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Building Culturally Diverse Communities through Innovative Public Library Services: A Case Study of Rivers State Public Library

Victor Wagwu, Ph.D

Dame Patience Goodluck
Jonathan Automated Library,
Ignatius Ajuru University of
Education Rumuorlumeni,
Port-Harcourt, Rivers State,
Nigeria.
victor.wagwu@iaue.edu.ng

Adaora C. Obuezie, Ph.D

Department of Library and
Information Science,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
adaoraobuezie@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study investigated building culturally diverse communities through innovative public library services: A case of Rivers State Public Library. The study was conducted in River State Public Library Board. The study employed a descriptive research design. Population of the study comprised 100 users of the Rivers State Library Board and Jubilee Library Port Harcourt. The researcher adopted the census sampling technique to select 100 users of the public libraries mentioned above which stood as the sample size. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while the hypothesis was tested with the z-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed among others that there are current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library. The study concluded and recommended among others that the library should increase the number and variety of books, magazines, and online materials available in the community's spoken languages, the library should create and support inclusive programming that actively includes people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: public library, cultural diversity, innovative, River State.

1.1 Introduction

Public libraries have been considered vital establishments that support the social and intellectual advancement of local communities. In addition to their historical function as knowledge warehouses, modern public libraries are becoming more and more acknowledged as vibrant community centres that may promote inclusivity and diversity of culture. In a time of rapid cultural change, migration, and globalization, public libraries are essential for promoting cultural knowledge and understanding (Emezie, 2018). Public libraries are becoming

increasingly important in providing education, training, information, and cultural opportunities for their communities, serving a diverse range of users at once, as many societies become more multicultural and the world becomes more globalized and interconnected. In many nations, public libraries serve as hubs for communication, engagement, information, and connection. They offer research services, assistance in finding material, and free reading access.

Anyim (2018) asserts that the creation of public libraries is a relatively new development. The claim that academic and

private libraries, two types of libraries that existed before public library services. Public libraries were founded in Nigeria in various parts of the nation, primarily by colonialists at various points in time. As the nation's states were formed, all of the regional library services evolved into different state library services throughout time. According to Amuda and Adeyinka (2017), laws, edicts, and decrees supporting public library services have been implemented in all states of Nigeria. They also point out that the expansion of public libraries was aided by the passing of numerous library statutes. According to the UNESCO declaration, public library services are intended to support and encourage resource usage and meet the reading objectives of people of all classes and ages as previously specified.

According to Aiyebilehin et al (2018), there should be scheduled reading programs, book and movie discussions, promotions, displays, reading lists, story hours, and other means of encouraging the use of materials. Additional services offered by the public library include information services to patrons and support for the children's, young people, and adults' educational, cultural, and civic programs. The library service includes gathering unique materials of community interest, lending materials between libraries, and providing library services to every area of the community via branches and bookmobiles. In a time of globalization, and interconnection, the idea of community has expanded beyond national borders to include a wide range of cultural diversity. Communities now flourish on the collective strength of shared values, customs, and experiences rather than being constrained by the boundaries of physical proximity. For both public libraries and their users, innovations are important. According to Skinner (2017), public libraries can become more valuable to their local communities by utilizing innovations that enable them question the status quo. For example, innovations help

public libraries meet the needs and overcome the obstacles that local communities and library users face in the areas of economic development, poverty, education, health, transportation, and the environment. Public libraries can therefore act as pillars in the communities they serve. Generally speaking, innovations encourage the addition of fresh concepts that are crucial to a library's future rather than reverting to a passive reaction to societal change. Lastly, innovations can boost public libraries' competitiveness, which has advantages such as drawing and keeping users, pursuing additional funding, and improving the perception of libraries.

