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# THE FELT NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF A TYPICAL PUBLIC LIBRARY IN THE INFORMATION AGE: THE CASE OF OSUN STATE BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In a developing economy like Nigeria, provision of timely information cannot be overemphasized. The right to information is a basic human right which should not be trampled upon. This is where the public library comes in which according to Ali (2007) is a public institution created with public funds for public education, literary information, culture, entertainment and recreation. Especially in a developing country like Nigeria, libraries serve a very unique and important role in providing free access to information for all types of people particularly those Internet services at home or at work. The demand for such services has increased significantly with the ever growing need for access to digital and on line information. E-banking, e-learning and even employment opportunities abound on line.

Research by the young adult library services (2007) indicates that there is a growing need of Internet services among young adults since this group makes up one of the most dedicated groups of library users and demand more and typically faster access to information. Over the years, Internet access provided by public libraries have been studied and documented by many authors. In this connection public libraries in Northern Nigeria as reported by Badawi (2007) no longer rely on books alone to render information services to their clientele. One major reason public library provides information is to support formal and non-formal education. This is an essential service for the masses.

A study by the ALA (2007) on Internet connectivity in US public libraries reports that nearly all of America's 16,543 public libraries offer free public access to computers, Internet, and to trained and equipped staff to help library users gain technology skills and find the information they need for school work and more. The same study reported that American public libraries are the only providers of free access to Internet in their communities.

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The important thing about public libraries is that they provide access for all irrespective of gender, education level, age or social class as an essential service for the masses. The digital age of the moment demands that library services provided by public libraries are as vast and varied in content as the librarians' imaginations.

The public library is an open avenue for literacy development, health information, political awareness and cultural promotion especially in an emerging democracy like Nigeria.

### **Needs Assessment**

Webinar (2010) defines needs assessment as the process of identifying performance requirements and the 'gap' between what performance is required and what presently exists.

### **National library of Nigeria**

National library is a typical public library going by the general definition of a public library as one that is established for the public using public funds in order to support the formal and non-formal education of the public (Ali, 2007). It was established in the mid 1960's with the enactment of the National library act of 1964 for the purpose of creating a local depository of knowledge. The headquarters is presently located in Abuja. By the National library act of 1964, a branch is supposed to be established in each state of the federation.

In reality, this goal is yet to be achieved. As documented by Wikipedia (2010), problems being faced by the National library of Nigeria include:

- a. Failure to effectively expand to all the 36 state capitals
- b. Lack of adequate social amenities
- c. Inadequate staffing
- d. Inadequate storage facilities for the AV collection.
- e. The problems being encountered by the National library of Nigeria are not limited to the under listed. For the propose of this study, emphasis shall be on the Osun state branch of the National located in Oshogbo

## **II. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The public library in contemporary times has ceased to simply be a repository for books and other information media. It is a dynamic gateway to information and as such should provide an active laboratory for the explanation, investigation and the retrieval of information wherever it may be found either locally or virtually (Angeley and Purdue 2000). Taking into



cognizance the present trend of information explosion, there is a need to connect all communities with ICTs and to establish community access points. The best way to ensure that the information gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is bridged is to equip the public libraries with ICTs especially Internet connectivity. Considering the fact that information is a resource, it is only reasonable to conclude that the right to information is an important human right.

A report by the Australian Library Association (2007) shows that in Australia, public libraries continue to provide a core service of Internet access to all categories of users based on the principle of the right of all users to unhindered access to information of their choice. It is against this background that this study investigates the responses to the peculiar questions and needs of the public that use the Osun State branch of the National Library of Nigeria in and around Oshogbo.

### **III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Public library services in Nigeria have declined dramatically over the last decade which is a reflection of the political and economic situation of the country.

To this end, it was felt that the management of the public library sector needs to be reviewed with greater focus on user needs. This is a pointer to the fact that the library community needs to become more knowledgeable about what constitutes quality and sufficient Internet connectivity in their library for the communities that they serve. A first step is to identify a felt need through a needs survey which is what this study proposes to do.

### **IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study is guided by general and specific objectives.

The general objective of the study is to carry out the Internet need assessment of National Library of Nigeria, Oshogbo.

