

IMPLEMENTATION OF FEE-BASED LIBRARY SERVICES FOR ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The study examined implementation of fee-based library services in public libraries for enhanced service delivery to the users. It covers fee-based library services; purpose of fee-based library services in public libraries which includes effective and efficient competition, provision of an additional services, actualization of the goals of public libraries in support of education among others; types of fee-based services in public libraries includes including abstracting and indexing services, registration of user services, compilation of bibliographic services among others. The study also covers importance of fee-based library services in public libraries, challenges associated with fee-based libraries services and strategies for enhancing fee-based library services in public libraries

Key Words: Public Libraries, Fee-Based Library Services, Service Delivery, Implementation

Introduction

With the mission of providing services to users, public libraries are established for the purpose of acquiring, processing, preserving and dissemination of information resources available to the community freely open to all, irrespective of age, profession, race, sex, color or creed and provides free access to any literature required. Public libraries therefore serve children, young adults and adults from all works of life. The resources in public libraries are comprehensive in all local languages covering all subjects according to the needs constantly reviewed, kept up-to-date and attractively presented and are sourced based on the disciplines or courses required by general public in order to meet the information needs of the users.

With increasing demand by users, public libraries are now developing different avenues in the fulfilment of their goals and objectives. For the public libraries to achieve its purpose, it should provide services and information resources that is required to meet the

information needs of its patrons which will contribute to the general roles of the library including educational, social, political, economic and cultural development of the society (Mondal, 2022). For several decades, libraries have generally explored alternative ways of providing responsive library services to their internal and diverse users (Bani, 2001). However, due to continuous increase in users' demand for information coupled with inadequate library budgets, public libraries can no longer develop a large and comprehensive collection of information resources. For the same reason, public libraries can no longer provide services that satisfy the needs of its patrons. To this end, the alternative to this problem of inadequate funding is to explore other means of generating the funds needed to provide quality information resources and satisfactorily provide library services to users. One of the ways of achieving this is through provision of fee-based library services

Fee-based service is an alternative source of funding required to transform public libraries to the standard that is acceptable in the global level. Fee-based library services in public libraries are those services offered to users of a library at a price. Fee-based library services also enable easy and satisfactorily library services if properly implemented in public libraries Reitz (2004) sees fee-based services as library services delivery, provided for a fee. In these regards, fee-based library services refer to fee-attracting services offered by libraries, independent information professional, library consultants and other knowledgeable and information industries. In other words, this service or resources provided is not free-of-charge (Umebali and Jude-Iwuoha, 2019)

Purpose and Importance of Fee Based Libraries Services in Public Libraries

Fee-based library services are established and managed with the purpose of revenue generation in order to provide effective service delivery. Umebali and Jude-Iwuoha (2019)

opines that development is usually justified by reference to the dwindling economy of nations which has affected the smooth running of public library service.

However, it would be simplistic to assume that the issue of inadequate funding by proprietors is the only reasons attracted for fee-based library services. Some of these other reasons according to Lisedunetwork (2018) are explained as follows:

a. For Effective and Efficient Competition: Information has gone global and can be sought anywhere. Several information agencies are now in existence unlike in the past. These agencies compete for dominance in the production, processing and delivery of information resources and services.

b. For Provision of an Additional Services: Provisions of additional services is the major reason for fee-based services. In order to achieve this, many platforms and programmes are therefore created in order to provide information that will satisfy the specific information needs of the users. Librarians have to go extra miles in providing additional services. But this can be achieved with adequate funding of the library. Since the proprietors of the parent community have failed in that regard, library managers are increasingly taking to provision of fee-based services which entails extra costs and charges on certain services.

c. For Actualization of the Goals of Public Library in Support of Education: In Nigeria, Public libraries play a central role in supporting the goals of the parent community. This is done through the provision of information in different formats, organization of the materials and creating access for effective use of the information resources in meeting the information needs of the information user. The achievement of this role requires good funding which the public libraries are struggling with. The prevailing paucity of funds in Nigerian public has made library managers to look for alternative ways of sourcing for fund to provide effective library services to users.

d. For Addition to Other Sources of Fund: Due to inadequate funds provided by government for the running of public libraries, these libraries seek alternative sources of funds including the non-conventional ways. In fact, fee-based services should be seen as alternative means of sustaining the image and relevance of the public library, especially, during periods of economic uncertainties.

e. To Appreciate Services Rendered by Public Libraries: People generally value what they pay for. The implication is that users value more what they spend money in getting it. Therefore, with the introduction of fee-based services, user would attach much value/importance to information resources and services provided by the public library.

f. For Future Planning by Public Library Management: It is what one has at hand that determines where and what he/she needs. Fee-based services help public libraries to plan ahead of time. It will also open other avenues needed for effective information service delivery.

