it a child, young person or an adult is to be given free access to information. Consequently, the library is seen as a facility that comprises items and materials that can be accessed for the extraction of information from a specified location which includes the storage mediums of such information. Libraries therefore exist to meet its user's basic needs for information by acquiring and organizing information resources, creating enabling environment and providing adequate services to users. Jaccarino (2009) rightly noted that, for

libraries to add to the advancement of knowledge, they must not only provide resources but also ensure that the resources are effectively used.

Children and young people in the library have the right to:

- Intellectual freedom
- Equal access to a full range of free resources, services and programs available to other users
- A wide range of free resources, services and programs developed to meet their diverse needs and interests
- A library environment that complements their physical and developmental needs
- Trained and knowledgeable staff specializing in services for young people
- Welcoming, respectful and supportive service for all ages
- Policies that address and include the diverse needs and interests of young people (Children and Young People Act, 2000).

Librarians have a public and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free, equal, and equitable access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format, or amount of detail. This principle of library service applies equally to all users; children and young people as well as adults. Librarians must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to them.

Information Needs of Children and Young People

The public library is seen as the local gateway to knowledge and provides basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. According to UNESCO's Manifesto for Public Libraries (2004), one of the public libraries' most important tasks is "to support and participate in activities and programmes for the development of reading and writing skills within all age groups". Children and young are an important client group whose needs must continue to be met and not overshadowed by the demands placed for services tailored to an ageing population (Fasick, 2006). A critical understanding of the different developmental stages the child progresses through and an understanding of how these stages affect their information needs is necessary for library professionals. Bishop and Salveggi (2001) identified three developmental stages; the first developmental stage is that of early childhood (age 2 to 7) this is the 'pre-operational stage'. Children at this stage are very egocentric: they view the world from their own perspective and expect others to hold the same point of view (Kuhlthau, 2000). Pre-operational characteristics include a lack of communication skills and the inability to see objects as belonging to more than one class (Bishop & Salveggi, 2001).

Middle childhood, the second stage of development, is marked between the ages of 8 to 10. Children at this stage can perform concrete operations (Kuhlthau, 2000). The concrete-

operational child is capable of thinking, but this thinking is grounded in a concrete object or a concrete experience (Kuhlthau,2000). They also begin to apply logical thought to concrete problems (Bishop & Salveggi, 2001). The third stage of development is between the ages of 11 to 14 and is referred to as ‘pre-adolescence’ (Kuhlthau, 2000). This is a period of rapid growth where the children in this grouping have a wide range of ability, levels of maturity and differences in personal interests (Kuhlthau, 2000).

According to Agosto (2011) the information needs of young adults are diverse. Some of these include information relating to peer, family, and other relationships, popular culture, emotional needs, physical health and safety, emerging sexuality, consumer needs, academics, leisure activities and interests, careers and college. Tichauer (2009) , speaking in the same vein, maintained that the issues facing today’s young adults are monumental, including poverty, incarceration, crime, unemployment, teen pregnancy, and attrition, and that they require timely and adequate information to navigate their ways through these challenges. Also Meyers (2003), in his study about the information needs of young adults discovered that young adults wanted less welcoming space, more access to higher end technology, more help with their homework, and better books and magazines. They also wanted less restrictive rules and fees and claimed that they could help libraries become better places young adults.

Overview of Public Libraries Services

The fundamental aim of libraries is to provide timely, accurate, relevant, reliable and current information to their users for effective and efficient development. Jaccarino (2009) observed that until when we have seen libraries as agents of social, political, economical and educational changes, then we can appreciate the role of library as a potent tool for national development. Public libraries are not left out in this task as a result, they are accepted as public goods that provide educational, social and political information to people free of charge in a particular its community. Nwokocha (2004) defines Public Library as being established to serve the generality of the residents of the community or town where it is located. Similarly, Olanlukun and Salisu (2003) sees public library as an agency, which engages in the collection, processing, preservation and dissemination of recorded information in the various formats, most convenient to its target users. Public libraries are a unique “third space” after home and school or work, where children and adults alike can make use of the physical and digital resources to improve literacy and other basic skills, receive informal consultations from a trained librarian or participate in structured (and often certificated) non-formal learning courses organized either by the library or by a third party (Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2009).

