

Identification of the Key Challenges Faced by Public Library Facilities in South East Nigeria

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Abstract

Public libraries play a crucial role in education, research, and community development. However, in Southeast Nigeria, these institutions face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness. This study examines the key issues affecting public libraries in the Southeast, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited technological access, outdated collections, and a shortage of trained librarians. The study used a mixed-method approach. Data were collected through field observations, structured interviews, and surveys administered to library users and staff. A total of 316 questionnaires were distributed to respondents who were carefully selected. Out of these, 309 questionnaires were retrieved with complete answers, giving a response rate of 97%. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane formula. The data collected was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis method, Weighted Mean Score, and Standard Deviation. Tables were used in the presentation of data gathered from the field. Analysis was done using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. The analysis identifies government negligence, economic constraints, technological lag, and changing reading habits as the root causes of the problem. To address these issues, the study proposes strategic interventions, including increased government investment, policy reforms, digital integration, infrastructure modernization, and enhanced public-private partnerships. Additionally, the study recommends need for strengthening security, improving staff capacity, improvement of library infrastructure, Modernization and Digital Transformation etc.

Keyword: Key Challenges, Public Libraries Facilities, South East Nigeria.

I. Background to the Study

The public library has proved to be of the best means of providing books and non-books materials and making them available and accessible for its diverse users. Public libraries are now acknowledged to be an indispensable part of

community wide range of reading materials for all ages and centres for community information services. The public library that provides services to the general public, is also responsible for serving special categories of the public, such as children, members of the armed forces, hospital, patients, prisoners, workers and employees. In other words, it is a library established by the state to provide wide service and supervised by either a ministry or a library board. The public library first started in the early 19th Century in Europe and America. In England for instance, industrial cities like Manchester, Russia and Detroit in the United States had public libraries so as to meet the informational needs of the industries. Boman (1989) in addition said that the growth of education and printing encouraged the use of books. For that reasons, the first public library Act in England was promulgated in 1850. It empowered that any town council with a population of 10, 000 (later 5, 000) people was entitled to one public library.

Public libraries are vital community institutions that offer vital resources and services to a wide range of users. To effectively meet the needs of their users, these facilities must, nevertheless, be maintained at the highest possible standard of operation and quality. Although many industries have adopted Facility Management (FM) practises to improve operational effectiveness and customer pleasure, there aren't many particular guidelines or framework designed to evaluate the functionality and state of public library.

Against this backdrop, there is a pressing need to develop an effective framework for the management of public library facilities in South-East Nigeria. Such a framework would provide guidance and direction for library administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in the planning, development, and operation of public library services by addressing key areas such as governance, infrastructure, technology, user services, and sustainability, the framework aims to enhance the quality of library services, improve access to information, and promote community engagement and development. Again, public library facilities may encounter issues including obsolete technology, ineffective layouts, poor accessibility, insufficient

safety precautions, and inadequate technology integration if they lack a thorough evaluation methodology.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address the absence of comprehensive framework tailored towards evaluating the functionality and state of public library services in South East, Nigeria. The goal of this study is to create and validate a thorough framework that could be used to assess specific public library locations, advance best practises, boost operational effectiveness, and ultimately enhance user experience and happiness in these important communal places.

Furthermore, the rapid advancement of technology and the rise of digital media have transformed the way information is accessed and consumed, posing new challenges and opportunities for public libraries. To remain relevant and effective, public libraries must adapt to these changes by embracing technology, expanding digital services, and redefining their role as community hubs for lifelong learning and innovation. The effectiveness and the survival of any organization are largely enhanced by the ability of management to ensure that there is functional equipment, lands and building, infrastructure, fixtures etc. Again, the responsibilities of every good management of an organization should include maintaining a good level of facility to ensure efficiency and productivity.

The absence of such frameworks in the South East limits the potential for these libraries to adapt to evolving user needs, remain financially sustainable, and align with international standards. Despite the long existence of public library services in Nigeria, (Salman, and Moster, 2017) pointed out issues and trends concerning the provision of public libraries in Nigeria like poor policies, absence of adequate professionals, lack of infrastructural facilities/services, and absence of awareness and good understanding of the notion of public library services which led to low level-utilization of the accessible services by prospective patrons. This is also a perceived problem in the management of library facilities in South East, Nigeria which needs to be investigated.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Public Libraries

A public library is a library which is accessible to the public and is generally funded from public sources (such as tax money). It is a library that is open to all members of a community regardless of age, educational qualification, sex, religious belief, political leaning, social class or status etc. The public library is generally considered as the people's university due to its non-restrictiveness to any group

of users (Okeoma, 2011). Public libraries exist in most nations of the world and are often considered as essential to having an educated and literate population. Reitz (2004) opines that public libraries are now acknowledged to be an indispensable part of community life, as promoters of literacy, providers of a wide range of reading for all ages and as centres for community information services.

