

Full Length Research

Overcoming the Challenges to Library Access and Opportunities in Nigeria

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The paper gave the general overview of libraries as collections of books, manuscripts, journals, and other sources of recorded information; types of libraries as academic, public, school and special library and information services, access to library resources and services. The work discusses how users can gain access to library resources and make maximum use of the information resources in the library. Challenges to library access were mentioned as inability to make use of library catalogue, poor ICT skills among others. To overcome the challenges, the paper suggested that users should be trained more on to use the library catalogue and training should be given to users on the use of ICT. And librarians need to be trained to assist users in gaining access to the library.

Keywords: Challenges, Library Access, Opportunities, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

In the library, resources are selected, processed and organised and they play unique roles in promoting, protecting, and educating about intellectual freedom. They serve as a point of voluntary access to information and ideas and as a learning laboratory for students as they acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed in a pluralistic society (American Library Association, 2021). Library Access is the means of getting approach to the library information resources. The resources cannot be reached without following the gate. The services the librarians render are the gate to the resources. On this note, the paper will be viewed under the following sub-themes:

- Library and types of libraries' resources
- Library and Information Services
- Access to Library Resources and Services
- Challenges to Library Access and Services

- Overcoming the Challenges to Library Access and Services

Library and Types of Libraries' Resources

Libraries are collections of books, manuscripts, journals, and other sources of recorded information. They commonly include reference works, such as encyclopaedias that provide factual information and indexes that help users find information in other sources; creative works, including poetry, novels, short stories, music scores, and photographs; nonfiction, such as biographies, histories, and other factual reports; and periodical publications, including magazines, scholarly journals, and books published as part of a series. As home use of records, CD-ROMs, and audiotapes and videotapes has increased, library collections have begun to include these and other forms of media, too. As technology has changed and allowed ever new ways of

creating, storing, organizing, and providing information, public expectation of the role of libraries has increased. Libraries have responded by developing more sophisticated on-line catalogs that allow users to find out whether or not a book has been checked out and what other libraries have it. Libraries have also found that users want information faster, they want the full text of a document instead of a citation to it, and they want information that clearly answers their questions. In response, libraries have provided Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services, in which librarians choose information that may be of interest to their users and forward it to them before the users request it (Britannica, 2020). Libraries are much more than a place to read books and journals. Libraries also houses advanced electronic resources, including the Internet, digital library collections, remote access to a wide range of technology and instruction (Cornell University Library, 2020).

Kinds of libraries:

- **Academic libraries** serve colleges and universities, their students, staff and faculty. Larger institutions may have several libraries on their campuses dedicated to serving particular schools such as law and science libraries. Many academic librarians become specialists in an area of knowledge and can have faculty status.
- **Public libraries** serve communities of all sizes and types. Wherever you live, there's bound to be a local public library nearby in the western world! As the name implies, public libraries serve the general public, "from cradle to grave". Public libraries often have departments that focus on areas of service, such as youth, teens and adults.
- **School libraries** are usually part of a school system, and serve students between Kindergarten and senior secondary school III. Many are called media centers, and librarians are often required to have a degree in library education or a certificate in school media.
- **Special libraries** offer unique opportunities to work in a specialized environment of interest, such as corporations, hospitals, the military, museums, private businesses, and the government. Special libraries can serve particular populations, such as the blind and physically handicapped, while others are dedicated to special collections, such as the Library of Congress or a presidential library (ALA, 2020).

Library and Information Services

According to Bhatnagar, Anjana (2005) in Patel (2015) libraries provide a variety of library and information

services to satisfy different information requirements of users. The following are the services:

- **Reference Service:-** Reference services help users to locate and obtain specific pieces of information from information sources such as reference books, catalogues, directories, files, abstracting and indexing periodicals, databases (online and CD-ROM) and other reference materials. Library personnel may either help users in searching (direct search) or they themselves do the search for users (delegated search) in online or offline mode. Reference service is subjective because of its stress on personalized service. Instruction has objective connotations about it because it encourages the user to independent study.
- **Referral Service:-** Referral services aim to refer users to the sources of information such as secondary publications, information units, professional organizations, research institutions and specialists/experts. Such services do not provide the documents or information required by the user for his/her query but give the direction where available. Librarians utilize directories and databases on sources, specially designed and developed for rendering referral services.
- **Current Awareness Service (CAS):-** CAS satisfies users' current approach to information and thereby keeps them up-to-date in the field of their work. CAS may be provided through variety of media and channels such as current awareness lists, current contents, routing of periodicals, list of research in progress and forthcoming meetings/seminars/conferences, newspaper clippings etc.
- **Document Delivery Service (DDS):-** Document delivery is a key element in access to information. Unless the documents required by the user are available to him/her, all the other services are of no use. DDS is a complex process and is concerned with supply of documents to users on demand in required format. DDS is the last point in this chain of information services that actually locate the required document and supplies it to users in required format. Electronic DDS supports delivery of documents in digitized form at anytime from anywhere.
- **Web-OPAC Service:-** Web-OPACs are next generation of OPACs. Web-enabled OPACs allow users to search library catalogues and access other services from any client at Library Services anywhere at any time. It allows users to search for the bibliographic records contained within a library's collections. It helps users to find out necessary information and removes the time barriers. The users access the Web OPAC service with a standard web browser connect as a client machine because the mechanism does not require installation of any additional client-side software.
- **Union Catalogue and Inter Library Loan (ILL) Service:-** Union catalogue is a collection of

bibliographical details of resources belongs to a group of libraries. No library of the world can purchase all resources. Union catalogue helps user of one library to check the availability of required documents in other libraries, if not available in the stock of local library. Union catalogue is the result of co operative processing works of member libraries of a resource sharing network or consortium. These are available in the form of CD-ROM databases or online databases. Inter library loan (ILL) service handles the processing related with the borrowing of items from collections beyond that of the local library. ILL service acts as a central service in resource sharing activities.

