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Information Needs and Characteristics of the Users of Rural Libraries in Ekiti State, Nigeria (Pp. 206-213)

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Abstract

The paper examines the information needs and characteristics of the users of rural libraries in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Users of libraries in three rural areas of the three senatorial districts of Ekiti State were surveyed. This was aimed at investigating the reading needs, sources of information, level of education of users and benefits of rural libraries to them. Questionnaire was used to collect data; tables and simple percentage were adopted in the data analysis. A major revelation of the study is that the library constitutes the major source of information for rural dwellers. Books are the major reading materials of rural people. It concluded by giving recommendations towards the improvement of information needs of rural dwellers by improving the provision of library services to them.

Introduction

Information is an indispensable resource for any academic endeavour and has been given different definitions by people in different professions. Adeniyi (2004) stated that everybody needs information to reach his or her potential and that the more information that is available to a system about itself and

about its environment the more reliable it becomes and the greater its chances of survival.

Abdullahi and Haruna (2006) citing Aguolu (1989) saw information as structured data which are needed to take appropriate decisions. They stated further that when information is not available at the appropriate time, its value becomes zero. Information is a resource that must be acquired and used by any society be it rural or urban setting.

To bring rural dwellers into a central focus in social development, they must be well acquainted with relevant information which can propel them into making the right judgment and taking the right decisions that affect their lives and existence. The information rich countries have through effective uses of information resources advanced technologically while the information poor countries are yet to find their feet.

Adewale (2001) observed that Librarians and information professionals are interested in the roles that they can play in the development process particularly as they reckon that the library is a major vehicle for dissemination of information. They therefore argue the need for rural library services to support and sustain the educational, cultural, economics, social, political and other programme designed to improve the living conditions in rural areas.

The assumption as been that the rural populace needs libraries to fight illiteracy among other things. Therefore librarians in developing countries attempt to extend services to them using models employed in more advanced countries such as branch libraries mobile libraries etc. Establishment of rural libraries side by side with urban libraries has remained an important part of this process. In other words, Library services to the peasantry are made to conform to those at the urban centres with standard library building, shelves and properly catalogued and classified books.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the information needs of users of rural libraries in Ekiti State.
2. To investigate the sources of information materials of users of rural libraries in Ekiti State.

3. To find out the level of Education of users of rural libraries in Ekiti State as a determinant factor in their usage of rural libraries.
4. To find out the benefits of rural libraries services to its users in Ekiti State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were specifically tested.

- (i) Users of rural libraries in Ekiti State have information needs which they seek to satisfy
- (ii) Information sources available in rural libraries in Ekiti State do not meet their information needs
- (iii) Level of education of users of rural libraries in Ekiti State is a determinant factor in their usage of rural libraries.
- (iv) Users of rural libraries in Ekiti State are aware of benefits that rural library services offer to them.

Literature Review

Adewale (2001) posited from reports and results of a study that among the categories of information needs in a rural setting are:

- (i.) Health and safety
- (ii.) Legislative and regulative information
- (iii.) Government information
- (iv.) Statistics
- (v.) Market news and research
- (vi.) Scientific and technical information
- (vii.) News and current affairs and
- (viii.) Local events and activities.

Studies on channels of information in rural areas by Sturges and Chimseu (1998) showed that Africa's rural people are exposed to quite a lot of information. The problem however, is whether the information reaching them is reliable and organized in such a way as to achieve defined objectives. They concluded that the role and function of information agencies which render some services in these places are important and should be examined closely allied to this is the postulation by Aboyade (1990) that information needs of rural people are determined through a variety of channels like the mass media, government information officers, rural health personnel, adult

educators and local school teachers. For example, information on health matters reaches the rural people through hospitals and rural health centres.

Some of these information agents are pervasive and are involved in intensified information transfer activities in the rural areas. They include teachers, community development workers agricultural extension officers and mass media.

Methodology

The major instrument used to collect data for this study was questionnaire. This is the most used instrument for gathering data on users' studies in Nigeria. The questionnaire consisted of structured close ended questions regarding opinion and knowledge of users of rural libraries in Ekiti State on their information needs and characteristics.

Ekiti State, a Yoruba speaking state in Nigeria in the South West Zone was created on 1st October 1996. By 1991 census, Ekiti State population was 1,647,822 while the estimated population on creation on 1st October, 1996 was about 1.75 million. The recently released population census of National Population Commission put the population of Ekiti State at 2,384,212.

There are 16 local government Areas in Ekiti State. Selection for this study was based on one Local Government Area in each of the three Senatorial districts in Ekiti State geo-political arrangement. Ijero local Government Area in Ekiti Central Senatorial District, Ikole Local Government Area in Ekiti North Senatorial District and Ekiti East Local Government in Ekiti South Senatorial District. The rural areas in the selected Local Government Areas in the districts were used.

