

**BUILDING WEALTH WITH PREMIUM FEE-BASED LIBRARY SERVICES: A
COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE**

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Abstract

Libraries have long been valued for their role in providing free access to information and promoting literacy. However, in the face of changing funding models and budget constraints, libraries are increasingly exploring alternative revenue streams to sustain their operations and expand their services. This paper examines the concept of fee-based library services. It discusses the evolving landscape of library funding, highlighting the challenges faced by traditional funding sources. It also explores the potential benefits and considerations of implementing fee-based services within libraries. The paper further identifies various monetizable library services that can be offered for a fee. Additionally, the paper addresses concerns regarding equity and access, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balance between free and fee-based services. It uncovers strategies for ensuring that essential services remain accessible to underserved populations while offering value-added services to those willing to pay for enhanced experiences. Furthermore, the article delves into innovative approaches to marketing and promoting fee-based library services to maximize their potential impact. In conclusion, the paper stated that implementing fee-based library services can contribute to the financial sustainability of libraries, enabling them to continue providing free and accessible resources to the community while expanding their offerings and enhancing user experiences.

Key Words: Fee-based, Library services, Wealth

Introduction

In an era marked by digital advancements and shifting paradigms, libraries have undergone a remarkable transformation. Traditionally regarded as strongholds of free knowledge

and public access, libraries have adapted and still adapting to the changing needs of their users. Alongside their commitment to providing free services, a new approach of fee-based library services has emerged whose primary aim is to complement the traditional funding system. Gone are the days when libraries solely relied on public funding and government grants to make information available and accessible. The rise of fee-based library services signals a transformation within the library sector, providing new opportunities for expansion, modernization, and enhanced service provision. By diversifying their revenue streams, libraries are becoming more self-sustainable and better equipped to meet the evolving demands of their patrons.

The concept of fee-based library services encompasses a wide array of offerings. From subscription-based access to premium online databases and digital collections to specialized training programs, rental services, and even exclusive events. Libraries are embracing the concept of paid services to unlock a wealth of additional resources and opportunities for their users. This shift will enable libraries to curate specialized collections, invest in cutting-edge technologies, and provide high-quality services that go beyond the traditional boundaries of free public access.

However, the introduction of fee-based library services also brings forth crucial questions of how can libraries strike a balance between providing free access to essential information and introducing paid services? How can they ensure equitable access for all, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds? These concerns formed the basic focus of this work. Join us on this

journey of exploration as we navigate the evolving landscape of libraries, where the boundaries of access, innovation, and user-centricity are constantly expanding, propelling libraries to new horizons while upholding their core mission of serving as beacons of knowledge, connection, and empowerment for all.

Concept of fee-based services

Fee-based services refer to the provision of specific services or assistance in exchange for a monetary fee. It involves the exchange of a predetermined fee or payment for specific services rendered by a service provider. These services can range from professional expertise and advice to tangible goods and resources. These services can vary across various sectors, including healthcare, finance, education, consulting, and more. The concept of fee-based services has garnered significant attention from scholars who have offered different perspectives and definitions. According to Ishola (2014), fee-based services is a transactional relationship between a service provider and a client, where the service provider offers specific expertise, support, or resources in return for a monetary fee. According to this definition, fee-based services emphasize the transactional nature of the relationship and the exchange of specialized services. On the other hand, Coutier (2015), offered a broader definition, stating that fee-based services encompass a wide range of services provided by professionals or organizations in exchange for a fee, which can include anything from consulting and advisory services to outsourcing and subscription-based models. As well, this definition highlights the diverse nature of fee-based services and their applicability across various industries.

In the context of fee-based library services, libraries charge users for enhanced or value-added services that go beyond the core offerings. These services could encompass personalized information literacy training, one-on-one consultations with subject specialists, or customized research support tailored to specific user needs (Anyaku, 2019).

One common element in the definitions provided by the scholars is the focus on service provision. Fee-based services involve the delivery of a service, which can be intangible (e.g., advice, consultation) or tangible (e.g., products, resources). Another essential element is the requirement of monetary compensation. The payment of a fee is central to fee-based services, distinguishing them from other forms of exchanges or relationships. This monetary transaction reflects the value attributed to the expertise, resources, or goods provided by the service provider.

