

Information dissemination for people with special needs in the society: Role of libraries as a panacea in bridging the gap for national development

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Abstract

The paper analyzed the information dissemination for people with special needs in the society. Special needs people have basic information needs for human survival in a lot of challenges they are prone to in their various communities. However, it has been observed that information dissemination among the special needs of people in the society is low. This has been attributed to incapacitations, loneliness, isolation, incarcerations, and degenerative diseases among others. One of the key objectives of librarianship as a service profession is provision of information to users in a manner that elicit satisfaction. The study concluded that it is evident that people under these categories need information like any regular library users to satisfy their information needs. The paper recommended that libraries and librarians in collaboration with the government of Nigeria should establish the information needs for improved service delivery.

Keywords: Information dissemination, special needs people, role of libraries, national development.

Introduction

The provision of library resources and information services is one of the fundamental human rights of every citizen. Library in a community provides a unique service that is accessible to everyone. The services provided to users of individual library depend on the objective of the parent organization. These services provided in a library differ from one library to another but there are certain services that are common to all libraries.

The provision of information is the sole business of libraries of various kinds. Libraries and information centres in Nigeria have been saddled with the tasks of providing information to the academia through special libraries, teachers and pupils through school libraries, government and the general public through public libraries (Uzuegbu & Uzuegbu, 2013). In the context of this paper, the responsibilities of public library will be discussed.

Potential library users who for whatever reason are unable to use the regular services of the library have a right to

equal access to library services. The special needs people are the people living in isolated (riverine) areas, people who are housebound (the aged) people with physical and sensory disabilities like hearing and visually impaired people, the immigrants and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) those that are confined in institutions like hospitals and prisons et cetera (Odutola, 2016). Special needs people are prone to a lot of challenges in their various communities; these challenges include loneliness, incapacitations, and degenerative diseases among others. To adequately cope with these problems, information becomes an essential ingredients to the bulk of these groups; Librarians are the sources and channels to make information available to them and how the information may help in modifying their lives.

The role of information dissemination and service delivery to mankind cannot be over stressed. The literature on information dissemination to special needs people indicates that unlike most regular library users, special needs

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people are always prone to different challenges in accessing library materials because of lack of proper arrangement to serve this category of people in the society. The reason for violation of the rights of this group in the library setting may be attributed to the attitudes of library personnel and various levels of government. Studies have not been directed at investigating the cause of low patronage of this category of people. Therefore, this paper intends to find out the shortcomings of service delivery on the part of library personnel and the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Review of related Literature

Information accessibility implies the ease with which the required information is reachable at the right place, to the right users at the right time. Access to information lifts individuals from the state of ignorance, illiteracy and poverty to a state of enlightenment, prosperity and literacy. Information accessibility is considered by Bartlett and Toms (2005) as cited by Adebayo and Omole (2019) as critical in the background of a goal-targeted problem in solving information. In a study conducted by Adebayo (2017) which states that health information accessibility can be achieved through interpersonal interaction which could be via health information providers; librarians, colleagues, peer group, or electronic resources which include television, Internet, radio, or institution sources such as hospitals, NGOs, information centres, or print sources which comprise books, journals, leaflets, handbills.

Kirsty and Richard (2013) affirm that in the developed countries, information accessibility has been given eminence. Librarians are now having books-on – wheels service for the non-ambulatory aged in private homes and hospitals they provide a social venue once in a fortnight for the ambulatory aged, and also supply books on

cassettes, make available posters in doctor's waiting rooms. Visits by library public relations officers to places where the aged meet, discussions with welfare personnel and contact people publicity in local papers and radios. Public library is at the centre of the community to play a full part in its activities, they collaborate with other groups and organizations in the community. This include department of government and local government, the business community and voluntary organization (NGO). An analysis of the information needs of these bodies is conducted, and services provided to meet these needs. This will not only help the organization involved but will also demonstrate, in a practical way, the value of the public library to these people in the community.

Concepts of needs of various user groups

The isolated needs

The isolated people are the people in riverine areas, people in remote areas like villages, cottages hamlet, slums etc. They lack social amenities. They are isolated simply because of the environment they find themselves. For example, in riverine community many forms of transportation are used to deliver library services. Boats are used to move the materials to the users in this type of community; public libraries provide a wide range of materials in a variety of formats and in sufficient quality to meet the needs and interests of the community. In riverine areas, the culture and interest of the local community and society will reflect in the resources collected.

Need of the aged

The aged are people that have advanced in years who often suffer from impaired physical health. They are also called senior citizens, elderly people or old people. The aged needs variety of health information in order to stay alive. This information needs

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cover psychological, security, social esteem and self – actualization using Abraham Maslow’s (1970) theory of needs (Adebayo & Omole, 2019). Moreover, information on degenerative diseases helps the elderly to discover on time and seek appropriate medical advice before deterioration. The role of libraries and librarians cannot be underestimated as the library services can be expanded to cater for the aged information access, sources and channels. If accessed information is duly utilized, the aged maybe relieved of their health challenges because information adds to knowledge, reduces uncertainty and supports decision making. In the light of this, comprehension and adoption of variety of information associated with the elderly’s health may enormously aid in solving their problems.