Potnis (2020) opines that traditionally, public libraries were thought to be information and book repositories. They provided a static collection of printed books and acted as peaceful places for reading and research. Adoption of new technologies, such as computerized catalogue systems or the introduction of audio-visual materials, was frequently linked to innovation in libraries. For example, in the past, library services in the riverine area may have been limited by traditional approaches that did not fully cater to the diverse languages and cultures present. Libraries may have primarily stocked materials in a dominant language, potentially overlooking the rich linguistic and cultural tapestry of the region. Limited technological infrastructure might have hindered the distribution and accessibility of materials to remote communities, particularly those with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Innovation in library services for the riverine area should be dynamic, inclusive, and technologically advanced. Etebu and Zacchaeus (2020) suggests that the library should embrace a multicultural approach that recognizes and celebrates the diversity of languages and cultures in the region. Libraries should curate a diverse collection of materials, including books, audiobooks, and digital resources, in multiple languages spoken in the riverine area.

According to observations, a lot of people discount the value of public libraries in society because they think of them as a structure or shop where old, dusty books are kept. This is supported by the opinion of Etebu & Zacheaus (2020), that most of Africa, including Nigeria, has not yet come to recognize the importance of public libraries to the advancement of their communities. In view of the aforementioned, the study aims to investigate the function of public libraries in building culturally diverse communities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As the need arises, public libraries offer a diverse of information services to everyone, implying that they serve every member of the society. It is interesting to see that the public library has books and information for all ages, interests, and backgrounds, in addition to information specific to women. It is a truth that the public library serves society in the same manner that a person's memory serves him. Despite the obvious benefits of public libraries, observations have revealed that certain people in communities-particularly those living in rural areas - are completely unaware of their significance. The noble purpose of public libraries would surely vanish if these were not addressed, as people will no longer respect the services that these libraries provide. In view of the aforementioned, the study aims to investigate the function of public libraries in building culturally diverse communities.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the Rivers State Public Library's initiatives in building culturally diverse communities through innovative public library services. Specific objectives include:

1. To find out the current library services that meet the needs of culturally diverse

- populations in Rivers State Public Library
2. To examine innovative approaches that the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities
3. To identify challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the current library services that meets the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library?
2. What are the innovative approaches that the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities?
3. What are the challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library?

1.5 Hypotheses

H₀: There is no significant difference between current library services and needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library.

2.1 Literature Review

2.3 Public Library

Public libraries are those that provide free, unrestricted access to library resources and services to all local citizens within a community district or geographic area. Public libraries are increasingly recognized as an essential component of communal life as advocates for literacy and suppliers of a vast array of reading for people of all ages and as hubs for neighbourhood information services. According to Anyim (2018), public libraries are thus considered to be library establishments created by the government with the aim of promoting the independent and ongoing education of individuals, especially those residing in this area. This is essential since they make their collection available to

everyone in the neighborhood. The public library's mission is to supply resources that facilitate the easy and free exchange of ideas and experiences between individuals. The public library serves as a hub for local knowledge, providing customers with easy access to a vast array of information and knowledge. The community funds, creates, and maintains it, either directly either the federal, state, or local governments, or by other neighborhood associations. It produces information, knowledge, and imaginative creations accessible by means of a variety of tools and services. All community members have equal access to it, regardless of their colour, nationality, age, gender, language barrier, religion, work environment, handicap, or educational attainment. Public libraries, in the opinion of many, are essential to having a populace that is literate and educated.

2.4 Public Library Services

These are programmes materials, and events offered by public libraries to meet the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational requirements of the communities they serve. These services are frequently provided without charge and are intended to be available to the general population. In order to facilitate lifelong learning, encourage community involvement, and promote literacy, public libraries are essential. The minimal standards for information resources, amenities, and services that public libraries must offer were set by the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA, 2001). Books - fiction and non-fiction - textbooks, magazines, artwork, audio and video, records, and cassettes, toys, CD-ROM, and Braille materials are some of the information resources. The amenities that must be provided include book shelves, a library, fans, lighting, ventilation, flooring, restaurants, exit points, notice boards/bullets, photocopiers, carrels, periodical racks,

circulation desks, and other items that would make readers feel comfortable (IFLA, 2001). While the services include, among other things, adult literacy instruction, mobile library services, career information, storytelling, reading competitions, leisure activities, reference services, and services for prisoners (IFLA, 2001).

