

The Developmental Roles of Public Libraries in Nigeria: A Case of Imo State Public Library, Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the developmental roles of public libraries in Nigeria: a case of Imo State Public Library, Owerri. Imo State is one of the thirty six states in Nigeria federation. The public library was established in 1976 with its nucleus administrative headquarters in Owerri – the capital of Imo State. The public library since its inception has played inalienable roles in the development of the state and the country at large through its services to the citizens of the state and other users from all parts of the country and the world in general without discrimination. The public library is the gate way and information centre for the scholarship of the state that has necessitated its educational and industrial development.

Introduction

Development is a phenomenon associated with humanity and creative energies. Its basic aim is an unending improvement in the capacity of the individual and to control the individual and society, to control the forces of nature as well as of humanity at large. Development involves less reliance on imported goods in preference to home produced goods. Development involves establishment of a stable political system and organizational factors such as specialization and technical improvements are on a steady increase (Ezeanyika, 1997). Public libraries are significant in stimulating development because they acquire, preserve and make available relevant information reading materials to the public for their intellectual growth. Intellectual growth is basic for social and economic reforms which improve good health, improved agricultural methods and other vocational techniques. The contributions of Imo State Public Library, Owerri, Nigeria in the overall development of Imo State are the crux of the study.

Brief history of Imo Public Library, Owerri.

What is today known as Imo State Public Library, Owerri was a divisional library of the defunct East Central State Public Library with its headquarters in Eungu. Following the creation of new states by the military regime led by late General Murtala Mohammed in Nigeria on 3rd of February, 1976. East Central State was broken into two component states, namely – Anambra and Imo States respectively. Anambra State retained the former East Central State Library and renamed it Anambra State Library, Eungu while the divisional library which was under construction then, though nearing completion, was proclaimed the nucleus of Imo State Central Library, Owerri. It has ten branches spread in eight Local Government Areas of the state. Mbaitoli and Orlu Local Governments have two branches spread each while Aboh Mbaise, Isiala Mbano, Isu, Nkwere, Obowo and Okigwe Local Government Areas have one branch each. The public library has a staff strength of 122 that perform different categories of functions grouped as follows: Library professionals ten(10), Para-professionals twenty seven (27), Library assistants twelve (12), Professionals in other fields seven (7), fifty (50) other categories of staff and nineteen (19) artisans. The operational working days of the public Library are Mondays to Saturdays. The staff of the public library starts work at 8am and close at 7pm. The staff works on shift.

The Public Library acquires materials sources, processes them centrally and distributes to its branches. Its collection covers fiction, non-fiction and reference books and is organized according to the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme (D.D.C.), (Imo State Public Library historical facts, 2015).

Imo State public library, Owerri and its branches located within the state have accelerated in no small measure to the overall development of the state and the country at large in the following areas of human endeavour.

Human resources development.

Human development means the ability of an individual to perform a function creditably. Human development means the acquisition of knowledge and applying the knowledge acquired to perform function, work or duty as expected. Imo State public library, Owerri ranks the first in human development in the country and has always being the highest number of intake in Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME), (JAMB, 2014) and also the highest intake in senior school certificate examinations (WAEC, 2014) as well as the National Examination Council

(NECO). Imo State is regarded as the land of educational and human development. Imo state is able to achieve these through their search for knowledge through preserved and documented information. Knowledge is power, power is the ability to command influence within an environment. No organization or society can exists

without people managing it.

Rural development.

Imo State Public Library, Owerri has contributed a lot in the rural development in the state through information dissemination. It has played an active role in the development and understanding of rural dwellers. The public library through its ten branches has increased, encouraged and motivated effectively participation of the rural dwellers in rural transformation. The rural dwellers need information to keep themselves abreast of current information in all branches of knowledge. Through Imo State Public Library, books and other information materials are made available to the rural dwellers. Today, the rural dwellers are contributing to the development of the state and the country at large the provision of library services.

Preservation of recorded knowledge.

Preservation of recorded knowledge is the earliest and the most fundamental responsibility of any library. Imo State Public Library, Owerri conserves the existing knowledge of the state by rationally and systematically accumulating all kinds of records, published, written or oral in recorded format, that embody the ideas and knowledge of the past. One thing is certain, each new knowledge or new idea or invention developed by man grown out of accumulated and conserved knowledge accumulated and preserved in the public library. Imo State Public Library, Owerri is the centre of accumulated knowledge, which it carefully preserves which are readily made available to users in order to enable them solve their information needs.

Cultural contribution.

Culture is all embracing. It is a way of life of the people. (Agbodike, 1998). Imo State Public Library, Owerri is the nerve of cultural advancement of the state. It is now the centre of cultural activity of the state as the conservator of social knowledge of the people of the state that is used to disseminate the cultural thoughts and values of the people of the state. The public library in question has contributed a lot in promoting and preserving the cultural heritage of the state, Igbo ethnic nationality and thereby giving them correct perspectives in understanding and controlling their environment through the provision of appropriate scientific and technical information generated within and outside the country. The public library is a potent tool of national aspirations since it has embarked upon a sustained programme of cultural information documentation that promotes and demonstrates national aspirations.