According to UNESCO public library manifesto, cited by Edoke (2000), the key missions that should form the core of public library services include: creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age; supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels; providing opportunities for personal creative development; stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people; promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations, etc.

A fundamental feature of a public library is that usage should be free to all residents of the community. Users of a public library in a community range from the youngest child to the oldest adult, from the wealthiest citizen to the most economically disadvantaged and from the most highly educated to the stark illiterate. In order to accomplish the expectations highlighted, the public library performs specific functions which include the following: to provide for educational development of all people in the community; to positively support the civic and cultural activities of groups and organizations; to promote and encourage wholesome recreation and positive use of leisure time; and to give the user access to information over the whole range of human activities such as agriculture, crafts, commerce and industry (Edoka, 2000).

The public library must therefore be well equipped to satisfy the information needs of the various individuals and groups in any given community. By its nature, it is a library that is open to all. Globally, public libraries were conceived to provide members of the community with an avenue for recreation, in which people could go and find something to read for leisure, hence the emphasis on fiction material. While serving recreational purposes, people could also use the information resources for self-education.

2.2 Concept of Facilities Management

Facilities management is a fairly new concept which has evolved as a result of globalization and competition in the business field. Both private and Public Organizations strive to enhance quality and improve performance at work. They focus on a reduction of overheads in an effort to improve their

bottom line and their position relative to competitors. These desires have created the need for facilities management.

The use of the term facilities management can be dated to the creation of the facilities management institute of Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1979 and the founding of National (later changed to International) Facility Management Association in 1980.

However, facility management of large and diverse facilities has long been practiced by the military government and North American colleges and university campus officials, usually under the name of post engineering, public works or plant administration (Cotts, 1999). The term facilities management has been misconstrued by many to mean the management of infrastructures such as telecommunication, equipment's, water, electricity, seems, roads and other services relevant to the use and occupation of buildings, such as lifts and elevators, electricity-generating plants, water reserve and treatment plants, sewage treatment plant etc.

Facilities management entails much more than this, it involves premises policy formulation long range planning, space management building maintenance and day-to-day administration and control of manpower, and related resources (Odiete, 1998). According to Cotts (1998) facility management is the quintessential business function, affecting not only revenues and costs but production, quality of life for employees, health and safety, the

work environment and increasingly, areas such as the ability to recruit and hold employees. The widened view of facilities management has become increasingly important today with changes in organizational structures, corporate styles, technological developments, environmental issues, and employment patterns. Thus facility management is far beyond looking after buildings and its facilities.

To effectively grasp the concept of Facility Management (FM), it is proper to address the concept of management as a characteristic foothold of the study. Human endeavours have and still encounter developments through constant improvement, and in the center of every improvement is management of the available resources. Although economics is engrossed with the appropriate allocation of scarce resources, management oversees the appropriation of both the material resources and human resources for the realization of marginal value in both sectors. Thus, management is pivotal in the development of social and material resources, and maximization of economic value. In a more disciplinary perspective, "management is defined as all the activities and tasks undertaken for achieving goals by continuous activities like: planning, organizing, leading and controlling" (iEduNoteTm, 2021). From this definition, it is clear that management is a human activity in the environment but with specific goals. As a human activity gearing towards effective and efficient realization of specific goals, management as a concept can be assessed in threefold aspects.

