

**PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES FOR PROMOTING PEACE IN MULTI-CULTURAL
SOCIETY: ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD**

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Abstract

Nigeria is made up of different types of people with different cultures, beliefs, traditions, and languages among others and every citizen of the country has a legitimate right to access information. Based on this, public library was established, to provide relevant services to the teeming population. But these public libraries do not provide services that cut across multicultural settings. As such, this paper attempts to have a look at public library services for promoting peace in a multi-cultural society: issues and way forward. Provide a way forward such as staff cultural competence strategy; selection policies strategy, acquisition strategy, multicultural users-focus strategy, current awareness services strategy, cooperation strategy, and community welfare strategy for promoting peace in a multicultural society. The paper presents some recommendations which include: public libraries should host art/ music poetry events with the theme of peace, public libraries should provide materials that teach peace and religious tolerance among people as well as engage in advocating for peace among others.

Keywords: Public library, Multicultural society, library services, Peace, Advocacy,

Introduction

Access to information is a legitimate right for all citizens irrespective of gender, tribe, religion, or ethnicity, this is what calls for the establishment of public library for the general and free diffusion of knowledge and information in the community. The International Federation Library Association manifesto (IFLA) (1994) stated that public libraries are open to every age, race, gender, religion, and social status so that they can be accessed equitably by individuals and groups with different backgrounds. From the above definition, it can be deduced that a public library is for all and is there to cater to all information needs of the citizens. In line with this Aiyebilehin, Onyam & Akpom (2018) defined, public libraries as agencies that promote education and eliminate illiteracy among people by providing educational, religious, social,

political, and cultural information to people in a particular community. Hence, it is the local information center; making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users in society. Public libraries provide services such as the organization of advocacy campaigns on peace, religious tolerance, and literacy campaign services due to the heterogeneous nature of the country consisting of people of various ethnicities, religions, and a multicultural society in nature.

A multicultural society is a society made up of different types of people with different cultural backgrounds, language barriers, ethnicity, religious beliefs, norms and values, and social and economic settings. Jennifer (2022) defines multiculturalism, as culture, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserves special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political or cultural setting. A multicultural society is important because of the segmentation of diverse information which is cultural. A multicultural society is formed by the times and history of a country in the form of globalization, migration, and colonization. As a result of being a multicultural society, with different beliefs and ethics in Nigeria, this calls for the effective promotion of peace advocacy in this multicultural setting/society.

Peace promotion advocacy is a process of calling the attention of the public to live in peace with one another, be religious-tolerant, and traditional-tolerant amongst themselves for peace to reign. Fischer (2017) stated that peace is a human disposition (i.e. it is a personal and social orientation to secure freedom from distress and to foster a capacity to act, predicated on a fundamental recognition of freedom and dignity of all people). Peace is a culture (i.e., it is distinctive from a culture of violence, and fosters a sense of global citizenship). Public libraries provide services that promote peace in a society with a multicultural setting. This call for the

researcher to delve into the contribution of public library services to promote peace in a multicultural society, identify issues, and chart a way forward.

Role of Public Library in promoting Peace in Multi-cultural Society

Due to the transformation of technology and the influx of information available, the present world has been converted into a global world. This is a new bringing about in expanding the number of individuals with multi-social characters. LaTronica (2014) believes that if people have access to public libraries freely, they will have no need for them to travel to discover new fairylands because of the multidimensional collection of these public libraries. The only thing they need is the willingness to learn. UNESCO (2012) stated that, regard for the decent variety of societies; resilience, discourse, and collaboration, in an atmosphere of common trust and comprehension are among the best certifications of universal peace and security. The public libraries in society must be organized on the basis of their needs. The role of a public library in a multicultural society has been discussed in a number of documents by major bodies, both national and International i.e., UNESCO, IFLA, and Council of Europe. According to IFLA/ UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto (2012), public libraries in multicultural societies should manage community need base collections including digital resources & e-collections.

The Manifesto believes that these libraries should play their role in the preservation of intellectual inheritance. The libraries serving multicultural societies should introduce new programs for the community and adopt the latest marketing techniques to reach out to the community. Wigell-Ryynanen (2021) classified the types of multicultural expertise in four different ways, these include; information skills, awareness skills, cultural skills, and social skills.