Access to information resources and services within the larger society cannot be achieved without involving public libraries because they “are one of the building blocks of the local information and knowledge infrastructure” (Tise, 2000). Furthermore, libraries embody a principle of rights of access to information and acquisition of knowledge by all categories of individuals in a society. In a nutshell, access to information without libraries is inconceivable because librarianship is concerned with literacy, intellectual freedom, and equity of information

access for reconstruction, development and enhancing the quality of life. Abdulkarim (2010) noted that public libraries are expected to play an indispensable role in the life of the community they serve, one of which is the promotion of reading culture among members of the society, be it in the rural or urban settings. As libraries re-imagine themselves, patrons, particularly young ones, are finding them more relevant in today's technological age. Examples of innovative projects public libraries can adopt include but not limited to:

The Power of The Internet: The Internet has revolutionized the computer and communications world like nothing before. It is at once a world-wide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location, According to Ojedokun (2001) it has broken down barriers of communication and information access from any part of the World and it also allows users to have access to information and offers them opportunity to access up-to-date research. Provision of internet services in public libraries will no doubt increase the patronage of children and young people

Sponsoring children and young people events such as read-aloud programmes, story times, book clubs, crafts and a variety of performers from dancers to theater groups which are designed to foster a love for reading and the joy of visiting the library

Diversifying Young Peoples' Materials: Books are central to library services. The kinds of materials available for children ranging from infants up to age 9 vary. The ages 7-9 are critical time for children. These are the years when they normally make the transition from just hearing and looking at picture books to reading independently for enjoyment and for schoolwork. How well they make this transition will determine much about the quality of their lives. It is very important to find well-written books for children at this stage though hardbacks, books with cardboard pages, picture books, and often cloth books, paperbacks, and magazines.

Creating Public Service Opportunities: The public library is expected to offer different kinds of services to users, these includes reference, extension, audiovisual and training services. It is no exaggeration that most public library customers come from the general public of which the post secondary school students are part. Miller (2006) stated that "while the public library was created by the people for the people, the public will let it go when and if they don't have use or want it any more If the public library is to continue to exist, then the library will necessarily have to develop and serve its children and young people in the ways they desire."

Public Library Services to Children and Young People

Children and young people deserve highest and the best library services considering the fact that their needs, interests, and special talents are easily overlooked or simply dismissed by the adult world. The public library must therefore understand the needs of children and young people and provide services to meet them. Derby city council (2016) observes that for library to be attractive to children and young people, the following services are necessary:

- Board books for babies and toddlers
- Picture books

- Books for children learning to read
- Stories and information books for all ages
- Books to help with homework
- Graphic novels and Manga
- Audio books on CD
- Stories in large print format
- Comics and magazines

According to New Zealand Library & Information Association (2005), Library services to children and young people must include the following:

- Provide the range of materials in appropriate formats that will enrich, support and develop the interests, information and leisure needs of the children and young people in the communities they serve. The curriculum needs of students are the chief focus and responsibility of the school library. These needs are supplemented by the more general resources of the public library.
- Provide materials, especially fiction and creative writing, to stimulate and develop appreciation of the use of language.
- Provide materials on all points of view on current and historical issues, chosen for sound presentation and appropriate levels of understanding, so that children and young people may develop critical thinking and make informed judgments.
- Provide services and collections that ensure a commitment to biculturalism
- Provide materials representative of the various religious, ethnic and cultural groups in society.
- Ensure comprehensive collections appropriate to the clients of the library, avoiding personal bias or sectional interest.
- Make the whole collection freely available and equally accessible, without charge, and without arbitrary discrimination, to the group it serves.
- Provide professional service, knowledge and understanding to all clients.
- Use professional discretion in protecting the confidentiality of dealings between the library and its clients, in accordance with the statutory provisions of the country.
- Make their facilities for exhibitions and meetings available on an equitable basis, consistent with the purposes of the libraries themselves