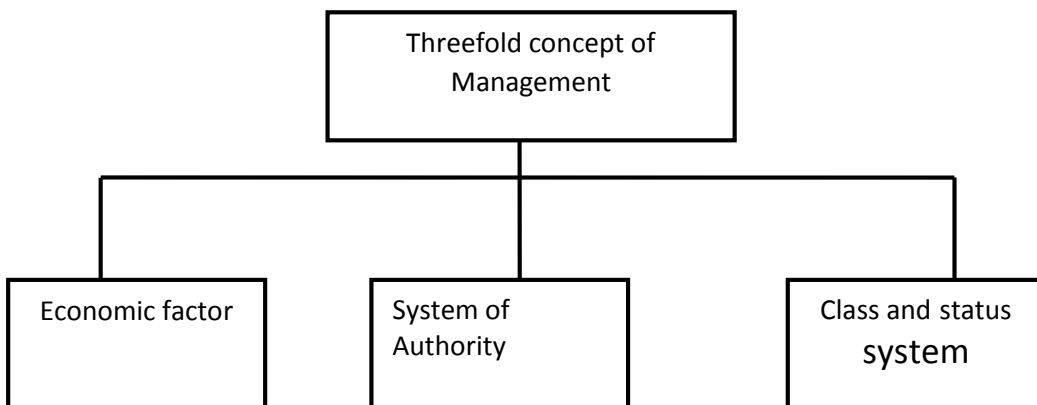


Fig. 1: Chart Showing Concept of Management

2.3 The Challenges of Public Libraries

Vital as the role of public libraries are, it is a thing of surprise that after many years of public library existence in Nigeria, most of its objectives are yet to be achieved due to several problems militating against them. Some of these prevalent problems according to Nwokeocha (1998) is the government neglect of the role of the public library to the society.

To this effect, they are faced with a lot of challenges and obstacles.

Oyedum (2005) states that there is a lack of recognition of the state librarians by the government decision makers. One can confidently say that the public library system in Nigeria today is characterized by poor status in collection, facilities, human resources, modern information facilities like

information computer technology (ICT) and poor quality services followed by poor ICT skills among staff. Most, if not all of these problems emanated from the mother of them all – poor funding. Nwokeocha (1998) observed that lack of funds. Inadequate funding is hindering the development of public libraries in Nigeria. At present, many public libraries have inadequate numbers of staff and others have staff that are seriously under-educated. If libraries in Nigeria are to survive, they must invest in the intellectual capital of their employees. Technology used to access information, can be a way to educate library staff, to provide resources and services required to bridge the information gap between developed and under-developed nations.

Bhattachajee (2007) informs that many of the public libraries do not have their own buildings; some are located in small thatched huts while some share a room and time with their institutions. The quality and quantity of public library services and the changes they can create in the society depends on its human resources. The staff of the public library is not motivated adequately to boost their morale.

Opara (2005) notes that it is as a result of inadequate attention given to these workers and their institutions. Furthermore, the number of the professional librarians is so small compared to the nonprofessionals who are always large in number. According to Oyedum (2005) this is contrary to the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA, 2001) suggestion that at least 33% of the total staff strength should be qualified librarians in any established library. Where this is lacking, there is no doubt that poor library services would always be provided to the users; secondly, library development would also be slow and this would attract little or no users. Therefore, Ebiwolate (2010) suggests that public library services are facing a number of problems which could be highlighted as bad roads, lack of funds, insufficient library materials, irrelevant or outdated materials.

2.3.1 Key Challenges Facing Public Library Facilities in Southeast Nigeria

Public libraries play a crucial role in promoting literacy, education, and access to information. However, in Southeast Nigeria, these institutions face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness and accessibility. From inadequate funding to poor infrastructure, several factors contribute to the decline in library services. This article explores the key challenges facing public library facilities in Southeast Nigeria and highlights potential solutions to improve their functionality.

1. Inadequate Funding: One of the most significant challenges facing public libraries in Southeast

Nigeria is inadequate funding. Many libraries rely on government allocations, which are often insufficient to maintain operations. As a result, libraries struggle to acquire new books, maintain infrastructure, and provide essential services. The lack of financial support also affects staff salaries and discourages skilled professionals from pursuing careers in library management.

2. Poor Infrastructure and Facilities: Many public libraries in the region operate in dilapidated buildings with poor ventilation, inadequate lighting, and limited seating. The absence of modern amenities makes it difficult for users to study comfortably. Furthermore, many libraries lack essential furniture, air conditioning, and well-maintained restroom facilities, making them unappealing to visitors.

3. Limited Access to Technology and the Internet: In today's digital age, access to online resources is essential for research and learning. Unfortunately, many public libraries in Southeast Nigeria lack computers, internet access, and e-library services. This technological gap limits users' ability to access global information, participate in online learning programs, and develop digital literacy skills.

4. Outdated and Insufficient Library Collections: Another major challenge is the lack of up-to-date books and research materials. Many libraries still house outdated books that do not meet the academic and informational needs of their users. The limited acquisition of new publications and a lack of books in local languages further restrict access to relevant knowledge. This affects students, researchers, and the general public who rely on libraries for information.