History of fee-based library services

The concept of fee-based library services emerged in the 18th century during the Enlightenment period, a time of intellectual curiosity and the spread of knowledge (ward, 2017). It was recorded that prior to this, libraries were often privately owned and accessible only to a selected few. Fee-based services aimed to make knowledge more accessible to a wider range of people by providing access to books and other resources for a fee. One of the earliest and most well-known subscription libraries was the Library Company of Philadelphia, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731 (Coutier, 2015). This library was a fee-based institution that allowed members to borrow books and participate in intellectual discussions. It played a significant role in shaping the intellectual and cultural life of the American colonies. During the 19th century,

fee-based libraries grew in popularity in Europe and North America. They became important centers for education, research, and social interaction. Many fee-based libraries focused on specific subject areas or catered to particular communities. Some libraries specialized in scientific literature, while others focused on literature, arts, or history.

However, according to Mahmood and Haider (2015), as public libraries began to emerge in the late 19th century, the demand for fee-based libraries started to decline. Public libraries provided free access to books and resources, making them more accessible to a broader audience. Despite the rise of public libraries, fee-based libraries continued to exist in various forms. Some evolved into private clubs that maintained extensive book collections for their members' exclusive use. These libraries often offered additional amenities, such as reading rooms, social events, and exclusive access to special collections.

Fee-based library services in Nigeria have a relatively limited history, and the concept is not as widespread as it is in some other countries. Public libraries in Nigeria have traditionally been free and funded by the government, with the aim of providing access to information and knowledge to all citizens. However, in recent years, some fee-based library services have emerged, primarily in response to specific needs and demands. One notable example of a fee-based library service in Nigeria is the e-library system which charge membership fee to individuals and organizations that wish to access their digital collections and services.

In recent years, some public libraries in Nigeria have introduced optional paid services alongside their free offerings. These fee-based services may include access to premium resources,

extended borrowing periods, or specialized programs and events. The fees collected from these services contribute to improving and sustaining the library's operations. It's important to note that fee-based library services are not yet widespread across the country, and most public libraries in Nigeria still operate on a free access model. However, as the demand for specialized resources and services grows, it is possible that fee-based library services will continue to develop and expand.

Understanding the Landscape of Traditional Funding Sources for Libraries

Libraries play crucial roles in society by providing access to knowledge, supporting education, and fostering community engagement. However, the funding landscape for libraries has undergone significant changes in recent years. Traditional funding sources, which have historically supported libraries, now face numerous challenges.

In the words of Ahenkorah and Osei-Boadu (2013), one of the primary challenges faced by traditional funding sources for libraries is the decline in government funding. Many libraries rely heavily on government grants, subsidies, and appropriations to cover operational costs, expand collections, and provide services to their communities. However, budget constraints, competing priorities, and changing political landscapes have resulted in reduced funding for libraries. As a consequence, libraries struggle to maintain their current levels of service and meet the growing needs of their patrons.

Another significant challenge for traditional library funding sources is the decreasing philanthropic support (Okeke, Urhiewhu & Nwafor, 2015). Historically, libraries have received

donations and endowments from individuals, corporations, and foundations. However, in recent years, there has been a shift in philanthropic priorities, with donors allocating their resources to other causes such as healthcare, environment, and technology. This reduced philanthropic support makes it challenging for libraries to secure the necessary funds for infrastructure development, innovative programs, and modernizing their facilities.

The digital transformation according to Downing, (2018) has also revolutionized the way information is accessed and consumed, posing a unique challenge to traditional library funding sources. He buttressed that the rise of e-books, online databases, and digital resources has changed the perception of libraries as the primary source of information. While libraries have adapted to this shift by incorporating digital services, the costs associated with maintaining and expanding digital collections strained traditional funding sources. Additionally, the perception that information is readily available online has led to reduced public and government support for libraries, further exacerbating the funding challenges.

As libraries face funding constraints from traditional sources, they increasingly rely on competitive grants and corporate sponsorships. However, this approach presents its own set of challenges. Grant funding for libraries has become highly competitive, with numerous institutions vying for limited resources. Libraries must invest significant time and effort into developing compelling grant proposals to secure funding, diverting resources from core operations. Similarly, corporate sponsorships often come with specific requirements or restrictions, limiting the libraries' autonomy in determining their priorities and services.

