EXAMINING THE EXTENSION SERVICES AND INFORMATION UTILIZATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Abstract

The research investigated the impact of extension services and information utilization in the Akwa Ibom State Public Library. A descriptive survey research design was used. Three research questions guided the study. Literature was reviewed. The study population was 85 users of the public library. For the fact that the study population is small, the researchers adopted a census or total enumeration technique that enabled the adoption of the entire population as a sample of the study. The instrument used was a questionnaire titled "Examining Extension Services and Information Utilization Questionnaire" (EESIUQ). A four-point modified Likert rating scale, known as a checklist, was adopted, and the data collected was computed using Mean and Standard deviation to answer the research questions. The findings reveal that extension services influence information utilization. Additionally, the outreach programme has a significant influence on information utilisation, as community partnerships substantially enhance information access in public libraries, particularly through collaborations with other libraries. It was concluded that library management should focus on creating and implementing targeted digital inclusion literacy programs in public libraries to meet community demands and enhance information utilisation. It was recommended that the government should prioritize the development and implementation of targeted digital inclusion literacy programmes to address the specific needs of the community and enhance effective information utilization in the Akwa Ibom State Public Library.

Keywords: Extension services, information utilization, public library. Outreach initiative, community partnership.

Introduction

Libraries have long been recognized as primary institutions for information resource dissemination and usage. They are repositories of intellectual knowledge, providing access to a wide range of resources, including books, periodicals, newspapers, journals, digital media, and more. (Aina, 2019). Access to electronic information has become as important as physical access. They are crucial in developing information literacy, which enables users to effectively utilize technology, such as computer programs and internet services. (Burdi, 2023). Digital inclusion is bridging the gap into the online universe, ensuring that all members of society have an opportunity to be part of the wealth of internet information resources. The library's extension services program is a deliberate way of broadening the use of library resources and services beyond the library building. The extension service is a philosophy that encompasses activities and programs dedicated to bringing the educational, informational, and cultural services of the library into the community to foster community development. (Egwuonwu, Obiekwe, & Ekpehe, 2022).

Information utilization is the ability to apply information obtained from various sources for the purpose of making decisions, solving educational problems, and achieving specific objectives. (Inyang & Ekeng, 2023). The determinants that influence information utilization are the availability and accessibility of information resources, and the ability to apply them is a key aspect of the library model. The Information utilization in the context of library extension services is not just about accessing the resources but also empowering individuals to make meaningful use of the resources provided to them in the library to meet the patron demands.

A public library is a library that is accessible to all citizens, offering a diverse and comprehensive selection of materials and services to people of all ages. It was established in the 19th century to promote reading literacy, support education, and provide access to information, knowledge, and lifelong learning within the community. Libraries began to offer new services such as interlibrary loans, online catalogues, and access to digital archives, significantly enhancing their utility and reach (Udeme & Anaehobe, 2020).

Extension services in libraries represent a strategic approach to broadening the reach and impact of library resources and services beyond the confines of the physical library building. These services are designed to cater to the diverse needs of communities, particularly those of underserved and remote populations who may not have easy access to library facilities (Sarkar, 2019). The concept of extension services encompasses a variety of programs and initiatives aimed at extending the library's educational, informational, and cultural offerings to the broader community (Egwuonwu, et al., 2022).

The outreach program, according to Udeme & Anaehobe (2020), is a program designed to foster a stronger sense of community within a public library. In today's life, these kinds of partnerships not only enhance library services but also strengthen social connections within the community and foster a sense of belonging among its inhabitants. Library outreach indicates that the community needs building and technology development (Borgohain & Nath, 2020). Outreach programs are most effective and cost-efficient when they bring work to where people are, either in person or online.

Community partnership refers to collaborations between libraries and other organizations, groups, or stakeholders within the community to improve and expand library services, programs, and resources. It is responding to the specific needs and challenges of various groups within the community, libraries can further establish themselves as welcoming and inclusive community spaces. Community partnership and collaboration are at the heart of

making library services more relevant and effective. Ambali & Araba, (2020) inferred that community partnership aims to share resources and expertise to respond more effectively to community needs and provide more integrated support and services to the patron. On these premises, there is a need to examine extension service and information utilization in Akwa Ibom State public libraries for community usage.