Thus, the results obtained in the study would be fairly representative of readership in the rural areas of Ekiti State. The questionnaire were pre-tested with users of public library in Ado-Ekiti to find out its reliability. Three hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered of the three hundred administered, two hundred and eighty five were completed and returned representing a response rate of 95%.

The results for this study are presented in tables i – vi

Table I shows the age distribution of respondents. It shows that majority of the respondents 37% were in the 26-30 years of age. This is closely followed by 35% that falls within 20-25 years age bracket.

Table II shows information needs of rural dwellers which they seek to satisfy. It reveals that “Research is the most suitable information needs of rural dwellers which they seek to satisfy. Here, the research topped the list 39% while others had the least percentage of 2% in the table.

Table III shows the types of Reading materials that will satisfy their information needs. It reveals that majority of the respondents read books while books topped the list with 35.71% Biographies and others types had the least of 1.42% each in the table.

Table IV shows the nformation sources available to rural dwellers.

The library as a source of information had the highest with 35.71%. This shows the importance of library in rural setting. Internet had 5.36% which shows that the rural populace low patronage of the internet. Home source came last with 1.79%. This is a pointer to the fact that the rural dwellers do not always use home as a source of information.

Table V shows the level of education of users of rural libraries.

The upper secondary students topped the list with 28.57%. This is followed by the respondents who are of the lower secondary school students. These shows that in the rural areas the provision for library services should take the factor that upper secondary students use rural libraries than other users.

Table VI shows the benefits that rural library services after to rural dwellers. It is not surprising that acquisition of information needs had the highest with 35.71%. This shows that information needs of rural dweller are very paramount in their hearts. This is followed by the help in which rural libraries offer in filling information vacuum with 28.57%.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Rural libraries as presently conceived that is along the western lives, cannot fully meet the needs and aspirations of the rural populace. There is therefore the need for them to review their information delivery strategies. The rural librarian should not see himself as custodian of books waiting for those who care to come to use the materials. Rather, he should be a catalyst in the information provision processes. He should be encouraged to be a translator, social activist and change agent all combined into one. This will facilitate better access to vital information in the rural setting and provide all the essential information required for overall integrated rural development. It is also imperative for rural libraries in Ekiti State to designed information

system and services tailored towards meeting the information needs of the users. Although, the rural libraries are available and accessible to users, nevertheless, the following recommendations are hereby suggested for improving the provision of library and information services

1. Provision of more seats in the Library
2. Provision of more relevant materials
3. Recruitment of qualified personnel
4. Provision of internet facilities
5. Adequate supply of newspapers magazines
6. Provision of information technology facilities
7. Readership promotion campaign.

Table I: Age distribution of respondents

Age bracket	No of respondents	Percentage respondents	total
20-25years	100	35	
26-30years	105	37	
31-35years	20	7	
36-40years	15	5	
41-45 years	20	7	
Over 46 years	25	9	
Total	280	100	

Table II: Information needs of rural dwellers which they seek to satisfy.

Information needs	No of respondents	% of total respondents
Legislature and regulative information	10	4
Government information	40	14
Market news	40	14
Research	110	39
Scientific and Technical information	20	7
News & current affairs	30	11
Local events and activities	25	9
Others	5	2
Total	280	100

Table III: Types of Reading materials that will satisfy their information needs.

Types	No of respondent	% of total respondents
News paper	90	32.14
Magazines	56	20
Books	100	35.71
Journals	6	2.14
Dictionaries	15	5.35
Encyclopedias	5	1.78
Biographies	4	1.42
Others	4	1.42
Total	280	100

Table IV: Information sources available to rural dwellers.

Sources	No of respondent	% of total respondents
Personal collection	80	28.60
Internet	15	5.36
Library	100	35.71
School	80	28.57
Home	5	1.79
Total	280	100

Table V Level of education of users of rural libraries

Level of education	No of respondents	% of total respondents
Upper primary 3-6	20	7.14
Lower secondary Jss 1-3	40	14.29
Upper secondary SS1-3	80	28.57
College of education	30	10.71
Technical colleges	10	3.57
College of Agriculture	15	5.36
School of health technology	30	10.71
Polytechnic	20	7.14
Universities	30	10.71
Others	5	1.79
Total	280	100

Table VI: Benefits that rural library services after to rural dwellers.

Benefits	No of respondents	% of total respondents
Reinforcement of specific information	20	7.14
Repackaging information	30	10.71
Acquisition of information needs	100	35.71
Helps in filling information vacuum	80	28.57
Co-ordinating information flow	40	14.29
Others	10	3.57
Total	280	100

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