Similarly, Barker (2011) suggests the following means or ways be used to facilitate effective service rendering to children:

- Providing individual assistance in as far as selecting of sources is concerned;
- Posting notices concerning new and interesting sources in prominent locations;
- Organizing the collection in such a way that successful browsing will be possible;

- Distributing book lists inside the library, as well as using modern communication media such as the local access cable channel outside the library;
- Scheduling discussions of books with interested children, and presenting book talks to different organizations; and
- Providing better access to fiction in the card catalogue or OPAC

Tarulli (2015), noted that for effective service rendering to children in an African context, book talks and story hours, which make use of folk tales, should include different ethnic versions of similar tales as well as African versions. Barker (2011) observed that in order to render service effectively, staff members should be knowledgeable about books, reading and users, and they should be trained in different aspects of readers' advisory services.

Use of Library Resources by Children and Young People

Most studies show that as many as 50 to 60 percent of all public library users are young people. In a 1995 survey by the National Center for Educational Statistics, for example, librarians estimated that 35 percent of their users were children under eleven years of age, while 23 percent were between twelve to eighteen-year-olds (US. Department of Education, 1995). Meyers (2003), in his study about the information needs of young adults discovered that young adults wanted less welcoming space, more access to higher end technology, more help with their homework, and better books and magazines. They also wanted less restrictive rules and fees and claimed that they could help libraries become better places young adults. On the other hand, the American Harris Poll (2007), stated that the major reason young people gave for visiting libraries was to borrow books for personal use, for school assignments, to read on the premises or to use the library website for information, research or recreation, or to 'hang out' with friends. Akinola (2013), is of the opinion that young adults need information on personal development, academic work, job/career information, health-related information, sports and news, recreation, and research information. However, there are limited data about what those young people were doing at the library. The 1995 survey indicated that as many as 86 percent of the libraries responding offered programs for preschool and kindergarten children while '19 percent had programs for school-age children. Almost all librarians reported that they provide reference services to young people, while only one in seven offered homework assistance. Authors have variously agreed (Bolan, Canada & Cullin, 2007), that examining how young adults perceive the library resources and services available for their use can provide a better understanding of their library use, and serve as a guide not only for providing adequately for their information needs, but also for enhancing services and improving their reference encounter.

Challenges to effective information service delivery to children and young people

The situation of public libraries with regards to challenges they face in rendering effective information services differs enormously worldwide. Coradini (2006) writes that children and young people represent great percentage of public library patrons, yet the libraries

remain slow to address their service needs for several reasons. Some of these are challenges faced by librarians in delivering information services to children and young people.

Lack of Funds: Fund is one of the key factors for effective and smooth operation of any organization of which public libraries are not an exception. Research has it that many public libraries worldwide are under-funded and this has affected its effectiveness in information services. According to McNichol (2007) libraries have to be appropriately funded if they are to be effective and attractive. Adequate funding is needed for the building, for acquiring relevant materials, library furniture, for continuing education, for computers with Internet access and for running costs.

Lack of Professional Staff: Many public libraries in developing countries are run by non-professional staff. It is assumed that anybody can manage a library. Weisner (2002) stated that 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. Because of the librarian's lack of professional training on how to handle information, the library fails to make a recognizable impact in the life of the children and young people in our society (OCLC, 2006).

Irrelevant Material: Access to diverse multicultural literature can be limited despite the best efforts of librarians. The financial resources for collections, particularly in urban areas are limited and insufficient to provide diverse collections reflective of today's children and young people populations. Thorhauge (2006) wrote that poor physical library and facilities and limitations on funding for materials can lead to frustration in children and young people.

Lack of Appropriate Training: It has also been observed that Library Staff themselves may be reluctant to engage or work with children or young people, citing a lack of training in dealing with these age groups as an issue (McNichol 2007). This is also a barrier in the provision of library services to users in the library especially youths. Initiatives to cater for these kinds of needs require vision, flexibility, resourcing and specialized training for key staff.

Lack of Needs Analysis: Many libraries are established without a professional needs analysis of the community, resulting in an information service based upon assumptions and not on actual needs (CILIP, 2002). These libraries isolate themselves from the general public, often content to serve only a small group, mainly urban-based, relatively well-off, educated elite.