2.5 A Brief History of Rivers State Library

The Rivers State Library Board Edict No. 23 of April 1971, which created the Rivers State Public Library Board, was passed into law in 1971. The Board took over from the now-defunct Eastern Nigeria Library Board, a parastatal organization under government control that oversaw library services in Eastern Nigeria. The Divisional Library, located at Bernard Carr Street, was one of the state assets and liabilities that the former Eastern Library Board received when it closed. (Library Annual Report, Port Harcourt, 1983). Among its objectives were the establishment of libraries throughout the state and their management for public use, as well as providing expert counsel and technical support for the growth of additional public libraries throughout the State. Additionally, it was anticipated to offer repository services for the implementation of the Rivers State Library Board Law's legal deposit clause, which deals with book publication and mandates that all books published in the state be deposited in the library for preservation through the Director of Library Services.

The State Ministry of Education is currently the parent organization of the Rivers State Public Library. The Director of Library Services is the Public Library's Chief Executive. The Department of Acquisition and Technical Services, the Department of Reader Services, and the Administrative Department are the departments that make up the library services. Acquisition, processing, preservation, and distribution of information resources for public use are the responsibilities

of these departments. The Jubilee Library in Port Harcourt, the Bori Branch Library in Khana Local Government Area, and the Ogoboloma Branch Library in Okirika Local Government Area are the three operational branches of the Rivers State Library Board.

2.6 Innovations

The process of putting new initiatives, partnerships, procedures, or activity combinations into action is known as innovation. (Potnis *et al.*, 2020). According to Adejo, (2016), innovations also increase public libraries' operational effectiveness. The capacity for ongoing innovation is essential to the survival and prosperity of institutions such as public libraries. According to Potnis *et al.* (2020), the majority of libraries actively pursue program, procedural, partnership, and technological advancements to generate fresh and enhanced worth for their local community's involvement, creation and production, education, novel outreach, and collaborations are crucial components of creative public libraries in Nigeria which necessitate proactive process management. As a result, managing various advances in public libraries becomes more and more important.

Current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library.

The usefulness of public libraries in supplying information to community users was examined by Adejo (2020) through a case study of the Amuwo Odofin Local Government in Lagos State, Nigeria. The poll examines how well the public library in Lagos State's Amuwo Odofin Local Government serves the community's information needs. Three separate sets of questionnaires are used in this study to gather data from participants. These are divided into three sets: one for library users, one for librarians and library officers, and another group for non-users.

Two basic percentage calculations and a frequency count were used to analyze the data. The study finds that some of the issues experienced by library users and non-user inclusive groups include a lack of awareness in the community, operating hours, and an unfavourable environment among others. Therefore, it is advised to hold community awareness campaigns, encourage schoolchildren to read, and do much more.

Adejo (2020) conducted research on how libraries help Nigeria's underprivileged communities get the knowledge they need. This paper's main goal is to review the ideas surrounding libraries, information, and the information demands of underprivileged people in Nigerian society. This essay examines the several classifications of underprivileged individuals and the knowledge that they demand. It makes an effort to highlight the crucial responsibilities that libraries play in providing knowledge to the various populations. According to the report, meeting the information needs of physically disadvantaged and challenged populations will benefit their social and intellectual well-being as well as the country's sustainability and economic growth. This essay also makes clear how important information is for everyone, even those who are marginalized. In order to address these groups of people's information demands, the report concluded by suggesting that the government provide sufficient funding each year for the library to acquire sufficient and pertinent resources.

Challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library.

Okafor (2020) investigated Nigerian public library services: tactics and obstacles. This essay focuses on the services provided by public libraries, which demonstrate why they should be built in every community.

These services include those related to education, information awareness, children's libraries, and other services. A few of the problems brought up in this article are a lack of funding, inadequate working conditions and possibilities for staff, a dearth of ICT infrastructure, and a scarcity of people with ICT knowledge.

