

LIBRARY FACILITIES FOR INCLUSIVE STORY-HOUR PROGRAMMES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study is on library facilities for inclusive participation in story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The entire population was used for the study. Two validated instruments; observation checklists and structured interviews were used to generate data for the study. The findings of the study showed that the activities that make up the story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State are such that encourage inclusive participation during story-hour programmes. The findings also revealed that there are facilities for effective story-hour programmes in the public libraries but not used due to the absence of story-hour programmes in most of the public libraries in Anambra State. Several recommendations were made among which were that the activities of story-hour programmes should be harnessed and sustained in all the public libraries in Anambra State to encourage inclusive participation. Story-hour programmes should be conducted during weekends so that children that are mostly occupied with school and extra mural lessons during the week can participate. The management of public libraries should adopt possible measures such as the use of posters, bulletins, media and internet to sensitize members of the public on the availability of story-hour activities in the public libraries. This will go a long way at ensuring the use of library facilities for effective story-hour programmes.

Keywords: Library Facilities, Story-hour programmes, Public Libraries

Introduction

Public libraries aid personal development through the provision of programmes and activities that inculcate early literacy and life-long learning skills in members of the community where they are located. Its services cut across all user groups regardless of age, gender, ethnic affiliation, educational level or religion including children. One of the most exciting programmes conducted in public libraries is the story-hour programme which is aimed at enriching children's learning processes while meeting varied learning needs. Achieving active participation during story-hour programmes however depends on the availability of adequate library facilities. Facilities like adequate space, audio-visual resources, comfortable tables and chairs, fan and air-conditioning systems will help ensure that children are in their best state while participating in the programme.

Anambra state has a large population of pupils and pre-school children living within the state. It is therefore expected that children in Anambra State will enjoy the privilege of participating in story-hour programmes if there are adequate library facilities for the programmes. Despite the obvious advantages of story-hour programmes close observations revealed that most public libraries in Anambra do not organise story-hour programmes for children. This study therefore examined the availability of library facilities for inclusive story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State.

The study specifically seeks to:

1. Identify the activities that make up the story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra state.
2. Ascertain the availability of facilities needed for story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State.

Research Questions

Two research questions were posed to guide the study and they are as follows:

1. What are the activities that make up the story- hour programmes in Anambra state public libraries?
2. Are there facilities for story- hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State?

Review of related literature

Library resources include facilities which aid easy accessibility and use of information resources in the library as well as sources of information owned by a particular library. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)'s minimum standards emphasize the availability of flexible buildings and structures and library spaces to accommodate current innovative technologies and services to be provided by public libraries (IFLA, 2022).

Library Facilities

Library facilities include all hardware equipment and materials owned by the library which aids the study and learning process in the library such as shelves, reading tables and chairs, computers, air-conditioners or fans, adequate lightings, library space for learning and display, generating sets etc. Endarti (2022) broadly defined library facilities as the physical spaces, infrastructure and resources provided to support access to information, learning and community engagement. Afum(2020) also explained public library facilities as encompassing a variety of physical spaces and resources designed to meet diverse needs at the community including spaces for meetings, socio-cultural activities and storytelling. Library facilities therefore include adequate reading tables for users, chairs, book shelves, library spaces, fans, proper lightings, ventilation, flooring, restaurants, location of exit points, notice boards/ bulletins, photocopiers, vehicle parking space, computers, carrels, periodic racks, circulation desks, and other facilities that would make users comfortable while reading. Public libraries have recently included internet facilities to aid provision of digital information services like online literature search, e-mail services and digital reference services to users. Adetayo and Lawal (2022) in agreement noted that library facilities are physical and digital resources, spaces and services provided to support users in accessing, learning and utilizing information effectively and includes functional reading rooms, discussion rooms, exhibition spaces and specialized sections for different user groups including children. The availability of facilities in public libraries afford library users the opportunity of accessing and utilizing information resources in a

comfortable environment. Having a set of adequate furniture, equipment and space in the children's department of public libraries will enhance the degree of participation of children during story-hour programmes.