5. Shortage of Professional Librarians and Staff: A well-functioning library requires trained librarians to manage resources and assist users. However, many public libraries in the region suffer from a shortage of professional staff due to poor remuneration and a lack of training opportunities. Without skilled librarians, library users struggle to navigate available resources effectively.

6. Low Public Awareness and Patronage: Despite their importance, many public libraries remain underutilized because of low awareness. Many students and community members are unaware of the resources and services available. Additionally, the rise of digital entertainment and social media has shifted attention away from traditional reading habits, reducing library patronage.

7. Irregular Power Supply: Frequent power outages in Nigeria pose a significant challenge to library operations. Without a stable electricity supply, libraries struggle to provide adequate lighting, air conditioning, and access to electronic resources. This issue further discourages users from spending long hours in library facilities.

8. Security Concerns: The security of library resources and users is another pressing issue. Many libraries experience theft and vandalism due to weak security measures. The lack of proper surveillance and inadequate staffing make it difficult to protect books, computers, and other library assets. Additionally, safety concerns discourage people from using libraries, especially during evening hours.

9. Bureaucratic and Policy Constraints: Government policies on library management in Nigeria are often ineffective, leading to slow decision-making and poor implementation of reforms. Many libraries struggle with administrative bottlenecks that delay the release of funds and the execution of development projects. The absence of clear policies on digital transformation and library funding further worsens the situation.

10. Lack of Community Engagement and Support: Public libraries thrive when they actively engage with their communities. However, many libraries in Southeast Nigeria fail to organize literacy programs, book clubs, or outreach initiatives that could encourage reading culture. The lack of public-private partnerships also limits opportunities for library development and modernization.

The mixed-methods design was used in conducting the study, combining qualitative and quantitative data, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing public libraries in the study area. using content or qualitative analysis of the relationship between these strategies and state of public libraries in the study area. This was done by highlighting, analyzing and determining the relationship between the strategies and state of public library facilities in the study area. The different variables of the existing strategies and state of public library facilities in the study area was run in statistical software using Mean Scores to determine their relationship in the study area.

The study was carried out in Public Libraries located in South-East; Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Abia State of Nigeria with their state capitals at Awka, Enugu, Owerri and Umuahia, respectively. The justification and reason for choosing this area is because of security concerns in the South East region of Nigeria. Hence, this preference was due to the fact that these cities are considered geographically large enough in their respective regions. The study covered basically the selected public library facilities operated by state government in the study area.

III. METHODOLOGY

Table 1. Sample of Selected Public Libraries for the Study

S/N	State	Name of the State Public Libraries
1.	Anambra State	Prof. Kenneth Dike State Central Library, Awka.
2.	Enugu State	Enugu State Central Library, Enugu.
3.	Imo State	Imo State Public Library, Owerri.
4.	Abia State	Abia State Public Library, Umuahia.

The population of the study is made up of librarians, Library Officers and Users in the public libraries in the study area. A study population is the total number of all items, respondents, or institutions that possess the characteristics or have knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Asika, 1991). It is the collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics. This basically refers to the

number of persons or objects covered by the study or with which the study is concerned. The population of the study comprises library users, librarians and library officers in the selected public libraries in the state capitals; Umuahia, Awka, Enugu and Owerri respectively. The distribution of librarians, library officers and library users in the public libraries in South-East Nigeria are shown below.

Table 2. Population of the Study

S/N	RESPONDENTS	ABIA	ANAMBRA	ENUGU	IMO	TOTAL
1.	No. of Librarians	9	5	6	4	24
2.	No. of Library Officers	12	23	11	12	58
3.	No. of Registered Library Users	390	483	215	344	1,432
	TOTAL POPULATION	411	511	232	360	1,514

Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size for the study. The Taro Yamane formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the Total population (Population size), e is limit of tolerable error, 1 is unite (constant value).