The specific objectives are:

- i. Identification of the felt needs of the library users at National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo.
- ii. Determining the extent of users' satisfaction with the level of provision of library services at National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo
- iii. Identification of the gaps to be filled in order to ensure improved library services and guarantee users' satisfaction at National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo



## Research Questions

The following research questions were drawn to be provided answers in the study:

- i. What are the felt needs of the users of the Osun State branch of National Library of Nigeria, Oshogbo?
- ii. To what extent are the users satisfied with the level of provision of library services at the branch of the National Library of Nigeria Oshogbo?
- iii. What are the gaps which need to be filled in order to ensure improved library services and user satisfaction?
- iv. Is Internet connectivity the present priority of library users in order to enjoy better services from the staff of National Library of Nigeria Oshogbo?

## Significance of the study

This study will be found useful by the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) in policy making and implementation strategies. The findings will also serve as a platform for greater output at higher levels of efficiency and improved users' satisfaction in the provision of essential library services. Again, it will give insight on the way forward in an attempt to improve the battered image of the public library system in Nigeria.

## V. LITERATURE REVIEW

As far back as 1992, Henderson identified the numerous benefits and advantages to library users upon the introduction of new technologies; some of the benefits identified by Henderson (1992) included but not limited to the provision of speedy and easy access to information, that is, provision of around the clock access to users and access to unlimited information from various sources.

The Public library has been recognized and accepted as the first point of access to information for the community it serves. In recognition of this glaring fact, it is an implicit obligation to provide basic public library services free of charge to the public.

Scully (1998) stated that providing public access to electronic publications available through the Internet in public libraries, is therefore a core service to be rendered free of charge. He went further and opined that, a public library is not entitled to view assisting clients to locate information available through the Internet as a value-added service nor a commercial service with unfair competition with the private sector. This view was shared by the Australian Library and Information Association (2007) who reported that, in Australia, public libraries



continue to provide a core service of Internet access both to adults and children based on the principles of the right of all users to unhindered access to information of their choice. Evidence from the literature indicates that the situation of poor public Library services is not exclusive to Africa as a continent or to Nigeria in particular (Issak, 2000: 13)

The role of public libraries in the provision of information to support the formal and non-formal process of education cannot be compromised. This is evidenced by the fact that the majority of public library clients are students or young school leavers, seeking admission to higher institutions of learning.

A clear and consistent finding from the Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study (2010) is that, there is unequal quality of public access to the Internet among libraries. The findings indicate that location, availability, lack of electricity back up, bandwidth and cost, among others, are the key factors that affect the ability of public library to provide high quality public access to the Internet.

Libraries are essential and important elements in the society in ensuring access to educational, entrepreneurial and employment resources. For instance, nearly all of America's 16,543 Public library buildings offer free public access to computers, the Internet and to trained staff to help library users acquire technological skills and find the information they need for school, work and more (public Library Funding and Technology Access Study, (2008).

The situation in Public Libraries in Africa is quite different. Isaak (2000;12) noted that factors such as economic crisis, lack of definition of the role of the libraries, excess centralization of the management of libraries coupled with lack of human resources to run the libraries professionally lead to deteriorating library services in Africa. She advocated that since the majority of public library users in Africa are students, new approaches to librarianship need to be found in order to meet the real needs of library users.

This study sets out to ascertain the real needs of the users of the Osun State branch of National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Osogbo.

## **VI. RESEARCH METHODS**

Survey method was adopted for the study. A needs analysis was carried out using questionnaire survey of library clientele over a two week period.

The population for the study was all the library clientele who used the National Library Osogbo during the two week period, when the survey was carried out. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire titled, "Library Needs Assessment Questionnaire" (LNAQ)



Table 4 presented the extent of respondent satisfaction with the library resources. It is clear from the table that majority of the respondents as represented by 54.3% were not sure whether or not they were satisfied with the library resources. This implies that the library users of National Library of Nigeria are not sure of their satisfaction level about the library resources at NLN which may be due to the fact that the users do not always have access to the library resources at NLN or that they only go to the library to make use of their own resources.

**Table 5: General Performance of the Library Staff**

Performance level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly satisfactory performance	10	10.9
Satisfactory performance	67	72.8
Poor performance	7	7.6
Not sure	8	8.7
Total	92	100.0

Table 5 presented information on the performance level of the library staff. It is clear from the table 77(83.7%) respondents representing the majority are satisfied with the performance level of the library staff. This is suggestive of the fact that the librarians are dedicated and committed to their work and at the same time friendly to the library users.