Monetizable Services Rendered in the library

Libraries are constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of their patrons, and while many library services are traditionally offered for free, there are also monetizable services that can be provided to enhance the overall experience and generate revenue for the library. A search through literature revealed some possible services that libraries may offer for a fee as captured in the works of (Susan, 2012, Coutier, 2015, ward, 2017).

Membership fees: Some libraries may charge a membership fee for access to certain resources or services.

Membership Upgrades: Libraries may offer premium or enhanced membership options for a fee. These upgraded memberships could provide additional privileges such as longer borrowing periods, access to exclusive collections, priority reservations, or extended computer usage time.

Overdue fines: When a library member borrows a book or other materials and fails to return it by the due date, the library may charge a fine.

Copying, Printing, and Scanning: Libraries often provide photocopying, printing, and scanning services, and they may charge a small fee per page or image to cover the cost of supplies and maintenance.

Meeting Room Rentals: Libraries frequently have dedicated spaces for meetings, workshops, and events. They may offer these spaces for rent to individuals or organizations, charging fees based on the duration of use and the capacity of the room.

Interlibrary Loan Services: While interlibrary loan (ILL) services are often provided free of charge for materials within the library network, some libraries may charge a fee for requesting materials from libraries outside their network or for expedited delivery.

Technology Rentals: Libraries may offer technology rentals for items such as laptops, tablets, e-readers, or audiovisual equipment. Patrons could pay a fee to borrow these devices for a specified period, allowing them to access technology resources without needing to purchase them outright.

Classes, Workshops, and Seminars: Libraries can organize educational programs on various topics, such as computer skills, language learning, arts and crafts, or job hunting strategies. These classes can be fee-based, requiring participants to pay a registration fee to attend.

Research and Information Services: While general reference assistance is typically offered free of charge, in-depth research or specialized information requests may incur fees. Libraries may provide research services where trained librarians assist individuals or organizations in conducting complex research projects for a fee.

Personalized Reading Recommendations: Some libraries offer personalized reading recommendation services, where librarians provide tailored book suggestions based on a patron's preferences and interests. This service could be fee-based, with patrons paying for a curated list of recommended titles.

Fine Arts or Exhibition Spaces: Libraries with dedicated exhibition spaces may charge artists or organizations fees to display their artwork or collections. These fees can help cover the costs of maintaining the exhibition space and promoting the artists' works.

Digital Services: Some libraries offer access to premium digital resources, such as online databases, e-books, or audiobooks. While basic access is often free with a library card, there might be additional subscription-based services or exclusive content that require a fee to access.

It's worth noting that not all libraries offer fee-based services, and the fees charged can vary widely depending on the library and the service provided. Availability of these fee-based services can vary depending on the specific library and its policies. Libraries typically strive to balance their offerings between free services and fee-based services to ensure accessibility for all patrons while generating necessary revenue to sustain operations and provide enhanced services.

Potentials of fee-based library services for wealth creation

Offering library services for a fee has the potential to introduce several benefits and opportunities. While libraries traditionally provide free access to books, resources, and services, the concept of a fee-based library can offer additional advantages and cater to specific user needs. In the words of Mahmood and Haider (2015), charging fees for library services can generate additional revenue for the library, which can be used to fund new services, materials, and programs. Furthermore, they also posited that it reduces dependency on government funding. By generating revenue through fees, libraries can reduce their reliance on government funding or

public support. This financial independence can provide stability and ensure the sustainability of library services, even during times of economic uncertainty.

In the same vein, Ahenkorah and Osei-Boadu (2013), were of the opinion that it enhances resources and collections. With a fee-based library model, additional funding can be allocated towards expanding the library's collection of books, digital resources, audiobooks, e-books, journals, and other materials. This allows for a more extensive and diverse collection, offering users access to a wider range of information and entertainment. By charging a fee, libraries can introduce premium services and amenities that enhance the user experience (Ilo, Idaerefama & Fufuri, 2016). For instance, they can provide comfortable reading areas, private study rooms, high-speed internet access, advanced research tools, multimedia resources, and specialized equipment. These offerings can attract professionals, researchers, and individuals seeking a premium environment for their work or study.

