

Public Library Functions and Social Development of Users in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper presents a study on public library functions and social development of users in Cross River State, Nigeria. It was a qualitative analysis using Focus Group Discussion with 20 participants accidentally selected among public library users in the study area. The study revealed influence of promotion of culture, information dissemination and spread of education as indicators of public library functions on intergroup cohesion, civic activism and awareness socialization respectively, being indicators of social development. The study concluded that public library functions influence social development of users in Cross River State, except in terms of gender equality. It was recommended that the government should renovate, restock and weed its libraries, as well as expand capacity of the libraries to accommodate more users. Private investors should also be encouraged to assist public libraries as aspect of corporate social responsibility. Public library functions to a greater extent influenced social development of library users in Cross River State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Public library is very crucial as a critical factor in the development process of any society. Library is a room or building containing books carefully preserved for easy reference and usage. Individuals owned libraries in their private house, communities, organisations and institutions of different types also established libraries. The need for libraries is due to the quest for learning and information to improve conditions of lives.

Social development entails improving the lot of the people and relationship between and among them. One of the ways of affecting people's lives positively is increasing awareness, learning and adoption of improved ways of interaction. The primary aim of this study is to examine if there is a link or relationship between public library functions and social development. The cardinal question is to ascertain if public library functions trigger social development where they are established. In Cross River State, there are four major public libraries, Calabar Central Library, National Library Calabar, Ikom Library and Ogoja Library (Uche, 2018). This paper is specifically aimed at ascertaining if the existence of four public libraries in Cross River State influences social development of the state and its people.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The objectives of public libraries as noted by Ashikuzzaman (2018) are purely developmental, as they are aimed at improving the life and condition of the library users. Ashikuzzanam (2018) identified the following as the objectives: personality development, human adjustment, spread of education, self-improvement and development, cultural revival

and leisure promotion. Consequently, Ashikuzaanam (2018) considers a public library as a centre of culture, information and education. This study is set to discover if this development goals of a public library are achieved in view of the long existence of public libraries in Cross River State.

Basic indices of social development as noted by Davis (2004) are: civic activism, inter-group cohesion, awareness and socialization, interpersonal safety and trust, and gender equality. This research study examines utilization of public libraries in Cross River State to determine if goals of social development are achieved.

ANALYTICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Public Library

A public library is defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (1994) “as the local gateway to knowledge which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making in cultural development and social groups, which must be established under the clear mandate of law”. A public library is open for public usage and it is funded by public tax, in which users should not pay fees. A public library should be freely accessible by members of the public. It is operated by librarians, library para-professionals and other support staff who are employed and paid by government under the civil service.

The primary goal of a public library is to ensure education of the public, increase awareness and increase literacy level. Other than the public libraries, there are also other types of libraries, namely: Research library, school library and special library. This study is specifically focused on public libraries. Ashikuzzanam (2018), analyzing public library functions, maintains that public library helps in personality development, human adjustment, spread of education, self-development, economic development, science and technological

development, as well as the development of culture and leisure. In this regard, it could be seen that public library covers diverse areas of socio-economic development, thus, a critical component of overall development of society. It is therefore difficult to think of social development in any society without considering the role of public library. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation Public Library Manifesto (1994), opined that “a public library is a living force for education, culture and information, as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women”. Central to social development are: culture, information and education, which are key component functions of public library which the study will examine.

Social Development

This is defined as the transformation of society resulting in individuals treating each other more fairly in their daily lives, which result in increased social cohesion, integration and solidarity. According to Davies (2004), social development is a commitment that the entire development of society should benefit people holistically. Social development should reveal improvement in pattern and ways of social interaction, norms and learning, acceptable universal values that promotes peaceful and harmonious living in groups and the society as a whole.