On the importance of fee-based libraries services in public libraries, the rationale behind the introduction of fee-based services in public libraries in Nigeria is simply to expand their revenue base in order to acquire relevant information resources and to provide effective services to the users. By so doing, the libraries would be able to acquire and make rapidly available information needed by library clients in providing services. As explained by Mahmood and Haider (2005), through fee-based services, the public library is equipped and strengthened to remain relevant irrespective of financial challenges they may face in the course of rendering their services to users. It is no longer a hidden fact that in Nigeria today, fee-based library and information services are still at the rudimentary level. The most emphasis is placed on reprographic services. In the midst of this, Oyedum (2007) agrees that Library and librarians should not be demoralized. Rather, they should continue to

demonstrate their professional prowess and encourage fee-based services because of its enormous benefits. The benefits of fee-based library and information services in Nigerian public libraries system according to the author are summarized under the follow points:

1. Fee-based services help to place the 21st century libraries in a solid position to enhancing service delivery.
2. It provides the avenue for the delivery of all the services needed by users to meet up with the contemporary information demand. It therefore become necessary that it is with fee-based that these services can be provided.
3. It helps libraries to meet the existing demand for library service from external users.
4. It helps to improve the standard of library service to users as value is usually added to any service that has price tag. Users value what they pay money for, unlike what is offered to them free-of-charge.
5. Fee-based services are avenues for generating additional income to the library
6. Fee-based services enhance innovation by librarians which in effect creates opportunity for improved usage and customer satisfaction.
7. It helps in sustaining library information resources and equipment provided in the library which at the end enhanced service delivery
8. Fee-based services improve the image of the library. This is on the fact that those who pay money to a number of public services will equally rate library high as one of the important service units that place prices for their services.
9. It makes users to be cautious in the use of library facilities as they would be made to pay for any damage done on facilities provided for them.

Types of Fee-based Services in Public Libraries

Many types of fee-based services are adopted to make up the shortfall in government subvention. The various types of fee-based library and information services practiced in Nigerian public libraries (NULs) as identified by Mwuese and Doosuur (2014) are summarized as follows:

Abstracting and Indexing Services: An abstract gives concise information about an original work of an author. Therefore, an information user can get necessary information without going to the original work. Abstracting service is one of the services provided by librarians to attract fee to the public library. Indexing is a process of giving definite location of items used in an information material. Indexing provides key for locating information in a published material (Nnadozie, 2010).

Registration of Users: Most public libraries in Nigeria charge a token from Users during registration. This fee is to enable these public libraries effectively provide information resources and services needed by users in these libraries. The amount charged is dependent on the policy of the public library to cover the registration process.

Bibliographic Services: Researchers always look up to librarians to help them arrange bibliography or references to their works. It takes special skill in compilation of bibliography effectively arrange this without mistakes. This service is provided by librarians to bring together publications scattered in different places using definite items necessary to trace/locate the resource for use by information users.

Repackaging of Information Services: Repackaging of information needs an intellectual analysis of consolidated information made in a form suitable for the user's need (source). Information repackaging is the physical recording, arrangement and presentation of information on a given medium and in a given form (source). For example, a book may be decided to be repackaged into CD-ROM by librarian to enhance acceptance and use of

information products and the assimilation and recall of their contents. In most cases, charges are made on the user for this extra service.

Translation Services: Many individuals have used their linguistic proficiency to generate huge revenue as well as attract contracts for their employers or institutions. Besides, language has been a barrier to many information users in many public libraries in Nigeria. To solve this problem, many public libraries engage the services of translators for information in other languages deemed very important for library users. Also, publishers engage the services of polyglot librarians who use their skills/expertise as a medium for generating funds for their libraries.

Overdue Fines: These are fines charged by public libraries as a penalty for books kept beyond the expected date-due. The overdue fine is administered by the library staff as determined in the library policy. Usually, the amount paid covers the length of time the defaulter decides to keep the book(s) borrowed from the library. On the other hand, if the book is lost, the defaulter is expected to replace the book or a related copy of the book as well as pay for the time the book has been in his/her possession.

Internet Browsing Services: The advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has necessitated the growth of Internet centres. Because of this, public libraries have established business centres to generate funds for the libraries. This they do by selling Internet access time to users. Others who do not directly operate Internet services/centres engage contractors who make monthly payments to the library for hiring the place.

Consultancy Services: Public libraries as repositories for information in the public communities are in the good position to identify relevant information sources for the community. They can also plan and organize seminars, workshops for other organizations. If

managed properly, these consultancy services are capable of generating sizable amounts of money for the library.