3.1 Research Method

The study was conducted in River State Public Library Board. The study employed a descriptive research design. Population of the

study comprised 100 users of the Rivers State Library Board and Jubilee Library Port Harcourt. The researcher adopted the census sampling technique to select 100 users of the public libraries mentioned above which stood as the sample size. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while the z-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The grand mean was 2.50.

4.1 Results and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the current library services that meets the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library?

Table 1: Respondents mean rating and standard deviation on the current library services that meets the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library.

S/N	ITEMS	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	S/D	REMARK
1	The library actively promotes literacy and education initiatives that address the needs of culturally diverse populations.	10	10	14	25	41	3.77	1.35	Agreed
2	The library provides resources (books, materials, online resources) that reflect the cultural diversity of the community.	9	10	19	24	38	3.72	1.31	Agreed
3	The library's digital resources and services are accessible and inclusive for users with diverse technological capabilities	9	17	25	26	23	3.37	1.26	Agreed
4	Library staff are knowledgeable about the cultural backgrounds and preferences of the community they serve.	24	10	4	34	28	3.32	1.56	Agreed
5	The library actively seeks input from culturally diverse community members to shape its services and collections.	26	15	16	23	20	2.96	1.50	Agreed
Grand mean							3.43	1.40	Agreed

The result from table 1 showed the summary of mean rating and standard deviation on the current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library. It shows that the grand mean rating of the respondents on current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library was 3.43. Overall, the grand mean of 3.43 indicates that the respondents are generally in agreement that there are current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library.

Research Question 2: What are the innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities?

Table 2 : Respondents mean rating and standard deviation on the innovative approaches that the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities

S/N	ITEMS	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	S/D	REMARK
1	The library offers multilingual services, including resources and assistance in languages reflective of the diverse community.	12	23	12	16	37	3.43	1.48	Agreed
2	The library organizes cultural events and programs that actively engage and celebrate the diverse cultures within Rivers State.	52	21	5	8	14	2.11	1.47	Disagreed
3	The library collaborates with local cultural organizations to enhance its services and programs for multicultural communities	23	15	7	15	40	3.34	1.65	Agreed
4	The physical environment of the library is designed to be inclusive and welcoming for individuals from various cultural backgrounds.	33	21	6	12	28	2.81	1.66	Agreed
5	The library promotes literature and content from local authors and creators representing diverse cultural perspectives.	25	9	3	14	49	3.53	1.71	Agreed
	Grand mean						3.04	1.60	Agreed

The result from table 2 showed the summary of mean rating and standard deviation on the innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities. It shows that the grand mean rating of the respondents on innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities was 3.04. Overall, the grand mean of 3.04 indicates that the respondents are generally in agreement that there are innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural

communities.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library?

Table 3: Respondents mean rating and standard deviation on the challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library.

S/N	ITEMS	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	S/D	REMARK
1	The library faces challenges in acquiring and maintaining a diverse collection of resources that adequately represents the cultural backgrounds of the community.	25	12	20	19	24	3.05	1.51	Agreed
2	Limited financial resources hinder the library's ability to organize and sustain cultural events and programs for the diverse population	9	19	8	25	39	3.66	1.39	Agreed
3	The library faces difficulties in establishing and maintaining partnerships with local cultural organizations to enhance its services	17	12	8	32	31	3.48	1.47	Agreed
4	Challenges in staff training and development may hinder the successful implementation of cultural competence initiatives.	12	10	10	28	40	3.74	1.39	Agreed
5	The lack of cultural competence among library staff poses challenges in effectively serving patrons from diverse backgrounds.	29	21	14	26	10	2.67	1.39	Agreed
Grand mean							3.32	1.43	Agreed

The result from Table 3 showed the summary of mean rating and standard deviation on the challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library. It shows that the grand mean rating of the respondents on challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library was 3.32. Overall, the grand mean of 3.32 indicates that the respondents

are generally in agreement that there are challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between current library services and culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library.

Table 4: Z -test analysis of the mean response of current library services (CLS) and culturally diverse populations (CDP) in Rivers State Public Library.