Access to Library Resources and Services

As the digital world continues to evolve, libraries help ensure that people can access the information they need – regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers. (ALA, 2021). Qamar (2002) defined accessibility to information as the provision of information resources to clientele in order to increase their knowledge base. However, this increase in use and importance of information resources, raises concern as to whether these resources are fully accessible to all people. The central significances of accessibility to all recorded knowledge and experience are underlined by the absence of any restriction of guidance as the nature of the contents of the library. The framework of information makes two values of assumption to the function of a library and the right accessibility to it or not. Library resources provide information on the user groups that benefit from information accessibility.

To access library material, resources must be catalogued and classified. Cataloguing and Classification is the general bibliographic description of information resources and assigning of subject heading and class mark for easy retrieval (access). Through the Use of Library catalogues, users can access the library materials. Library catalogue are in two types. Users can either use the traditional Card and the Online Public Access Catalogue; each contains materials held by the Library.

It is one thing for the resources to be available and it is another thing to be accessible. What so ever is available but not accessible is equally useless. It is only what is accessible that is usable.

In addition, Garba, (2009) in Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Salami, (2014) posited that information resources can also be accessible through the use of telecommunication and information technology. It enables access to information and services by minimizing the barriers of distance and cost as well as the usability of interference. If the resources are in print format but the language, which it is written is not understood by the

user, it means the resources are not accessible. Therefore, the accessibility of information resources depends on the ability of the inquirer to make use of the resources effectively (Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Salami, 2014).

Librarians render services to users in order to strengthen the capacity of the use of the resources in the library. Librarianship is an aspect of information provision and dissemination that deals with the effective and efficient provision of information on demand and in anticipation to its users. In other words, they provide information and its sources at the “finger-tips” and “door-steps” of its users/clientele. Librarians are to assist their users in conducting research into specific topics, and also assist in the selection of reading materials. They in other words, render services in terms of assisting clueless users who are not knowledgeable in effective library search. These enable users appreciate reading, enhance their reading habits and see libraries, as indispensable Information Services centre. This service can also be called Referral Service.

Referral Service is the process of identifying resources and agencies with special services or information needed by library users or information seekers, and the ability of the libraries, from time to time, to refer these users to these agencies or organizations for the purpose of satisfying their information needs. Libraries from time to time receive a good number of reference and information enquiries whose range is usually very long i.e. from general to specific. Majority of reference and information queries by users received at the reference desk can be answered through ready reference tools such as dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias, handbooks and manuals, atlases and gazetteers, indexes and bibliographies etc. (Atanda and Uchendu, 2017). All these are services provided by librarians are what users can access.

Challenges to Library Access

According to Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel (2020) in their study the challenges which hinder users from accessing quality information from libraries ranges minor to major ones. The majority of libraries are inaccessible to persons beyond the main entrance of the libraries. The biggest challenge is the absence of diverse multimedia information for various groups. Also, findings reveal that library staff lack adequate knowledge of issues relating to individual needs and their right to access information. According to the findings of Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Salami, (2014), it could be expressed that information resources are available in the library but users cannot access them because they cannot use the catalogue and they cannot locate information resources on the shelves quickly. The findings of Mahwasane and Mudzielwana (2016) in their study reveal that there are other challenges such as for example, lack of information

retrieval skills, insufficient user education, lack of computer knowledge and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills in accessing information in the library. These are the challenges that hinder users from gaining good access to the resources that are available in both electronic library and the physical one.

Overcoming the Challenges to Library Access

The challenges to library access can be treated in many ways. Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel (2020) recommend that relevant state institutions be empowered to implement the ratified information policies and increase education among stakeholders on the need to improve access to information among users. Also, there should be increased investment and allocation of funds to libraries to provide for the information needs of library users.

Also, the users need to be educated on how to use the catalogue to locate information. Accessibility is dependent on availability. If information resources are not available the users would not find anything to lay hands on. In order to improve accessibility to information resources in the library therefore, other retrieval devices should be developed to make it easier for users to locate the resources. When the information resources are accessible the users can now utilize it in meeting their information needs. The effectiveness of any library depends on the resources availability, accessibility and use of its information resources by information seekers. Therefore, proper management of its information retrieval tool should be the focal point of the library in order to meet the demands of the users.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The library cannot function without users as all the barriers to gaining access to information resources in the library should be removed. The librarians should render quality services to the users and help to define their information needs and create a forum for inclusive services that will empower the users in making the maximum use of the available information resources in the library. Also, Library Heads should endeavour to train and retrain the library staff on Information and

Communication Technology use. This will boost the capacity building of the library and create a room for increased information access and use among users.

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