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Funding of public libraries: issues and way forward

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This study examined the funding of public libraries: Issues and way forward. The paper is guided by four (4) specific objectives. The study defined the concept of public library and also compared it with other types of libraries. Funding of public libraries was also discussed. The study further identified and discussed other alternatives funding for public libraries. The study therefore recommended that: Public libraries should be adequately funded so as to facilitate acquisition of information resources for utilization by the public. Staff of the public libraries should be well trained in the use of information and communication technologies. Management of public libraries should be linked up with the alternative ways to raise fund for public libraries.

Keywords: Concept of Funding, Public Libraries, Need for Funding Public Libraries, Alternative Funding for public Libraries, Issues and Way Forward for Public Libraries

INTRODUCTION

Dramatically Public libraries have declined over the past few years due to the effect of both the economic and political situation in the country. The financial crises have affected the structure and maintenance of the building, the size, the content of the collections and the overall provision of services hence, the main library activity now is to serve as reading and study rooms for students, who in some cases use their own materials and do not consult library collections (Aisa, 2000). Different types of information resources in different subject areas of knowledge are stocked in Public libraries and this enable them to serve the teeming population of clienteles that visit the library every day. Academic libraries define the category of clienteles they admit while; public libraries admit all categories of users. Public libraries according to Akanwa (2013), provides information resources, services and recreational outlets for the generality of the citizenry, namely; the young, the old, the literate and the non literate. In another similar definition, Aina (2004) notes that while other types of libraries are meant for specific groups of users, the public library is not restricted to a particular group of users.

Never the less, it is quite imperative to adequately fund public libraries to enable them satisfy the information needs of different types of clienteles it serves, considering the services and categories of people served by public libraries. The need for funding of public libraries according to Akanwa (2004) is necessitated by (1) Information needs of the public, (2) Acquisition of information resources (3) Provision of library services, (4) Maintenance of infrastructure and (5) Staff motivation.

Finance according to Anafulu (1991), is at the hearth of any enterprise and no matter which way we look at it, the library is a classic example of an enterprise. Anafulu

further posits that if the library is to meet the objective for which it is established for the procurement and processing of materials, for hiring of personel and for purchase and maintenance of equipment. As the local gateway of knowledge, public library should be adequately be funded to enable it achieve its objectives, considering the need for the provision of library services by public libraries, there is need to provide adequate funding for public libraries so as to serve the teeming population of clienteles that need the services of public libraries. Public libraries are supposed to be agents of popularization of information literacy, so that every citizen should be able to identify his or her information needs, know where and how to demand for information, how to use the information collected in satisfying life's options, using a variety of information resources. Nevertheless, public libraries cannot achieve these laudable goals without proper funding. Funding is very important in every organization, especially as it pertains to the public library which is a non-profit organization.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the funding of public libraries, issues and way forward. The specific objectives are:

(1) To ascertain the need for funding the public libraries
(2) To identify the alternative funding for the public libraries
(3) To find out the missions for public libraries and
(4) To identify issues and way forward for the public libraries

There are many reasons why public libraries should be funded and they include the following:

To Carter for the Information Needs of the Public Library: Public libraries serve the generality of the public. Based

on the nature of its service to the public, it should be properly funded to enable it provide adequate service for its clienteles. In conformity with this argument, Aina (2004) posits that while the other types of libraries are meant for specific groups of users, the public library is not restricted to any group of users.

To acquire information resources: Public libraries require information resources for use by its users. Any library be it academic, special or public library that does not have a full complete materials and complement of print and non print materials cannot be fully utilized by its users. There for public libraries make appreciable impact in the lives of their users, they require fund to acquire

information resources in the form of books, audiovisual material and electronic information resources.

To provide library services: Today, library service is no longer what it used to be, users can now stay in the comfort of their homes to access services of the library. With the help of on-line services like e-mail, WhatsAPP, Face book, or the website. Adequate funding is needed for the public library to provide these services.

To maintain infrastructure: Infrastructures in the libraries need maintenance. Maintenance is very necessary for every establishment if such establishment must not be dilapidated. Many public libraries are now in bad shape as a result of non maintenance. Print materials in some libraries are very old and unattractive, and this situation may even affect the usage of these libraries.

To enhance staff motivation: Proper funding of the library will bring about motivation of its staff, and this in turn lead to increase in output. Poor funding of the library will make the staff of the library not discharge their duties effectively (Egbufor, 2004)

Alternative Funding for the Public Library

In view of the fore-going, it is now very clear that the government is not capable of funding the public libraries adequate, the library has to source for other means to finance its programs. They can achieve this through fund raising; through churches, schools and even social clubs, public libraries can raise fund to operate the library. Through fund raising, staff of the public library can public a journal and present same for launching, this may attract fund for the procurement and installation of new gadgets; information resources, establishing a rural library; renovating or digitizing of the library materials.

Friends of the library: Friend of the library is an association which can be formed by some lovers of the library, and the public librarian may identify with this association through fund can be raised to finance the public library. This can be achieved through fund raising events, sponsoring library outreach programmes and hosting book fairs.

   The library can also raise money through advocacy. This can be achieved by mounting public awareness programmes to sensitize the public about the services public libraries can offer them. Staff of the library can still be of help to the library by helping to improve the image of the library, this can be done through the following ways: (a) public awareness programmes which will be geared towards sensitizing the public about the services of public library. According to Agosto (2008), creating

awareness about the services of the public library can bring in a lot as they can volunteer from time to time to work for the library, they can also help in funding the library.