Literarily diverse populations (CDP) in Rivers State Public Library.								
Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	T-cal	Df	t-crit	Remark	
CLS	100	3.2	0.18	4.80	384	0.05	1.96	Significant
CDP	100	3.1	0.2					

Table 4 above shows the result of tested hypotheses one, the result revealed that the observed t-value is 4.80 at 0.05 level of significant, with a degree of freedom (df) of 384. The critical t- value was found to be 1.96, since the observed value is greater than the table value, it imply that the observed value is significant. Therefore, the null hypotheses is rejected, meaning that there is a significant difference in the mean response of current library services (CLS) and culturally diverse populations (CDP) on the relationship between current library services and culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

Current Library Services that meet the Needs of Culturally Diverse Populations in Rivers State Public Library

The result from Table 1 showed the summary of mean rating and standard deviation on the current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library. It shows that the grand mean

rating of the respondents on current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library was 3.43. Overall, the grand mean of 3.43 indicates that the respondents are generally in agreement that there are current library services meeting the needs of culturally diverse populations in Rivers State Public Library. The finding of the study is in agreement with the opinion of Adejo (2020), who investigated how libraries help Nigeria's underprivileged communities get the information they need. This paper's main goal is to review the ideas surrounding libraries, information, and the information demands of underprivileged people in Nigerian society.

This essay examines the several classifications of underprivileged individuals and the knowledge that they demand. It makes an effort to highlight the crucial responsibilities that libraries play in providing knowledge to the various populations.

Innovative Approaches that the Public Library have Employed to Cater for Multicultural Communities

The result from Table 2 showed the summary of mean rating and standard deviation on the innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities. It shows that the grand mean rating of the respondents on innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities was 3.04. Overall, the grand mean of 3.04 indicates that the respondents are generally in agreement that there are innovative approaches the public library have employed to cater for multicultural communities. The review's decisions struggle with those of Syn et al. (2023) who assessed creative public library administrations during the coronavirus pandemic: Application and correction of social advancement typology.

Challenges Faced by the Library in Implementing and Sustaining Culturally Diverse Initiatives in Rivers State Public Library

The result from table 3 showed the summary of mean rating and standard deviation on the challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library. It shows that the grand mean rating of the respondents on challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library was 3.32. Indicates that the respondents are generally in agreement that there are challenges faced by the library in implementing and sustaining culturally diverse initiatives in Rivers State Public Library which include inadequate funding, poor employment opportunities and working conditions, a lack of ICT infrastructure, and a shortage of ICT-savvy staff. The finding of the study is not in agreement with the opinion of Okafor (2020) investigated Nigerian public library services: tactics and obstacles. This essay focuses on the services provided by public libraries, which demonstrate why they

should be built in every community. These services include those related to education, information awareness, children's libraries, and other services.

Conclusion

This study looked at public library as tools for building culturally diverse communities through innovative public library services. It's interesting to observe that every indicator points to the public library as a crucial tool that must function extremely well if civilization is to advance. Knowledge is essential to advancing community progress, and public libraries play a key role in this regard by offering the information resources needed for community members to widen their horizons. The purpose of public libraries is to serve the requirements of the broad public in which they are located, including informational and educational purposes. The unique services provided by the Rivers State Public Library aim to foster cultural diversity within the community, highlighting the significant influence that public libraries have on building a region's social life. Through its embrace of cultural variety and proactive efforts to close gaps, the library has emerged as a symbol of inclusivity, encouraging a sense of community among its patrons. The activities of the library have an influence that goes beyond its boundaries and enhances society's cultural diversity and harmony.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The library should increase the number and variety of books, magazines, and online materials available in the community's spoken languages. To make sure the collection is still relevant, evaluate the linguistic requirements of the diverse community on a regular basis.

2. The library should create and support inclusive programming that actively includes people from a variety of cultural backgrounds. These could include participatory events that highlight the diversity of customs, storytelling sessions, and cultural workshops.
3. The library should continually train library employees and assist them in overcoming obstacles associated with cultural diversity program.

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