Fee-based libraries can employ expert librarians and subject specialists who provide personalized assistance, research support, and guidance (Ishola, 2014). Patrons can benefit from dedicated assistance in finding relevant resources, conducting in-depth research, and gaining insights into various topics. This specialized expertise can be particularly valuable for professionals, students, or anyone requiring comprehensive and tailored assistance. Fee-based libraries according to Okeke, Urhiewhu and Nwafor (2015), can organize exclusive events, workshops, seminars, and programs for their members. These events might include author talks, book clubs, writing workshops, language classes, art exhibitions, and more. Such gatherings

create opportunities for networking, learning, and engaging with like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community within the library.

In the same light, Susan (2012), asserted that by charging a fee, libraries can potentially extend their operating hours beyond regular working hours. This flexibility accommodates the needs of individuals who require access to library resources outside standard schedules. Extended hours can benefit professionals, students with hectic schedules, or those who prefer to study or work during unconventional hours. Fee-based libraries can also offer different subscription plans or tiers to suit the needs and preferences of their patrons. These plans could include various levels of access, such as basic memberships, student discounts, family packages, or corporate subscriptions. Tailored subscription options allow individuals or organizations to choose the level of access and services that best align with their requirements.

Fee-based services enables the library to invest in advanced technologies and digital platforms to enhance the user experience (Ward, 2017). They can adopt state-of-the-art library management systems, digital borrowing platforms, virtual libraries, and other cutting-edge technologies that facilitate convenient access to resources from anywhere, at any time.

Through fee-based services, libraries can establish partnerships with other organizations, institutions, or publishers to offer exclusive benefits to their members. These collaborations can lead to discounted access to online databases, academic journals, e-books, or other valuable resources. By leveraging partnerships, libraries can provide members with additional value and a broader range of resources.

Draw backs of fee-based library services

While libraries traditionally offer free services to the public, charging fees for library services can introduce several drawbacks. In the words of Ilo, Idaerefama and Fufuri (2016), charging fees for library services can create financial barriers for individuals who cannot afford to pay. They stated that public libraries have historically been a cornerstone of equal access to information and knowledge, providing resources to people from all socio-economic backgrounds. Implementing fees could restrict access for low-income individuals and perpetuate inequality.

In the same clime, Jenda (2016), reiterated that libraries are meant to be accessible to everyone, regardless of their financial situation and introducing fees may deter people from utilizing library services, leading to a decline in library usage and limiting access to valuable educational resources, books, and information. When libraries charge fees, people may opt for alternative sources of information and entertainment, such as purchasing books or accessing digital content independently. This could result also in reduced library usage and diminish the library's role as a community hub.

Libraries often serve as a vital resource for marginalized communities, including students, immigrants, job seekers, and seniors. Charging fees may disproportionately affect these groups, further exacerbating existing disparities and limiting their ability to access essential services (Coutier, 2015). He further stated that libraries play a crucial role in fostering a love for reading and learning in children and introducing fees may discourage families from utilizing library services, reducing children's exposure to books, educational programs, and early literacy

initiatives. Additionally, public libraries often enjoy strong community support due to their free and inclusive nature. Charging fees can lead to a loss of community goodwill and reduce public support for the library, potentially impacting funding and resources.

Maintaining Equity and Access to Information in Fee-Based Library Services

Equity and access to information are essential components of a democratic society and libraries are expected to provide access to information regardless of an individual's socio-economic status, culture, or language. However, the increasing costs of maintaining libraries and acquiring resources have led to the emergence of fee-based services. While these services can generate revenue for libraries, it is crucial to maintain a balance between free and fee-based services to ensure equity and access for all individuals.

According to Susan (2015), introducing fee-based services can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can generate revenue to support library operations, ensuring the sustainability of free services. On the other hand, it can create barriers to access for individuals with limited financial means. Therefore, it is crucial to approach fee-based services with careful consideration, ensuring that they are designed in a way that maintains equity and does not undermine the principle of equal access to information.

Different scholars have suggested probable ways of striking a balance. In the work of Mahmood and Haider (2015), one approach is to offer basic library services free of charge while providing additional, value-added services at a fee. For example, libraries can offer free access to books and basic research materials, while charging for specialized databases, printing and

photocopying services, or premium membership benefits. He stressed that this approach enables libraries to generate revenue while ensuring that essential resources remain accessible to all.