Statement of the Problem

Traditional library services face several challenges in meeting the evolving needs of diverse communities. This outdated model is insufficient in the age of digital technology, when information is abundant and readily available on numerous websites. Perhaps the most fundamental challenge is that digital access within most neighbourhoods, especially for rural and disenfranchised populations, is limited due to a lack of reliable internet access and digital tools.

Libraries face budget constraints and fund availability, which hinder their ability to buy new collections, maintain buildings, and expand services in an effort to keep up with the growing demand of the public, as in streaming media and online stores, that offer convenient access to digital content by enhancing the potential of libraries to respond to the needs of marginalized groups and their particular demands, this study aimed to contribute to the general well-being of communities and learning outcomes in Akwa Ibom State Public Library.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate the influence of extension services on the information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, to:

1. Determine the influence of the digital inclusion literacy program on information utilization in the public library in Akwa Ibom State.

2. Ascertain the influence of the outreach program on information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State.

3. Find out the influence of community partnerships on information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the influence of the digital inclusion literacy programme on information utilization in the public library in Akwa Ibom State?

2. How does the outreach programme influence information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State?

3. To what extent do community partnerships influence information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State?

Literature Review

Extension services can be achieved through outreach programs, community partnerships, outreach programme, and the digital Literacy programme. It plays a vital role in promoting information utilization in public libraries. Borgohain and Nath (2020) define extension services as organized efforts that take library resources to people where they are, rather than waiting for them to come to the library.

Egwuonwu et al *(*2022) inferred that investments in technology infrastructure are crucial to support digital literacy and online service delivery, especially in areas with poor internet access and low electricity supply. Also, Udeme and Anaehobi (2020) observed that information utilization is the strategic use of knowledge to enhance productivity, learning, or decision-making. This means that people don't just passively consume information but apply it in a way that leads to real-world outcomes of their demand.

Nwoye et al. (2022) describe community partnership as a strategic alliance where parties work together to solve specific problems or advance common interests. This alliance involves sharing resources, expertise, and collaboration with other organizations for the community's benefit.

Ambali and Araba (2020) maintain that successful community partnerships require clear roles and responsibilities. Each partner must understand their contributions and how they fit into the overall strategy. This clarity helps prevent overlap and ensures that each partner's resources and efforts are used effectively.

Burdi (2023) describes a literacy programme as efforts to improve information literacy, which involves the ability to find, evaluate, and use information effectively. These programs help individuals become more skilled in navigating various sources of information, such as books, websites, and databases, and applying this knowledge in practical ways. As community-based educational activities, it is designed to promote lifelong learning and intellectual growth of the community

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The study population was 85 users of the public library. For the fact that the study population is small, the researchers adopted a census or total enumeration technique that enabled the adoption of the entire population as a sample of the study. The instrument was titled "Examining Extension Services and Information Utilization Questionnaire" (EESIUQ), was used. A four-point Likert rating scale was the instrument for data collection. On Strongly agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), Strongly Disagree (1 point), and data collected were analysed using Mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The result is presented in Table 1

Results and Discussions of Findings

Research Question One: What is the influence of the digital inclusion literacy programme on the information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom state?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Digital Inclusion Literacy Programme on information utilization in public library (n=48)

S/N	Digital Inclusion Literacy Programme	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	The library offers programmes to improve my reading and writing skills.	18	12	10	8	2.7	0.85	Agree
2.	The library's digital inclusion literacy programmes are relevant to my needs.	6	20	18	6	2.1	0.75	Agree
3.	I have benefited from the library's literacy programmes.	22	8	6	12	3.0	0.90	Agree
4.	The library's digital inclusion literacy programmes are well-structured and effective.	10	16	14	10	2.4	0.80	Agree
5.	The library's digital inclusion literacy programmes have improved my ability to access information.	25	5	5	15	2.9	0.95	Agree
	Grand Mean					**2.62**	**0.83**	**Agree**

The results presented in Table 1 reveal the responses to the influence of digital inclusion literacy programmes on information utilization in the Akwa Ibom State Public Library. The summary of the results in the Table indicates that respondents agree with the statements provided regarding the library's digital inclusion literacy programmes and information utilization in the Akwa Ibom State Public Library.