To survive in a diverse society (multicultural society), one needs access to knowledge, which is accurate and up-to-date for different people. In keeping the tenets of the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) library decree, the following must be observed: “Librarians have an obligation to provide books and other materials presenting all points of view concerning problems and issues of our times, public libraries should be inclusive in nature. With a balanced collection development diversity of materials, not equality of numbers” (NLA, 2018). To develop an inter-group understanding based on respect for the worth and dignity of every individual, regardless of race, or socio-economic status, a public library must acquire materials that foster positive feelings and attitudes towards the multi-cultural society.

The general principles that the learning resources materials in the public library should reflect in order to promote peace in the multi-cultural society are:

- Contributing to a feeling of self-worth among people in society.
- Reflecting fully and accurately the reality of racial, religious, and cultural diversity of the community.
- Facilitating the development of mutual awareness and appreciation among all racial and cultural groups.
- Recognizing the universality of the human experience and the interdependence of all human beings and communities. The public library that is enthusiastic about multiculturalism will probably use multicultural materials extensively and encourage people to be tolerant of other cultures.

Challenges of Public Library in Promoting Peace in Multi-Cultural Society

Public libraries are called “Universities of the people” in advanced, civilized, and developed societies. The current situation of public libraries in Nigeria, even in big cities like Abuja, Kaduna, Enugu, and Lagos are very disappointing and frustrating. According to Euler & Wilke (2019), Public libraries are facing a lot of challenges in their effort to provide multicultural services to their users in society. Some of those challenges include:

- Inadequate funding
- Ethnicity
- Inadequate ICT literacy

Inadequate provision of funds is a major challenge affecting the activities of public libraries in providing multicultural services in Nigeria. The government does not fund the public library adequately and this has caused a lot of problems. It hinders effective and efficient service delivery. This problem, according to Robinson (2020) can be likened to a lack of political will. He observed that lack of political will leads to negligence on the part of the government to fund public libraries properly; non-approval of the budget; and non-release or non-implementation of the budget (where approved). Inadequate funding has led to the poor condition of services, shortage of professional staff; poor human resource management; extremely dilapidated structures and facilities; obsolete resources; difficulty in extending services to rural areas, and inadequate ICT facilities.

The majority of the public library in society have no knowledge of ingenious language information skills about the community they serve. Studies have consistently reported inadequate levels of ICT literacy as one of the major problems facing libraries in Nigeria as they move into

the 21st century. ICT infrastructure development and poor funding have been identified as problems, followed by poor ICT skills among staff (Overall, 2018).

The challenge of ethnicity exists in different degrees nationally not only in Nigeria. Today, people are not employed based on confidence and merit but on “connections”. This causes a setback in providing effectiveness and efficiency in any organization bearing in mind that one cannot give what he does not have. Poor collaboration between the community and the library has posed a challenge that affects effective service delivery.

Public Library Requirements for Effective Services for Promoting Peace in a Multicultural Society

The public library should have a policy and a strategic plan, defining its mission, objectives, priorities, and services related to cultural diversity in line with these, Bashir, Hanif and Khanum, (2018), identified strategies such as: Staff Cultural Competence Strategy, Selection Policies Strategy, Acquisition Strategy, MulticulturalUsers-focus Strategy, Current Awareness Services Strategy CooperationStrategy, Community Welfare Strategy.

Staff Cultural Competence Strategy: In understanding cultural diversity, one of the characteristics required by librarians is cultural competence. Cultural competence refers to a state that describes certain professional skills to be able to know and understand the needs of a diverse population and these skills continue to increase in order to give respect for cultural differences and be able to resolve these problems competently (Williamson, 2020).Public library staff whose work is to provide information for users in user’s information needs must have to be competent enough in any area they find themselves.Staff should be trained to provide information in appropriate languages and scripts; to the different multicultural groups in the community.

Library authorities should encourage the employment of people with relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as institute education programs designed to enrich the cultural knowledge of communities in the society(Tandé 2020).

Selection Policies Strategy: The public library is a library provided wholly or partly from public funds, the use of which is not restricted to any class of persons in the community but is freely available to all. According to Paola (2016), materials selection policies of a public library maintain some policies. Some of these policies includes: to see that no race, nationality profession, trade, religion, school of thought, or local custom is overlooked, every library collection should be built up according to a defined plan, with a goal of intentionally developing the general and special community.

Acquisition Strategy:Public libraries should acquire resources that will facilitate learning of the national language(s) and other languages.IFLA/UNESCO (2013) pointed out that resources should be in heritage or indigenous languages as well as in the national language(s) and should include all appropriate media, particularly the use of computers with literacy and language software. In the case of oral languages, speakers from the local community should be engaged as resource persons.