Zou and Zhou (2014) believe that there is dearth of literature on the health information needs of the aged people, and the topic has been poorly investigated by researchers and this is one of the reasons for this exposition because information satisfies curiosity, general interest, learning and self – education personal identity, integration, social interaction and entertainment are other usefulness of information. Everyone in the society needs information to function well because; it is the underlying resources for sustainable economic, political, communal, social and national development.

Need of the inmates in correctional centre: prison inmates are people restricted from normal human activities as a result of offences committed. Everyone needs information regardless of his or her social status. Information is needed for making choices for behaviour change, and for decision making. Thus, information is an indispensable resource for human survival. International Federation of Library Association and Institution (IFLA) (2005) assert that most of the people in prisons

around the world have inadequate education and life skill and do not come from a background where reading was a requirement. Many of them have been found to have low literacy and insufficient skills that will make them employable. This assertion is probably the major reason why most of them ended up in prisons. Information is critical for literacy, skill acquisition, rehabilitation, reformation and personal development. Any prisoner who wants to move beyond the prison walls as a transformed person, must engage in continuous learning in order to update himself and improve his skills (Folorunso – Ako, 2019).

Information is therefore, essential for personal development and character building. Prisoners need relevant and reliable information within the prison environment, such information needs to be tailored toward meeting their current daily needs, to prepare them for a future outside the prison walls and to be more responsive to training and discipline meted out for individual offences. In the same vein, the IFLA/UNESCO (2005) guidelines for public library services in respect of public library stock provides that the public library must have adequate resources and facilities not just when it is established but also on a continuing basis to enable it sustain and develop services that meet the changing needs of the local community. A thoughtfully designed space and social amenities will speedily increase reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of the prison inmates, foster a sense of community belonging and minimize the impact of environmental hazards. Thus, for correctional center to achieve the objectives of reformation and rehabilitation there is need for the training and re-training of the inmates and the prison staff on a regular basis on managerial and security related

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knowledge (Chandrasekar 2011 as cited by Odutola, 2019).

Information need of IDPs

Literarily, displacement is a form of violence or war that forcefully move people out of their residential areas or communities into a neutral place for the safety and security of their lives by the government of such country. They are called or referred to as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and not refugees as they do not cross an international border. Displaced people face many challenges during their displacement. One of the greatest needs displaced people have after they have been forced to flee their homes is shelter. Other immediate essentials include access to clean water and sanitation, relief items such as blankets sleeping mats, jerry cans and household goods and of course food (Adepoju, 2019).

Education is a priority for the increasing IDPs population and it is a key element to address the trauma that kids, young adults, men and women have experienced over the last months of conflict. Failure to resolve education challenges increase the risk of social tensions. Information is a major resource in the development of human beings and the world as a whole. Bello (2008) concluded that information is the bedrock, catalyst and heart of the world developments, therefore adequate and constant access to timely, accurate, relevant, reliable and current information has proved to be a significant precursor to the entire world technological innovations. Thus, the fundamental rights of the IDPs should not be taken for granted because information is acquired, processed and stored for retrieval when the need arise while the public library/Librarian is at the forefront to disseminate to the users anytime and anywhere the information is needed for national development.

Need of the blinds & visually impaired people

One of the key objectives of librarianship as a service profession is provision of information to users in a manner that elicit satisfaction. The information needs of the blind and visually impaired persons can best be satisfied if only they can be favourably confined to available resources. Information needs of persons with visual impairment, just like the sighted are supposed to portray their peculiarities as well as the information sources consulted. Regardless of status, people's information needs are sourced and selected from their environment (Bamidele, 2019).

According to Adetoro (2004) persons with visual impairment like any special group need information to reduce uncertainty, solve problems and ultimately for individual growth and survival. It is evident that people under these categories need information and therefore it is essential that public libraries and librarians in Nigeria should establish their information needs for improved service provision for national development.

Bamidele (2019) suggests the following improved facilities and services to the blind and visual impaired people by public libraries for it to bridge the gap between the normal users and special needs people in the society. They are to:

- i. Provide special awareness training programmes to visually impaired students so as to be capable of handling the complex information technology applications.
- ii. Provide with appropriate sources and collection of materials to meet information needs of visually impaired persons.
- iii. Bring to the notice of the visually impaired students through appropriate tools the information

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- materials or any kind of information resources newly acquired.
- iv. Have enough computer systems with advanced technology for visually impaired users to enhance library services;
 - v. Determine the impact of library interactions on visually impaired students, libraries can collect data on how they engage with library sources and services.