Inappropriate Buildings: Good interior design can have a significant impact on library use, as well as enabling staff to manage the diverse needs and behaviors of a range of users and age groups (Coradini, 2006). Creating spaces that provide access to a range of materials – including magazines, computers, study space, CDs and DVDs and listening posts – across a spectrum of ages has been shown to generate interest among young people. Arranging material by genre or identifying material of interest to young people (e.g. by means of special stickers on book spines) can also increase the use of stock, (Thorhauge, 2006).

Strategies for effective service delivery to children and young people

Children and Young people all over the world are a Vital and important segment of the society in which they live (Anansi, 2010). In the bid to serve them satisfactorily, there is the

need to understand their library needs. According to the IFLA report (2003) the following were listed as some of the suggested library needs of children and young people in the Library.

Cultural need: The library culture should be warm and receptive to users especially to children and young people who already have education challenges of using the library.

Developmental Needs: Children and young people should be treated with respect, acceptance, and a willingness by the library to validate their choices, even if different to those that the library traditionally offers. Libraries that structure their programme and services within the context of research-based youth development models can provide opportunities for children and young people to achieve a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. This will draw them closer and make them more excited to use the services provided by library and information professionals in the library.

Material needs: Children and young people are a diverse group whose interests, maturity level, needs and abilities varies greatly. Therefore, libraries must provide a variety of resources to reflect their needs. Special attention must be paid to young people with disabilities, and those who are social and linguistic minorities. Materials in other languages should be included in the collection, along with those that reflect cultural diversity. Giving young people opportunities to be involved in the selection and display of library materials for their age group, can bring positive benefits in promoting library services and resources and can help to increase library use. Many formats are recommended including comic books, popular genres such as science fiction, fantasy, romance, and mysteries to name a few, and current popular music.

Access to a range of contemporary library resources was cited by Edwards, Rauseo and Unger (2013) as one of the things most likely to entice young people to visit libraries. The diversity of available library resources raises a strong sense of curiosity in youths and this will prompt the attitude of use in them. IFLA (2003) also add that matching services and materials to young people's changing interests and developmental needs has been identified as important if libraries are to maintain relevance for them as users.

Selection and creation of children and young people materials: Librarians face the ongoing challenge of finding books and materials that capture teens' attention. Jones, Gorman and Sullentrop (2004) were of the opinion that it is increasingly common for libraries to recruit youth reviewers to read and evaluate the teen appeal of books and magazines. Further, they stated that the youth sections of library web sites increasingly feature original literary work of local teens, including book reviews, poetry, fiction, and commentary. In many cases, teens take an active role in editing and posting the materials on the web, while some libraries are beginning to involve teens directly in the design and maintenance of the website themselves.

The integration of trained, web-savvy youth into web design teams would appear to be a promising frontier for children and young people involvement in libraries.

Creating places and times for children and young people: Although children and young people are among the most frequent patrons of public libraries, their claim to space and time in libraries remains limited. However, studies have shown that involving children and young people in the

design process can change the chemistry between them and libraries (CILIP, 2002). Creating story-talk hours, creative activities or creative writing, clubs, drama presentations, etc are great tools for attracting children and young people to read or attend programs in the library.

Sponsoring and supporting summits and youth events. As central and attractive civic facilities, libraries can be both impressive and practical locations to convene youth for varied purposes. In turn, many young people welcome opportunities to bridge neighborhood boundaries, work collaboratively with adults, and think big about youth issues and potential.

Conclusion

Public library opens doors to equitable access to information and knowledge to children and young people since it is expected to provide people oriented information resources and services that will enable access to information and broaden the mind of the citizens. Most people think of public library solely as a source for books. However, libraries have many services and programs that can help children and young people such as internet services, sponsoring children and young people events, diversifying young people materials and creating public service opportunities which are designed to foster a love for reading and the joy of visiting the library. Therefore, Public Library should make a concerted effort to improve its collections, resources and services in other to meet the ever increasing need of children and young people.

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