Multicultural Users-focus Strategy:Public libraries should draw the attention of users of society to the values of the library, especially library users should be allowed to participate in the planning and implementation of public library selection of materials. They should be allowed to express their needs in the areas of cultural materials in the community so that the efforts of the libraries and librarian be channeled towards community user satisfaction (Ameen, 2015). Public

libraries should provide effective and efficient library services to attract community users and promote library use in society.

Current Awareness Services Strategy: This serves to promote awareness of the positive values of cultural diversity and foster cultural dialogue. As a public library service that is open to everybody, the public library has a key role in collecting, organizing, and disseminating information, as well as providing access to a wide range of multicultural information sources in society. The public library has a particular responsibility to collect local information and make it readily available. This can be through exhibitions, organizing cultural festivals, and also library displacement (Chadnoya 2019).

Cooperation Strategy: Public library plan should be based on a comprehensive user needs analysis and adequate resources; public library activities should not be developed in isolation. According to Akanwa (2013) Cooperation with relevant user groups and professionals at the local, national, or international level should be encouraged. As cultural centers, public libraries preserve, promote, highlight and give voice to different cultures, including their heritage, traditions, literature, art, and music. This access provides people from all cultures the possibility to experience and learn about diverse forms of cultural expression. As information centers, libraries acquire, produce, organize, preserve and make accessible information that addresses the needs of all communities, as well as disseminating information on culturally diverse communities. Public libraries should aim, in acquiring materials, to reflect the multicultural composition of society and to foster an understanding of cultural diversity, racial harmony, and equality (Euler & Wilke 2015).

CommunityWelfare Strategy: Public libraries should participate in the life and welfare of the community. That is providing multicultural communities with information to address their self-determined goals, and involvement and taking initiative in local events such as cultural activities, festivals, and the commemorative events of the multicultural groups in the area.

Recommendations

Public libraries should endeavor to hire staff with multi-language abilities to deal with these multi-lingual materials and provide better services to their users. Due to the rapidly increasing multicultural society it is very difficult for public libraries to satisfy all the multicultural users especially as they have an extensive variety of branches of knowledge with a restricted budget. So, there is a need for introducing the concept of rotating collections in public libraries. These multi-lingual books will rotate after four to six months from one library to another. World Population Review. (2018). Highlighted some recommendations such as:

- There is a need to provide a multi-lingual online catalog in public libraries.
- Public libraries in multicultural society should launch the Diversity Awareness Program for their staff and provide training through diversity workshops. With the help of Cultural diversity workshops library staff learns the most effective method to help users with a dialect issue; it makes staff more delicate towards users from the multi-cultural environment and gives them a course of action to understand these users' extraordinary requirements.

- Public libraries should display their newly-added collection for multicultural users' interest and arrange special exhibitions on holidays to highlight these collections. Monthly publication of these newly acquired titles can be an attractive idea.
- Celebrations of cultural holidays/festivals/ exhibition, etc may be a brilliant idea for public libraries, attractive cultural artworks, handicrafts of different cultures, artifacts, and local books to place on display with the help of cultural programs for the general public.
- Public libraries should offer bi-lingual story times to attract multicultural users which can be quite popular among new immigrants.
- Public libraries should arrange book discussions, lectures, and group talks on cultural topics to share ideas and exchange precious knowledge. Books by minority authors or on different cultures can be trendy amongst different age groups.
- Public libraries should adopt new marketing techniques for better awareness of users about library multicultural collections and services.

Conclusion

The complexity of problems that arise in multicultural societies has become a daily life in the modern era. Public libraries are pointed out as institutions capable of playing an important role in dealing with the dynamics of differences that emerge in the midst of a multicultural society. The variety of service forms to multicultural communities created by public libraries is aimed at meeting the needs of diverse communities by looking at the differences. The provision of free and non-discriminatory cultural space is able to create an ideal multicultural space as a

representative place for cultural diversity identity and also dialogue, specifically being able to teach diverse values and respect for one another. In particular, public libraries develop a form of service to communities with three objectives, i.e., adaptation, integration (with cultural activities), and provision of collections related to the identity of immigrant groups.

Meanwhile, services to indigenous groups are attempted through the preservation of indigenous knowledge, language, and participation in cultural activities, either directly related to their traditions or not. Finally, librarians' collective policy and awareness have a big impact on public libraries in carrying out their activities to accommodate the needs of community groups. The variety of public libraries' attention to multicultural society allows various groups of people to learn, recognize and maintain their group identity without being accompanied by a sense of identity loss and have the same opportunity to access information on their respective cultures and promotes their culture from generation to generation.

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