Generally, visually impaired persons particularly those in schools, have consistently shown a preference for reading materials in different formats, for example, Braille, talking, books or audio recording and large print. The reasons for talking book preference include ease of understanding and play back, time savings, teacher's ineptitude, difficulty and volume of Braille materials. Several reasons are responsible for the VIPs' preference for alternative materials as a means of reading and studying. These have implications for information provision in terms of access to and availability of materials as well as the reading interest and information needs of the visually impaired. Libraries are less recognized as information is becoming more accessible via internet but visually impaired users still depend on libraries and information centres for getting information. Thus, there is need to shift from traditional service and user instruction roles to new roles to serve this special group of users.

Role of public libraries in bridging the gap for national development

Information dissemination to special needs people is possible and can be achieved through the establishment of community libraries at strategic towns and villages. The establishment of such information centres in the society, rural communities is a viable

means of making information dissemination available to categories of library users particularly the special needs people in bridging the gap for national development in Nigeria

A man develops himself by what he does, by making his own decisions, increasing his knowledge and ability and by his full participation in the activities of the community he lives in (Uzuegbu & Uzuegbu, 2013). This can only be achieved when the library user has the right information, but unfortunately, these are the challenges of the special needs people in the society (Nigeria) simply because libraries are less recognized as information is becoming more accessible via internet but visually impaired users/students still depend on libraries and information centres for accessing information. This urgently calls for the need to shift from traditional service and user instruction roles to serve this special group of users. As a matter of urgency, the Federal Government should draw a policy that will back up the provision of these various social amenities in the delivery of services and dissemination of information to the people –who fall under this category.

In the same vein, it is worthwhile for public libraries and information professionals to begin with the community analysis cum information provision practice on wheels rather than waiting for traditional way of expecting users visit to the library. By so doing, the profession would only be doing herself good of spreading her professional image/skill and winning more relevance in the society. One of the primary objectives of public libraries' is to provide adequate resources for readers' development in the society. Studies have shown that public libraries have the potential to play a dominant role in improving literacy and reading habits amongst children and young adults in the society. In discharging their

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roles in the society, public libraries operate in line with set down purpose and this is evident in the performance of their duties. According to Wheeler and Goldhor, cited in Musingafi and Chiwanza (2012) , public libraries perform the following roles: providing information education opportunities for the citizens in the communities; enriching the knowledge of individuals in various subject disciplines where they undertake formal education; providing awareness to meet the information needs of people; supporting the educational, civil and cultural activities of groups and organizations; and providing recreational opportunities and encouraging constructive use of leisure time.

As observed by Ogbonyomi (2014), public libraries being the centre of activity in a community perform some fundamental roles which include: Provision of free service to all; Provision of Support for the civic and cultural activities of the community; Meeting the information needs of all the individuals in the community; Provision of information sources for continuing education, vocational education and adult education, thereby facilitating informal education of all those interested in informal education; Provision of library and information services to all, whether in urban or rural areas; and Provision of rental facilities to members of the public, such as hall for events like wedding reception, lectures and symposia, meetings, etc.

Conclusion

Nigeria has made a remarkable impact and has registered a phenomenal success in the dissemination of information to people with special needs with libraries playing pivotal roles in this feat, although there are still more grounds to cover. Simply put, libraries particularly, public libraries are democratic institutions, critical to the development of socio-economic wellbeing of any nation and

as such acquire, process, store and disseminate information in a variety of formats to every citizen in the community where they are located regardless of race, gender, and age. With the above in mind, public libraries can be more strengthened and repositioned for them to bridge the gap between the normal users and people with special needs in the society through a more aggressive provision and dissemination of information.

The following recommendations are made to proffer solutions to the challenges faced in disseminating information and service delivery to the special needs people in the society:

1. An analysis of the information needs of these categories should be conducted, and services be provided to meet their needs. This will not only help the organizations involved but will also demonstrate in a practical way, the value of the public library to people in the society who are likely to have some influence in the future of the library service.
2. The aged are prone to loneliness, incapacity, geriatric diseases and degenerative diseases, they require adequate information about coping with their present unavoidable but natural stage in life. Suitable information can be published and public library services should employ the services of audio – visual presentation (slides and audio-cassettes) positioned in unrestricted sites within a given community like banks, town halls, churches, mosques, et cetera to maximize social interaction, connection and feeling of usefulness for the aged. Above all, the government should create a house bound and hospital services for her aged population as a matter of policy.

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3. Special transport like mobile libraries, book-boats and other forms of transport to serve those living in isolated areas.
4. Special equipment and reading materials should be provided for those with physical and sensory disabilities such as hearing impaired and visually impaired people.
5. Services for immigrants, internally displaced people (IDPs) and new citizens to help them find their way within a different society and to provide access to media of their native culture.
6. There is need for the prison inmates to be provided with information services that can change their mindset that will enable them live a meaningful life after serving their prison term.

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