The public library provides adequate facilities to aid easy accessibility of resources while in the building. The public library is a non-profit library that is maintained for public use and usually supported in whole or part by local tax. It is usually located in towns especially within the local government headquarters. IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2022) also defined public library as a local information centre that provides universal access to knowledge essential for life-long learning, cultural development, civic engagement and continuously adopting digital literacy and inclusive online access to meet modern needs while remaining committed to fostering democracy and community well-being. It provides information resources, services and recreational outlets for the generality of the citizenry namely; the young, old, illiterate and non-literate. Public libraries provide comfortable and amenable resources for children in their children's department.

Activities for Story-Hour Programme

Story-hour refers to a regularly scheduled period of activity which includes storytelling in combination with other activities and programs that inculcate skills for early reading success in the child such as talking, singing, reading, writing and playing. The activities of the story-hour programmes are aimed at developing the individual capacity of the child,

improving their literacy skills as well as providing support. The activities of story-hour include storytelling, songs, finger plays, nursery rhymes, crafts, poetry, etc. Storytelling is considered one of the first obligations in service to children. National Storytelling Network (2021) defined storytelling as the interactive use of words and actions to reveal elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination. It is an important aspect of story-hour programmes which enables the development of literacy abilities in children. Storytelling enhances comprehension, expands vocabulary, develops speaking and listening abilities as well as aids the development of narrative thinking which is essential for both writing and reading in children (Chandra, 2023). In order to ensure sustainability, storytelling is coordinated by a professional children's librarian who is expected to be an experienced story teller. Storytelling is a unique way of enhancing both the listening skills and vocabulary of the child. According to Debaratti (2017), storytelling is an interactive activity that encourages and enhances the listening skills of children. It introduces books, stories and languages to children. Stories are either listened to from a film or read aloud from a book by the children's librarian. Apart from enjoying the exciting experience from storytelling, the period provides an opportunity for children to learn and master the parts of a book. They encapsulate the child's imaginative reasoning ability especially when accompanied with moral lessons. Storytelling provides an awesome experience which will linger for a long time in the child's subconscious mind. The child, who is already thrilled by the stories, can in turn narrate the same to other kids at

playtimes. Storytelling sometimes comes with songs to buttress meaning. Storytelling acts as an integral part of early literacy education as it introduces children to books, rhymes, music and other literacy-based activities.

Craft hour is a time for kids who are reasonably capable with scissors and glue etc. It is meant to challenge kids' abilities to use their hands and imaginations (Pocono Mountain Public Library, 2015). Crafts serve as direct links to learning with hand activities in young children. Craft hour in story-hour programme is an enjoyable and exciting time for children as it teaches them how to solve simple problems using both the eyes and hands in line with the imaginations of the mind. During this time, children are taught how to use clay, scissors, papers, water colors etc in creating simple objects like puppets. Children during this time can interact by sharing ideas with their peers while learning new techniques from the children's librarian coordinating the exercise. Crafts hour activities make the participating children active thereby bringing out their innate creative abilities. It serves as a means of enhancing skill sets and boosting self esteem in children by creating opportunities for children to interact with each other and with parents (Cleveland Public Library, 2023). Campala et al (2022) explained that craft activities like paper folding, toy making and handicrafts help to extend the connections and interactions between children and care-givers. It also facilitates the teaching of the concept of recycling and reuse of material that could help children learn to care about nature and environment. Other activities of

story-hour programmes include songs, finger plays and rhymes which serve as stretchers for the mind and body.

The activities of story- hour programmes in the public library play a vital role in the child's psychomotor domain. Children are made to participate in a series of activities that stimulate their senses by giving opportunity for them to interact with one another, answer questions that may be posed by the tutors, as well as indulge in activities that prepare them for reading in proper school.

Research Methods

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. According to Creswell & Creswell (2023) descriptive survey are those studies which aim at collecting data through surveys, interviews or observation and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about the population being studied. The choice of research design was deemed appropriate because the findings realized from studying the children's department of all the eleven divisional and branch public libraries will be used to describe the state of affairs of story- hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State. The eleven branches of the public library covered by this study are libraries in Awka, Abagana, Adazi-nnukwu, Ajali, Amichi, Atani, Ihembosi, Nkpologwu, Nnewi, Onitsha and Ozubulu respectively. The headquarters of these branch libraries is Kenneth Dike Central library, Awka. The public libraries of Onitsha and Abagana serve as divisional libraries while the others are branch libraries.