The International Institute of Social Studies (1995) identified the following indices of social development, namely: civic activism; clubs and association engagement socialization; intergroup cohesion; interpersonal safety and trust; and gender equality. This study examines public library vis-à-vis indices of social development as: intergroup cohesion, awareness and socialization and gender equality.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is an empirical investigation that relies on focus group discussion and interview. Two focus group discussions were conducted with library users in which twenty library users participated in 2 parts. The participants were carefully selected accidentally from among library users in two library facilities in Calabar after their usage. The study also made use of secondary materials from textbooks, newspapers, magazines, journals and other archival materials. In this regard, both primary and secondary data were used in the study. The study in terms of design was an ex-post facto research in which users were examined on the usefulness of library facilities after they had used the facilities. It was mainly a qualitative study.

Functional theory of Robert K. Merton guided the analysis. Merton (1936) maintains that a social function is an objective consequence of an action on the system in which the action takes place. The action in this study is public library functions, while the consequence of using public library is on social development, which to this study is manifest or expected.

Public Libraries in Cross River State

There are four main public libraries in Cross River State: Calabar Central Library, National Library Calabar; Ikom Library, and Ogoja Library. The Calabar Central Library is the biggest of all the libraries in terms of facilities and building complex. The new Calabar library complex was opened on 17th April, 1989 (Uche, 2018). Other than the National Library in Calabar, which is owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria, all the other libraries are owned by the state.

Uche (2018) explained that citizens bemoan the shameful condition of Cross River State libraries, as a newspaper headline. Narrating the condition of the three public libraries owned by Cross River State Government, Uche stated that “the pride of Cross Riverians is in their last legs, parading

outdated books with book-lovers disillusioned at the unpleasant turn of events”. Uche (2018) further stated that the library precinct is used for wedding receptions on the weekends, making it uncondusive for reading. Uche (2018) also revealed that Ikom and Ogoja public libraries require revamping of infrastructure and restocking of antiquated books. The conditions disclosed by Uche (2018) does not portray the public libraries of Cross River State in good shape to foster social development.

Edem (2017) stated that “snakes, grasses have taken over Cross River State library, virtually all the roofs have been blown off by the wind, just as the environment has been covered by overgrown weeds, thus exposing the few workers on duty to snake bite and invasion by rodents. Furniture, air condition, tile, public address system and other valuables have been vandalized”. Other problems noted by Edem (2017) include: poor electricity, no vehicle, no water supply, no new books, insufficient staff etc. The present condition of public libraries in Cross River State requires urgent attention and action of the state government to put it back to effective use. The only functional public library in the state is the National Library in Calabar, which is small and cannot accommodate the ever-increasing population of library users in the state. The state of the libraries poses a major problem to social development of the state and its people.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

The primary data was sourced from two focus group discussion sessions conducted purposively in Calabar due to paucity of fund. One was conducted for users of National Library, while the second was conducted for users of State Library both in Calabar, Cross River State.

Demographic Data of Participants in FGD I and II

S/N	Age	Edu. Qual.	Religious Affiliation	Sex	Occupation	Status	Tribe
1	19	SSCE	Christian	Male	Student	Undergraduate	Efik
2	26	B.Sc.	Christian	Male	Student	Postgraduate	Ejagham
3	18	SSCE	Christian	Male	Student	Secondary School	Ibibio
4	32	B.Sc.	Christian	Female	Applicant	Postgraduate	Ibibio
5	28	SSCE	Christian	Male	Student	Undergraduate	Yaka
6	21	SSCE	Christian	Male	Student	Undergraduate	Yala
7	25	SSCE	Christian	Female	Student	Undergraduate	Ejagham
8	38	B.Sc. M.Sc.	Christian	Male	Journalist	Postgraduate	Yala
9	45	HND	Christian	Male	Public Servant	Postgraduate	Igbo
10	24	SRN	Christian	Female	Nurse	Undergraduate	Igbo
11	18	SSCE	Christian	Female	Applicant	Applicant	Ibibio
12	16	SSCE	Christian	Male	Applicant	Applicant	Ibibio
13	17	SSCE	Christian	Female	Applicant	Applicant	Yoruba
14	23	SSCE	Christian	Female	Student	Undergraduate	Ibibio
15	20	SSCE	Christian	Female	Student	Undergraduate	Ejagham
16	17	SSCE	Christian	Male	Applicant	Applicant	Oron
17	18	SSCE	Christian	Female	Applicant	Applicant	Nekwara
18	15	JSS	Christian	Male	Student	Secondary	Efik
19	16	JSS	Christian	Female	Student	Secondary	Efik
20	14	JSS	Christian	Male	Student	Secondary	Annang
			20	Male= 11 Fem. = 9 Total 20	Applicant=6 Student=11 Employed=3 20	Undergraduate=7 Postgraduate=4 Secondary = 4 Applicant = 5 Total 20	