The grand mean score is 2.62 with a standard deviation of 0.83 based on the data presented in the Table. The implication of this finding shows that digital inclusion literacy programmes have a moderate influence on information utilization in the library. The finding agrees with (Burdi, 2023). who stated that digital inclusion is bridging the gap into the online universe, ensuring that all members of society have an opportunity to be part of the wealth of internet information resources

Research question two: How does the outreach programme influence information utilization in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on how Outreach Programme Influences information utilization in the library (n=48)

S/N	Outreach Programmes	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	I am aware of the library's efforts to reach out to the community.	18	15	10	5	2.9	0.9	Agree
2.	The library's outreach efforts have helped me access information.	15	18	12	3	2.8	0.8	Agree
3.	The library's outreach efforts are relevant to my needs.	12	20	14	2	2.7	0.8	Agree
4.	I have benefited from the library's outreach efforts.	19	14	10	5	2.9	0.9	Agree
4.	I have benefited from the library's outreach efforts.	19	14	10	5	2.9	0.9	Agree
5.	The library's outreach efforts are well-publicised.	15	18	12	3	2.8	0.8	Agree
	Grand Mean					**2.76**	**0.86**	**Agree**

The results presented in Table 2 reveal the responses on how outreach programmes influence information utilization at the Akwa Ibom State Public Library. The result revealed no significant influence of outreach programmes on information utilization in the library. This contradicts Nwoye et al (2022) findings that outreach programmes, particularly mobile libraries and community workshops, significantly improved information access in rural areas.

The grand mean score is 2.76 with a standard deviation of 0.86, as presented in Table 2. The implication of the finding indicates that the outreach programme has a strong influence on information utilization

Research question three: What is the influence of community partnerships on the utilization of information in public libraries in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of community partnerships on utilization of information in the library (n=48)

S/N	Community Partnership	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	The library collaborates with local organizations to deliver enhanced services.	22	12	8	6	2.9	0.9	Agree
2.	Community organizations have helped the library improve its services.	19	15	10	4	2.8	0.8	Agree
3.	I have benefited from the library's partnerships with community organizations.	17	18	12	3	2.7	0.8	Agree
4.	The library's partnerships have increased my access to information.	24	10	8	6	2.9	0.9	Agree
5.	The library's partnerships are well-publicised.	20	14	10	4	2.8	0.8	Agree
	Grand Mean					**2.82**	**0.87**	**Agree**

The results presented in Table 3 reveal the responses to the influence of community partnerships on information utilization in the Akwa Ibom State Public Library. The summary of the results in Table 3 indicates moderate agreement, with a grand mean score is 2.82 and a standard deviation of 0.87. Based on the data presented in the Table, this shows that community partnerships have a strong influence on information utilization.

This agrees with Adaobi, et al *(*2022) who averred that community partnerships foster engagement with library resources. By hosting joint events or workshops, libraries increase opportunities for people to interact and utilize available information resources for effective utilization in public libraries.

Conclusion

Based on findings, the researchers concluded that extension services, comprising outreach programmes, community partnerships, and literacy programmes, have varying levels of influence on information utilization in Akwa Ibom State Public Library. As such, the management should prioritize the development and implementation of targeted literacy programmes, addressing the specific needs of the community, to enhance information utilization in the library.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The library management should prioritize the development and implementation of targeted digital inclusion literacy programmes, addressing the specific needs of the community, to enhance information utilization in the Akwa Ibom State Public Library.

2. The library management should re-evaluate and strengthen outreach programmes and community partnerships to ensure effective collaboration and engagement with the community, ultimately promoting information utilization and access.

3. The library management should provide training and awareness programs for library staff on the effective implementation and promotion of extension services, including outreach programmes, community partnerships, and literacy programmes.

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