Private Donation

Donations from private individuals comprise a greater percentage of funding than any other alternative source. Private donation as a source of public library support is not a new phenomenon. it is quite imperative to adequately fund public libraries to enable them satisfy the information needs of different types of clienteles it serves. Many public libraries across the globe have benefited from personal donations, For instance in the United States. John Jacob Actor made the first significant private donation to a public library by donating $400,000 of his estate funds in 1839 for its establishment. Between 1839-1999 also, Andrew Carnegie funded the library new building in 1,418 communities across the United States (Sessa, 2003 and Seaway, 2003)

Similarly, Mr. Emeka Offor an indigene of Irefi Orafite in Ekwusigo L.G.A of Anambra State has been funding libraries through his foundation that oversees funding and provision of information resources to public libraries, especially public library system is one of the best in the whole of Nigeria.

Grants

According to Abdulrahim (2019), there are two types of grants: government grants and corporate and foundation grants. Grant that emanate from the government for a particular organization for the execution of one project or the other us known as government grant. Government in some cases gives tha public libraries grant to acquire information resources, develop websites, acquire ICT gadgets, or engage in specific enlightenment campaign that will benefit the citizenry. Grants are not easily accessed in Nigeria, especially now that the country is experiencing economic depression.

The second type of grant according to Abdulrahim (2019), is Corporation and foundation grants. This grant forms part the important sources of the alternative funding for public libraries, and it appears that corporate support for organizations especially the public libraries is increasing intermittently. This may be as a result of technological advancement like the social media, the Internet, e-newspapers and magazines etc., that make it possible for people to communicate online. To benefit from this advantage, the administrators of public libraries should search for these addresses/links online and use them to access fund to the public libraries. The Global libraries Initiative has been privileged to partner with the

public libraries, making available fund for public library development, the organization has also helped to improve the lives of about 280,000,000 people across African Continent (Abdulrahim, 2019)

Most public libraries charge fees for selected services such as photocopying. Placing reserves, consultancy, Selected Dissemination of Information (SDI), international brokerage, sending the lists of bestsellers and new arrivals to patrons etc. However, many public libraries have not engaged in this profit making service for the first time. In contrary to this, Goldberg (2014) and Kniffel (1997) argue that public libraries should offer their services free of charge to its users. In agreement with this, Johannesen (2004), posits that the introduction of fees to the services of the public libraries is a shift from the general focus to public library services "from an external focus on society to internal focus on the public library itself" and a similar shift from the user as a citizen with rights, to the user as a customer with individual preferences and needs that should be met. Based on the arguments in this study by most authors, there is an indication that provision of service to the library users is more important than charges on the services of the public library, as this practice will discourage the public library users.

Issues and Way Forward for Public Libraries

Ngozi (2012). In the maiden conference of the Nigeria Library Association Abia State chapter, has discussed some of the underlying issues in the operation of public libraries. In her words, the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) as well as the utilization of social media for information communication and networking has radically erupted transformation in entire information handling process. She further posited that as a result of this development in the handling of information, public libraries have significantly created the need for changes in the tools and roles of public libraries requiring new information technology skills in addition to traditional library skills. In agreement with this, Titangos and Jan (2006) assert that library profession is at a crossroad in the 21st as traditional library service appear to be on the decline while new technology based services are on the rise.

Way Forward for Public Libraries

According to Singh and Pinki (2009), there is need for skill development for information handling in the public libraries. In his argument, he maintained that library professionals should render services to users by using different information technology skills. Library and Information Science Schools should introduce skill-based

curriculum, making more provision for specialization. There has to be timely updating of syllabus and the facility of well equipped computer laboratory to cope with the frequently changed technological environment. Professional associations and universities should from time to time organize short term coerces for skill enhancement for workers. Another way forward is the organization of seminars, workshops and conferences for professionals (Singh and Pinki, 2009)

CONCLUSION

Without doubt, this paper has done justice to the meaning of public library for better understanding of the concept. Public library serves the general purpose of the entire society without segregation in the provision of quality education. If the public libraries are adequately funded, it will go a long leading to the enlightenment of the society at large. The public library should be adequately stocked with all types of information resources such as; books, audiovisual materials and electronic information resources, including facilities that aid recreation. It should link the library with international donors for assistance and other stake-holders who are capable and willing to assist and thereby providing opportunities for lifelong learning and reducing the teeming population of drop outs from schools. In a computer age like ours, public libraries should be able to serve its users with innovative technologies such as the internet, social media, maker-space, especially for children all types of digital resources. The information resources of public libraries should also be digitized so as to facilitate the access of their resources online. The government should try their best to assist the public libraries with adequate funding for the library to be able to achieve all these laudable projects discussed in this paper. If all the recommendations and conclusions in this paper are implemented, the practice of public library will be in conformity with the international best practice of public libraries

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings, of the study:

(1)   Public libraries should be adequately funded so as to facilitate acquisition of information resources for utilization by the public.
(2)   Staff of the public libraries should be well trained in the use of information and communication technologies.
(3)   Management of public libraries should be linked up with the alternative ways to raise fund for public libraries.

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