The population of the study comprises of the children's department of the 11 branches of the public library in Anambra state which is made up of a combination of the facilities and the activities that are used for story-hour programme in the children's section of the eleven branches of public libraries in Anambra state. The instruments for data collection were observation checklists which were designed in line with the purpose of the study and research questions. The instrument was validated by experts from both measurement and evaluation and library and information science departments all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The checklist was expanded to include the components captured in the specific purposes. The data was immediately collected by the researcher who personally observed and filled the observation checklists as well as interacted with the staff in the children's departments of the public libraries. A total number of ten (10) checklists was finally used because Nnewi divisional library was temporary closed down as at the time of this study due to location issues with the host community.

Discussion and Presentation of Results

The summaries of the analysis of the data collected from the field were presented in tables to emphasize the findings. The results of the data analysed were presented according to the research questions that guided the study.

Research question 1: What are the activities that make up story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State?

Table 1 shows the analysis of data on the type of activities that make up story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State.

Table 1: Percentage observation on the type of activities that make up the story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State.

S/ N	Facilities	Ami chi	Onits ha Divisi onal librar y	Ihe m- bo si	Ke n- th Di ke	Nk pol- og wu	Ozu - bul u	Ab a- ga na	Adazi - Nnuk wu	Aj ali	Ata ni	Total		Not	
												Available F	%	available F	%
1	Storytelling, sing-alongs and rhymes	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	09	90%	1	10%
2	Drama, debate, poetry and spelling	√	√	-	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	08	80%	2	20%
3	Puppetry, crafts-hour and finger plays	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0%	10	100%
4	Drawing, tracing and colouring	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	09	90%	1	10%

The analysis of the individual item showed that 10 out of the 13 activities listed are among the activities that make up the story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra state. The activities include reading aloud, storytelling, spelling sessions, drawing, singing, reading aloud, poetry, drama and debate. Their percentage ratings are between

80% and 90% respectively. The remaining 3 activities which are puppetry, crafts and finger-plays are not part of activities that constitute the story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State as they are not available. The findings revealed that the activities that make up the story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State include story-telling, singing, drawing, poetry, reading together, spelling etc. This agrees with the statement by Augustine(2020) that story-hour programmes include activities like storytelling, reading, singing, drama etc. Children are also made to participate in debates and spelling competitions with the aim of improving their reading abilities thereby increasing their love for books and reading while ensuring inclusivity through story-hour activities.

The activities of story-hour programmes indicate that public libraries in Anambra State understand the place of story-hour activities in stimulating the child's early learning abilities. This supports the statement by Caldwell (2023) that modern story-times should involve interactive reading techniques and activities that will expose children to phonological awareness, vocabulary and comprehension skills while instilling literacy skills like listening and thinking in them. The activities of story-hour programmes are most visible in the public library headquarter in Awka and Onitsha divisional library as they are the libraries that regularly conduct story-hour programme. Amichi, Ozubulu and Nkpolgu branch libraries only organise scheduled activities such as spelling bees and quiz competition. Abagana divisional library rarely conduct story-hour programmes due to lack

of patronage which they attributed to the location of the library. This contradicts IFLA’s (2022) guidelines for children’s library services.

Research Question 2: Are there facilities for effective story- hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State?

The table below shows the analysis of data on the type of facilities available for story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State.

Table 2: Percentage observation on the facilities available for effective story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State.