In the other hand, Ishola (2014), posited that to strike this balance effectively, libraries must actively engage with their communities and seek partnerships with local organizations and businesses. Collaborations can help secure additional funding through sponsorships, donations, or grants, reducing the need to rely solely on fee-based services. Furthermore, community involvement ensures that library services align with the specific needs and interests of the people they serve, enhancing equity and fostering a sense of ownership.

Ahenkorah and Osei-Boadu (2013), were of the opinion that to ensure equitable access, libraries must first identify and understand the specific needs of underserved populations within their communities. They further stressed that conducting surveys, holding focus groups, and collaborating with community organizations can help gather valuable insights which will aid in designing targeted programs and services to address the unique challenges faced by underserved individuals and communities.

In the same vein, Okeke, Urhiewhu and Nwafor (2015), posited that effective outreach initiatives are vital in maintaining equity and access in library services. Through Collaboration with local schools, community centers, and social service organizations, libraries establish partnerships and extend library services beyond the library's physical boundaries. Furthermore, they stated that libraries should carry out regular assessments of their programs and services to evaluate their effectiveness and impact. They were of the opinion that analyzing data on library

usage, program attendance, and user feedback helps identify areas for improvement and informs future decision-making. By staying responsive and adaptable to evolving community needs, libraries can ensure that essential services remain accessible to underserved populations while effectively catering to those seeking value-added services thereby strike a balance.

Innovative Approaches to Marketing and Promoting Fee-Based Library Services

In today's evolving library landscape, good number of libraries have implemented fee-based services to supplement traditional funding sources. These fee-based services, such as specialized workshops, premium memberships, and personalized research assistance, offer a valuable opportunity to generate revenue and expand their offerings. However, to fully leverage the potential of these services, effective marketing and promotion strategies are essential. According to Downing (2018), one of the innovative approaches is personalized marketing which involves tailoring marketing messages to specific individuals or groups based on their interests, behaviors, or preferences. Personalization can be done through email marketing campaigns, targeted social media advertising, or even personalized recommendations on the library's website. Personalized marketing can help libraries promote their fee-based services to the people who are most likely to be interested in them. For example, if a library offers a genealogy research service, they could use personalized marketing to target individuals who have shown an interest in genealogy or family history.

In the same vein, Jenda (2016), wrote that one of the innovative approaches to marketing fee-based services is partnership marketing which involves collaborating with other

organizations or businesses to promote each other's services. For example, a library could partner with a local museum to offer a joint ticket package that includes admission to both the library's special collections and the museum's exhibits. Partnership marketing can help libraries reach new audiences and promote their fee-based services in a way that is mutually beneficial to both organizations.

Furthermore, in the work of Koulikov (2018), it was revealed that content marketing is a powerful tool for marketing fee-based services. This involves creating and sharing valuable content that educates or entertains potential customers. For libraries, content marketing can involve creating blog posts, videos, or podcasts that showcase the library's fee-based services in a way that is informative and engaging. For example, a library that offers a writing workshop could create a video that features successful writers who have attended the workshop and share tips and tricks for aspiring writers. Content marketing can help libraries build relationships with potential customers and establish themselves as a valuable resource in their communities.

Additionally, Dequin (2017), inferred that referral marketing is a veritable approach of marketing fee-based library services which involves incentivizing existing customers to refer their friends and family to the library's fee-based services. For example, a library could offer a discount on a service for every friend that a customer refers. Referral marketing can be a powerful tool for libraries because it harnesses the power of word-of-mouth marketing, which is one of the most effective forms of advertising. By encouraging satisfied customers to refer their

friends and family, libraries can increase their customer base and generate more revenue from their fee-based services.

Conclusion

The implementation of fee-based library services has the potential to enhance the overall library experience and sustain the quality of services provided. While the concept may be met with skepticism, it offers a viable solution for addressing budgetary constraints and expanding resources in an increasingly digital age. By offering premium services, such as expedited book requests, access to exclusive databases, and personalized assistance, libraries can generate revenue to support their operations while catering to the diverse needs of their patrons. However, it is crucial to strike a balance between the fee-based services and maintaining equitable access to information for all members of the community. By carefully considering pricing models, providing discounted options for low-income individuals, and ensuring that essential library services remain free, libraries can successfully embrace this innovative approach without compromising their fundamental mission of serving as a democratic and inclusive resource hub for all.

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