**Table 6: Gaps in Services to be Filled at the Branch of the National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Osogbo**

Required service	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Provision of more books	9	9.8
Provision of quiet area service	57	62.0
Provision of Internet working stations	34	37.0
Provision of comfortable seating spaces	9	9.8
Provision of carrels service	13	14.1
Provision of computer training centre	41	44.6
Provision of local history collection/ Displays	32	34.8
Provision of Arts/Crafts exhibition	15	16.3
Extension of library opening hours	20	21.7
Provision of homework/helpdesk	17	18.5

Table 6 presented information on the gaps in services at the library and it revealed that majority of the respondents affirmed the need for provision of quiet areas for reading and

studying (57 or 62.0%) as the major services gaps that existed at the library. This may mean that the library is located in a noisy environment. This is closely followed by the provision of computer training centre as major service area that required attention as indicated by 41 (44.6%) respondents. This implied that there is need to ensure quietness in the environment of the library.

**Table 7: Ways of Improving the Library Services at National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo**

Ways of improving library service	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Extension of library opening hours	23	25.0
Provision of relevant books/journals/ magazines	33	35.9
Seeking the support of library users/ individual in form of donation and endowment	72	78.3
Seeking the support of staff in form of improved service delivery	56	60.7
Seeking the support of government in form of provision of adequate facilities and resources	88	95.7
Provision of Internet services	44	47.8

Table 7 presented respondents opinion on ways of improving library services at NLN, Oshogbo and it showed that majority of the respondents agreed to the seeking of support from government in form of provision of adequate facilities and resources (88 or 95.7%), seeking support of individuals in form of donation and endowment (72 or 78.3%) and seeking support of staff in form of improved service delivery (56 or 60.7%) as major ways of improving the library service. This implied that there is need for the NLN to enlist the support of government, individuals/users and staff in order to improve library services.

The findings of this study reveal that majority of the users of National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo are students. This corroborates the assertion by Isaak (2000; 12) that majority of public library users in Africa are students. This may be explained by the fact that Oshogbo is not an industrial town. The greatest industries there are schools and the state civil service.



Furthermore, the respondents indicated that the felt need contrary to what is reported in developed countries such as the United States is more reading space. This is in sharp contrast to what was reported by the Australian Library Association (2007)

Again, based on observation and perusal of the library users register, it was discovered that there are peak periods of library use and this coincides with examination periods. This may account for the indifference by the study respondents to devices of the library. This is further suggestive of the fact that, the respondents use the National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo more or less as a reading room hence the felt need for a quiet environment and more reading space.

This finding is a pointer to the fact that National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo is a far cry from the expected standard of public library services. This merely confirmed the observation made by Isaak (2000;12) that the situation of public libraries in Africa is deteriorating due to factors such as finance, lack of definition of the role of libraries and an excessive centralization in the management of public libraries.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study are suggestive of the fact that National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Oshogbo has great potential. Presently, finance is the major setback. The government should come to its aid and also, public spirited individuals as well. It is meant to be more than a reading room. The facilities need to be upgraded; the staff retrained and empowered to ensure that they meet up with the challenges of provision of library services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made: Computer training section should be incorporated into the library as part of the services rendered. Obviously the respondents in this study are not yet ready for new technology because they are not Information Technology (IT) compliant.

Again, the management of the National library should be decentralized, as this will afford the state branches the autonomy to carry out the need assessment survey and provide the services required by the host community and not what headquarters think the states need.

The community hosting the National Library should provide infrastructures (e.g. landed property), while the government will fund the libraries. In this way it will be ensured that the library is situated in a low density area without noise pollution where maximum use will be made of the library facilities.

Again, Information Technology infrastructures should be provided in order to ensure a sustainable platform for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) implementation in the Nigerian National Libraries. Competent and technically skilled personnel should be employed to assist in training library staff on proper handling and usage of IT equipment. User education programme should be given topmost priority.

When all these and many more one can think of along this direction are embraced, then Internet facilities can be successfully incorporated into the regular library services, in order to live up to the required standard.



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