Author's field work, 2019

The age of participants in the FGD range from 14 – 45 years of age. All participants were functionally literate, they can read and write, thus can use library resources effectively. 50% of the participants were below the age of 20 years, that is 14 – 19 years of age. Educationally, five of the participants were educated up to SRN, HND, B.Sc. and above, while 12 being 60% were SSCE holders. Only three were at the level of Junior Secondary School Certificate (JSSC). Their educational status confirmed their functional literacy level.

All participants were of the Christian faith; while male were 11 (55%), female were 9 (45%). Applicants among them were 6 (30%), current students 11 (55%) and unemployed 3 (15%). 7 were undergraduates (35%), post graduates were 4(20%), current secondary school students 4 (20%) and looking for job 5 (25%). Students of both secondary and university are often regular library users, who may be seeking information to

do their assignments, read and complement classroom lectures and prepare for different examinations.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis and discussion in this paper follows variables of public library utilization in terms of its functions and social development indicators, namely:

1. Promotion of culture and intergroup cohesion
2. Information dissemination and civic activism
3. Spread of education and awareness socialization
4. Human adjustment development and gender equality

Promotion of culture and intergroup cohesion

Cultural promotion is a cardinal function of public library, while intergroup cohesion is an indicator of social development.

Research question: Does cultural promotion in public library influence intergroup cohesion among users?

Objectives: To ascertain if cultural promotion in public library influence intergroup cohesion among users

Hypothesis: There is no influence of cultural promotion in library on intergroup cohesion among users.

Cultural promotion is aimed at ensuring dialogue through providing information on various cultural areas, to enhance dissemination of cultural elements, traits as well as exchange of same. Intergroup cohesion is an important indicator of social development, it refers to increasing interaction among cultural groups, integration and high solidarity among their members, creating a sense of oneness despite difference, which results in peace and harmonious living. Participants of Focus Group

Discussion I were asked if their frequent use of library materials promotes unity and oneness in their dealing with members of other groups. They responded thus:

“Display of cultural materials, provide insight to the understanding of other cultures and help us to appreciate their values, which guide us in dealing acceptively and harmoniously with members of other groups. This feeling spreads beyond cultural groups to other social groups and associations (FGD 1)

The above position of participants, who are library users confirmed that “there is influence of cultural promotion in library on intergroup cohesion among users. In this regard, public library cultural promotion influence intergroup cohesion, thereby inducing social development. It is interesting to discover that despite the deplorable conditions of public libraries in the state as noted by Edem (2017) and Uche (2018), the library as a social agency is capable of inducing intergroup cohesion, harmony and elimination of conflict.

Information Dissemination and Civic Activism

Information dissemination entails making available information resources, like newspapers, magazines, flyers, journals, posters, etc. to information seekers who are library users. Information dissemination is one major function or role of public libraries. Civic activism has to do with behaviours and organisations in society which involves greater participation of citizens in public policies and decisions affecting them and their society as a whole. Civic activism is a core index of social development. A socially developed society is one in which members of the society participate and contribute actively in policy decisions affecting them.

Research question: Does information dissemination by library influence civic activism of users?

Research objective: To determine if there is any influence of information dissemination by library on civic activism of users.

Hypothesis: There is no influence of information dissemination by library on civic activism of users.