Research development

Research is a systematic investigation or inquiry towards increasing the sum total of human knowledge. Research aims in discovering of new knowledge as well as rediscover, systematize and preserve existing knowledge. Research is to search again, to take another look because something may be wrong with what we already know. Research can be defined as finding out the truth about a thing, event or situation. It is a careful or diligent search, studious and critical inquiry and examination arriving at discovering and interpretation of new knowledge. Uhuegbu (2009) defined research as a systematic analysis and recording of observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles, theories, resulting in prediction and ultimate control of many events that may be consequences or causes of specific activities. The public library studied has helped scholars, scientists, explorers, reporters, government officials, employees of business firms, lawyers, doctors and archaeologists etc through making their information resources available to these categories of researchers to achieve validity on their various investigations. These researchers engage in their various investigations in attempt to make contributions to the body of knowledge about the world and their work is incomplete until they have made their results publicly available. Their findings add valid knowledge to our environment which improves the welfare of the masses or adds a meaningful life to the society.

Development of commerce, transportation and industry

The public library studied has contributed a lot in the development of commerce, transportation, agriculture and industry through the provision of adequate information reading materials not only with primary resources in book and non-book materials but also with secondary bibliographical apparatus such as guides to literature, abstracting and indexing journals that can direct the user to the primary sources that contained information on commerce, industry and transportation. Commerce deals with buying and selling of goods and services. It is the vehicle by which goods are exchanged and distributed between individuals, regions and countries. Industry deals with manufacturing which involves the use of machines to achieve large scale production. Transportation means all the available ways or avenue by which persons, goods etc are carried or conveyed from one place to another. Imo State Public library, Owerri has information reading materials that covers commerce, transportation and industry. Through these information sources, a transporter can be able to manage his transport business effectively as well as industrialists and other commercial business ventures.

Stimulating reading for leisure and recreation.

The public library studied through its branches spread across the state has contributed a lot in stimulating reading for leisure and recreation by acquiring, processing and making available light reading for those with simple taste especially as can be found in novels like thrillers, mysteries, romances. The public library offers protection to the working class from foibles of drinks and idleness. The public library encourages the constructive use of leisure time by adults and serves as source of assessment for children and adolescents.

Aesthetic appreciation.

Imo State Public Library, Owerri acquires preserves and makes available classical literature; standard works often read in schools and cultured educated people. Aesthetic appreciation is the full understanding or the affecting of a sense of beauty and excellence of a piece of work, for example, poetry, prose writing or essay and music. The terminologies and figurative language (images or symbols) used in them gives effect to the beauty of the work. Users of this public library enjoy themselves with all these classical literature.

Provision of information service

Information is a message or stimulus. It is a data of value not only the recorded of human experience – factual, imaginative, scientific and humanistic – but also the unrecorded experience which is available only from human resources to whom library users may be referred. Information is stored and preserved in print medium, miniaturized in computer format. The public library studied acquires different kinds of print and non-print information materials, organizes, interprets, preserves and stores the information in purveying medium for easy access and consultation. Imo State Public Library, Owerri provides access to these information materials for individual's advancement and national development. The right information at the right time, at the right place improves the ability of an individual, a business, a government agency or some other kind of organization to make informed decision for the immediate solve of their practical problems in daily life and work (Agbodike, 1998).

Generating of employment opportunities.

The public library studied has generated a lot of employment opportunities for the citizens of this state and the country at large in different capacities and categories. The public library can boast of staff strength of one hundred and seven workers who receives monthly salaries and seven board members who allowances on any of their sittings. From investigation, 80% of these workers (staff) have families which they carter for. Many of their children are in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions while others are learning various trades in order to be self reliant and self sustenance. There are also good numbers of industrial training students who receive monthly allowances as a means of helping them solve some of their financial problems. It is on record that many of the retired staff of the public library receives pensions and were paid gratuity and many individuals who served as board members of the public library derived a lot of financial benefits which helped them to solve the financial needs of their different families and personal problems. The public library has generated a lot of employment for the Global System Mobile (G.S.M.) operators who engage in phone calls, cyber cafes, and private photocopy business operators who operates within the premises of the public library. From survey carried, report showed that their businesses are booming because of the influence of the public library.

Organizing training programmes

The public library in studied has contributed in no small measure in organizing training programmes for library assistants, school library prefects and individuals who want to acquire knowledge on the arrangement, preservation, classification and cataloguing of books for easy retrieval. For example, one hundred library assistants employed by the state government to serve as library assistants in our secondary schools were offered training programmes by the public library before they were deployed to various secondary schools in the state. The public library is at the vanguard of organizing seminars for students on the importance of library education and library user education on a bit to impart to the students on the importance of libraries towards achieving academic success. The public library also organizes conferences and symposiums for various categories of persons or organizations on library related subjects and in other human endeavours. The public library serves as a meeting point for discussion, exchange of views and ideas which creates harmony and understanding among all they participants.

Centre for academic activities

Imo State Public Library is now the centre from which all intellectual activities are radiated to all research programmes. It is the centre for promoting informal education, learning and research. The public library is now an integral and indispensable part of the state which acts as an agent for the transmission of the scholarship of the state and the country at large by satisfying the basic information and bibliographic needs of students,

business men and government. The public library is now the knowledge industry of the state and the gate way for the industrial growth of the state (Akanaga, 2016).

Centre for political education

Politics is the science of governing and means by which individuals acquire political power. Investigation reveals that there are users who go to the public library for the reading of daily issues (newspapers) in order to keep themselves abreast of current issues and political matters. A good knowledge of political education will lead to good governance, stability and individual's participation in both economic and industrial ventures which lead to industrial growth which the overall is national development. It is in Imo State public Library that the citizens of the state access and utilize political information.

Conclusion

It is crystal clear that Imo State Public Library, Owerri is repositories of information centre for the provision of information reading materials that satisfy their patrons irrespective of colour, race, gender, creed, class, social status and educational attainment which the end product is national development. It is certain that the public library has vigorously contributed to both educational and industrial growth of the state and the country at large through the provision of its preserved and documented information resources.

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