Sale of Weeded Materials: Public libraries, from time to time, conduct evaluation of library resources. This exercise is meant to ascertain resources that are still relevant to the community and the ones that are not useful to them. It is during this exercise that public libraries remove materials that are not relevant to the community they serving. However, these weeded materials may have economic value because they may be relevant to other institutions. Hence, weeded materials, when gathered, are not thrown away but are sold to institutions that are in need of them at lower prices. Through this, money is generated for the library.

Chat services: Chat services are online services that are carried out between the information seeker and the information provider for fees. It is a communication that is done with the use of ICT devices over the internet. Examples of the online chat are text-based messages, video calls and use of social media plate forms in rendering and accessing information for fees in Nigerian Public libraries

Cataloguing and Classification Services: The bigger and older public libraries in the country are better staffed. A creative public library management could use this advantage to generate revenue. For instance, since many of the newer public libraries do not have experienced cataloguers, classifiers and indexers, the older public libraries can tap this opportunity by leasing the services of staff in theses technical areas to generate money for the upkeep of the library.

Scanning Services: Public libraries rendered scanning services to the users' communities for fees in order to generate revenues. Most of the materials not available electronically are done

using an image scanner which optically scans print text or handwritten document into an electronic resource.

Reprographic Services: This service is provided to library users for the photocopy of some pages of books, journal articles or other materials needed by the users which in turn will generate money to library and as such serve as employment opportunities.

Human Services: Most of the Nigerian public library's practice hiring experts in answering users queries in all fields of the studies which directly or indirectly enhanced better service delivery to the users.

Challenges Associated with Fee-based Libraries Services

Several challenges limit the performance of fee-based services in Nigerian public libraries (Ishola, 2014). Notably among the challenges are described as follows:

1. Introduction of fee-based service puts information service out of the reach of the many who cannot afford their services. Such persons would either quit coming to the library or reduce the use made of the resources and services.
2. Some librarians are not willing to implement the concept of fee-based services. Because of this, these librarians even go as far as discouraging users who would have wished to pay for services rendered.
3. Introduction of fee-based services requires appropriate skill from staff to meet the demand of the time in delivering services. The ability to deliver documents when requested and identified depends mostly on staff availability and skill.
4. The management of the public libraries takes the fee-based services as one of the sources of income generation for the community and as such, demands that the money be remitted

to the account of the community. As a result, the money generated from fee-based services is not maximally used.

5. With the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Internet centres are located in many places where information seekers can conveniently go for information. It will therefore be difficult to convince users to pay for services which they may consider not useful due to the availability of Internet. With this alternative and the competition, it naturally presents, introducing fee-based services will pose a lot of challenges for librarians to convince users for patronage.
6. The frequent breakdown of machines renders fee-based unreliable and not really profitable.
7. Users of information do not see library professionals as information managers. Rather, they see them as mere custodians of information. Therefore, convincing patrons to pay for information provided by librarians may not be an easy task.

Strategies and General Recommendations for Enhancing Fee-Based Library Services in Public Libraries

Public libraries in Nigeria are therefore expected to provide a good framework that will enhance the operation of fee-based services for effective and efficient information service delivery. Considering the importance of fee-based services in improving library services, the following strategies are worthwhile.

1. Public libraries in Nigeria should see fee-based services as an operation that has come to stay considering the economic situation in the country. As such, they should develop a policy frame work that will guide the fee-based activities in the library.
2. Fee-based services should not be seen as avenue that libraries will use to make profit for their parent institutions. Rather, the proceeds should be retained in the library and used to

add value to already existing resources and services, as well as introduce other services relevant to the information needs of users.

3. Staff of Nigerian public libraries should be trained on areas of operation -for fee-based services so as to know the operational exercises involved and the price system to adopt for the value of services provided.
4. Public libraries users should be given orientation on the operations of fee-based services and what they stand to gain from the service.
5. Public libraries in the country should make available all the facilities needed to provide adequate services to users so that they will not be disappointed in the quality of services they paid for.
6. The public library management should not see revenue from library fee- based services as money for the running of administrative cost. Rather, the proceeds should be used to improve the quality of information resources and service.
7. Fee-based services should be managed by staff who have skills of librarianship

Conclusion

The public library is a beacon of knowledge, empowerment, and community development. It is a vital resource for people of all ages and backgrounds, providing access to information, supporting education, promoting a reading culture, and fostering social cohesion. As custodians of cultural heritage, public libraries preserve the collective memory of communities and promote local history and identity. Beyond books, libraries create an environment that encourages lifelong learning, intellectual curiosity, and personal growth. With their diverse functions and unwavering commitment to serving the public, public

libraries play a pivotal role in enriching lives and empowering individuals, making them essential cornerstones of knowledge and learning within society.

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