In the Focus Group Discussion I, 65% of participants accepted that they belong to various community based organisations and associations, through which they are able to contribute to policy decisions affecting them in their areas and even state. 15% of participants in FGD I stated that they contribute to policies they read about in the libraries in articles they wrote and suggestions they provide for policy change or adjustment. In FGD II, participants stated that:

They guide the various associations they belong, because of information they obtained through using library to make their positions known to government and their agencies through courtesy calls, position papers, contributing in news commentaries and other media reports (FGD II).

In view of the above, it was accepted that information dissemination by public libraries influence civic activism of users, thereby promoting social development of their society. If this was so in a deplorable public library, it is believed that greater influence will be exerted by a well-stocked library.

Spread of Education and Awareness Socialisation

Public library is a reservoir of educational material for all types of learners. Those that are involved in formal education and informal education all make use of public libraries. Users are socialized through the materials they read, which increase their awareness. Learning and awareness of environment and self are clear indicators of social development. The more an individual becomes conscious of his or her environment and

self, the more he will seek advancements and progress in different frontiers of life.

Research question: Is there any influence of spread of education by public library and awareness socialization among users?

Objective: To determine if spread of education by public library influence awareness socialization among users.

Hypothesis: There is no influence of spread of education by public library on awareness socialization among users

The independent variable was spread of education, which was a function of public library, while awareness socialization was the dependent variable, being an indicator of social development. Users of public library in Cross River State that participated in the two Focus Group discussions were 100% literate. In both Focus Group Discussions, it was discovered that:

Continuous exposure to library cause us to be aware of latest development in the society, activities, events and programmes that will promote our standard of living and quality of life. we are able to read and key into the programmes (FGD I & II)

This position proved that public library plays significant role in awareness creation and socialization process of learners, as indicated by Ashikuzzamam (2018) that public library is a centre for the spread of education and a gateway to knowledge, which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning and independent decision, a critical indicator of social development. In view of this stand point, there exists influence of spread of education by public library on the awareness socialization process of users being a factor of social development.

Human Adjustment Development and Gender Equality

Any society with gender inequality cannot be said to be socially developed. Gender equality is the dependent variable, while human adjustment development is the independent variable. Gender equality refers to balance in access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender identity of being male or female. Gender equality involves opportunities in economic participation (employment, ownership of resources etc.)

Human adjustment development as independent variable is a prerequisite of equality. Adjustment here involves accepting female to play roles that were previously assigned to male. Taking women into political positions and welcoming them as co-participants. This removes women from position of dependence and subjugation and places them on social development platform. Participants in Focus Group Discussion I strongly resisted women involvement in certain roles despite their level of education. 55% of participants maintained that certain roles and behavioural patterns should be reserved for men. Even females that were 45% of participants were of the opinion that “key positions in society should not be handled by women”. Their positions countered adjustment socialization caused by public library usage, as an influence on gender equality. Consequently, there is no influence of human adjustment development on gender equality among public library users in Cross River State.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was to examine public library functions and social development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The following findings were made:

1. There is influence of promotion of culture in public libraries in Cross River State on intergroup cohesion of users.

2. There is influence of information dissemination by public libraries in Cross River State on civic activism of users.
3. There is influence of spread of education by public libraries in Cross River State on awareness socialization of users.
4. There is no influence of human adjustment development by public library users on gender equality.

The study discovered the deplorable condition of public libraries owned by the Cross River State government in Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja. The only public library in a good condition in the state is the National Library in Calabar which is small in capacity and cannot accommodate up to 50 users at a time, considering the huge population of the state and teeming library users. The study concluded that there is influence of public library functions on social development of library users, in terms of inter-group cohesion, civic activism and awareness socialization, while there was no influence of public library usage on gender equality as an indicator of social development.

This study in recognition of the central role of library functions on social development recommends that, the state government should look into the current condition of public libraries and restore them through renovation, restocking, weeding and provision of basic library facilities. New libraries should also be established in emerging towns like Ugep, Obubra, Obudu, Creek Town, Atan Onoyom, etc. Federal library should be expanded to accommodate more users, as both the federal and state government should employ more library professionals to expand existing public library system in the state and Nigeria as a whole. Private organisations should also assist in funding and renovation of public library facilities as an integral aspect of corporate social responsibility.

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