Therefore, given that $N = 1,514$ (as stated above) and e is assumed to be 5%, Then the sample size is calculated thus,

$$n = \frac{1,514}{1+1,514(0.05)^2} = 316$$

Thus, the sample size (n) for the study is put at 316.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULT

4.1 Key Challenges Faced by Public Library Facilities in Study Area:

In order to answer this research question 3, the respondents were presented with a number of questionnaire items, and obliged to rate each item so as to express their views about the challenges faced by public libraries in their respective states. Result of the analysis conducted on their responses are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 1: Respondents' ratings regarding challenges facing public libraries in the study area

Description of Challenges facing public libraries	N = 309	
	\bar{x}	SD
Inadequate Infrastructure	2.92	.888
Limited Funding and Resources	3.03	.958
Technological Obsolescence	3.05	.979
Low Community Engagement	3.00	.990
Staffing and Training	2.88	.990
Sustainability	2.23	.830
Infrastructure Security	2.54	.873

The data presented in Table 1 revealed that public library facilities in the study area face several challenges, with the majority of challenges falling within the "Agree" category. Specifically, the mean score for inadequate infrastructure ($M = 2.92$), limited funding and resources ($M = 3.03$), technological obsolescence ($M = 3.05$), low community engagement ($M = 3.00$), and staffing and training ($M = 2.88$) all fell within the "Agree" range (2.50-3.25), indicating that these issues are perceived by majority of the respondents as significant

challenges facing public libraries in the study area. While concerns surrounding sustainability ($M = 2.23$) and infrastructure security ($M = 2.54$) fell within the "Disagree" range (1.75-2.50), suggesting these areas are considered less pressing, they still warrant attention.

Further analysis was conducted to determine the variation in respondents' views regarding the challenges facing public libraries in relation to the four selected states. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.9.

Table 2: State-wise distribution of respondents' views regarding the challenges faced by public libraries in the study area

Description of challenges facing public libraries	Selected States (N = 309)							
	ABIA		ANAMBRA		ENUGU		IMO	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
Inadequate Infrastructure	2.94	.95	2.95	.76	2.88	.98	2.88	.94
Limited Funding and Resources	2.98	1.05	3.07	.88	3.08	.94	3.00	.97
Technological Obsolescence	3.05	1.03	3.01	.96	3.04	1.03	3.10	.93
Low Community Engagement	3.11	.94	3.02	.98	3.02	1.00	2.84	1.05
Staffing and Training	2.87	1.00	2.87	.95	2.90	1.04	2.90	1.02
Sustainability	2.23	.75	2.19	.89	2.25	.79	2.26	.87
Infrastructure Security	2.42	.79	2.59	.89	2.50	.88	2.64	.93

The data reveal significant challenges faced by public library facilities in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, and Imo states, with mean scores across the four states indicating a perception of "Agree" (2.50-3.25) for several areas. Public library facilities are perceived as facing challenges related to inadequate

infrastructure, limited funding and resources, technological obsolescence, low community engagement, and staffing and training. Specifically, Enugu ($M = 3.08$) has the highest mean score for limited funding and resources, followed by Anambra ($M = 3.07$) and Abia ($M = 2.98$). Similarly, Imo (M

= 3.10) exhibits the highest mean score for technological obsolescence, followed by Enugu (M = 3.04) and Abia (M = 3.05). Notably, Abia (M = 3.11) scores highest for low community engagement, with Enugu (M = 3.02) and Anambra (M = 3.02) also scoring high in this category. While sustainability and infrastructure security are perceived as less pressing, with scores falling within the "Disagree" range (1.75-2.50), they still warrant attention.

IV. CONCLUSION

Public libraries in Southeast Nigeria face significant challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited access to technology, outdated resources, and low public awareness. These issues have far-reaching consequences, negatively affecting education, workforce development, and social engagement. Without functional libraries, students, researchers, and the general public are deprived of essential learning resources, contributing to a decline in literacy and knowledge acquisition.

The root causes of these problems include government negligence, economic constraints, technological lag, and a shift in reading culture. While these challenges are substantial, they are not insurmountable. With strategic interventions, public libraries can be revitalized to serve as vibrant centers of knowledge, learning, and community engagement.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the identified challenges and improve public library facilities in Southeast Nigeria, the following recommendations should be considered:

- i. The government should allocate sufficient funding to public libraries, ensuring regular financial support for infrastructure maintenance, resource acquisition, and staff salaries.
- ii. Investments should be made in ICT infrastructure, including computers, online databases, and digital literacy programs to enhance access to information.
- iii. Renovating existing library buildings and constructing new ones with modern facilities will enhance the user experience.
- iv. Adequate ventilation, lighting, comfortable seating, and alternative power sources (such as solar energy) should be provided to ensure usability.
- v. Incentives such as better salaries and career development programs should be introduced to attract and retain skilled professionals.
- vi. The private sector, NGOs, and philanthropic organizations should collaborate with the government to fund and manage library projects.

- vii. Libraries should implement security measures, including surveillance systems and trained security personnel, to prevent theft and vandalism.

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