S/ N	Facilities	Ami chi	Onits ha Divisi onal librar y	Ihe m- bo si	Ke n- th Di ke	Nk pol- og wu	Ozu - bul u	Ab a- ga na	Adazi - nuk wu	Aj ali	Ata ni	Total		Not available	
												F	%	F	%
1	Reading Desks and comfortable chairs, bookshelves and carrels	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	09	90%	01	10%
2	Air-conditioned reading	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10	100%	0	0%

3	rooms/fans Well-ventilated rooms with adequate lightening	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	-	√	08	80%	2	20%
4	Quiet environment for reading	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	09	90%	1	10%
5	Moderate space for play and practice	√	√	-	√	-	√	√	-	-	-	05	50%	5	50%

The results of table 2 showed that there are facilities for story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State. The analysis of individual data as shown in table 2 indicates that nine(9) out of the ten(10) branches of Anambra state public library have reading desks and comfortable chairs for reading in addition to bookshelves and carrels for effective story-hour activities which represents 90% of the facilities listed. The only exception however is Ajalli branch library representing 10% which is too small to accommodate reading desks and similar furniture needed in the children’s department. Prof Kenneth Dike library which is the headquarter of Anambra State library board, has a good number of reading desks, tables and puff beds for babies and younger children to rest or sleep when tired. The analysis also showed that all the public library branches have fans (100%) but no air-conditioners in their children’s department. Majority representing 90% (9 public library branches) have well-ventilated reading rooms with adequate

lightening. The only exception being Ajalli branch library (10%) which has no bright light. Nine (9) public library branches representing 90% have relatively quiet environment for reading. Abagana divisional library is however not so quiet due to occasional interference from activities on the busy road where it is located. Five of the libraries, Amichi, Onitsha, Kenneth Dike, Ozubulu and Abagana (50%) have adequate space for play and practice during story-hour programmes. Most facilities are not available in Ajalli public library as at the time of this study. From the results of the observation checklist, it can be deduced that public libraries in Anambra state with the exception of Ajalli branch library, have the facilities required to effectively organise story-hour programmes if used.

The availability of facilities for story-hour programmes in public libraries in Anambra State is an indication that public libraries in Anambra State acknowledge the place of adequate facilities in conducting effective story-hour programmes in line with the basic functions of the public library which includes provision of comfortable environment and spaces (Onwuka 2016). This also support Onuorah (2021)'s assertion that there are facilities in the children's department of public libraries. The results of the findings however disagrees with Oguniyi and Akerele's (2022)'s findings that revealed that the children's sections of most public libraries lack sufficient space and were not adequately equipped as well as with the findings of Okafor, (2020) who identified lack of infrastructural facilities as a major challenge to the effectiveness of children's services in public libraries in Nigeria. The situation in Ajalli library is a contrast to what is obtainable

in other public library branches in the state. The library has no space for play and practice in addition to the fact that it is almost dimly lit thereby supporting the observations by Oguniyi and Akerele (2022) and Okafor (2020). No public library in the state has air-conditioners.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusion of the study:

1. The activities of story-hour programmes should be harnessed and sustained in all the public libraries in Anambra State. For more effectiveness, story-hour programmes should be conducted during weekends so that children that are mostly occupied with school and extra mural lessons during the week can participate.
2. The management of public libraries should also collaborate with relevant authorities and policy makers such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to make story-hour programme a compulsory activity during which pupils will be brought to the library so as to boost the population of children who participate in story-hour programmes in public libraries.
3. The management of public libraries should ensure that the available facilities are used for story-hour programmes. They should adopt possible measures to sensitize members of the public on the availability of story-hour activities in the public

libraries near them. This can be achieved through the use of posters and bulletins which can be pasted in strategic places in the children's department and other parts of the libraries. Adverts can also be placed using various media and internet platforms.

4. Professional children's librarians should become more creative by introducing more appealing ways of reaching out to children. They could also collaborate with nearby schools and other stakeholders to conduct and sponsor programmes with broader audience (like inter-school debate, spelling competitions etc) adding small gifts for winners will also serve as attraction to children.

Conclusion

Activities that make up the story-hour programmes of public libraries in Anambra State are adequate for inclusive participation of children if harnessed and sustained using the available facilities .It can therefore be concluded that public libraries in Anambra State do not organize story-hour programmes even when the facilities needed for all inclusive programmes are available. This can however be corrected if the children's librarians can collaborate with other stakeholders to articulate more exciting ways of making the programmes more appealing to children.

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