

**INCLUSIVE LIBRARY INITIATIVES: ENHANCING ACCESS TO PUBLIC
LIBRARIES**

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**A PAPER PRESENTED AT
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COMPLEX SEMINAR SERIES
(ABULCSS/006-21) HELD AT AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
COMPLEX, A.B.U ZARIA NIGERIA ON 25TH MAY, 2021**

Abstract

Providing library services to the satisfaction of all users without discrimination is crucial to Public Libraries in this century. Inclusive Library Initiative is aimed at enhancing access and increasing meeting the demands of all users. The aim of the paper was to look at how inclusive library initiative enhance access to public libraries. A lot of inclusive initiative programmes were introduced by librarians such as Ipad lending, Mobile Workplace, Seat2meet, Table Tennis, Fab Lab, Chat and Chill, Tool Lending, Kitchen Equipment and many more. The paper concluded that Inclusive Libraries Initiative has made, and will continue to make, significant improvement in attracting and serving library patrons within the community it is located and therefore enhancing access to Public Libraries. Finally the paper suggested that Public Libraries should develop a general policy to guide the public library inclusive initiatives, Librarians in Public Libraries should be encouraged to create more library inclusive initiatives programmes and more Public Libraries should be built to cater for the increasing population of the community.

Key Terms: Inclusive, Initiative, Public Library, Enhance, Access, Libraries

Introduction

To survive the latest trend and thrive high in the future, librarians and libraries must change and adapt the new rapidly evolving global external environment. In advocating for an urgent transformation of the library system, there are a lot of big challenges facing librarians. In a business environment, for instance, the risk of holding on to a traditional mode or means of doing business can quickly render the business or a product obsolete. Therefore, these same disruptive forces are present in the operation of libraries, especially Public Libraries. Although a number of scholars have called for a quick transformation in the library system, there is a relatively minimal amount of attention given regarding what the transformation of library systems entails.

The importance of social inclusion and libraries as socially inclusive organizations has been reviewed by many authors such as Irwin & Silk (2019), Kulikauskienė (2019), Lloyd (2020), Koller, Pouesard & Rummens (2018) and Racelis (2018), who opined that socially inclusive libraries also focus on the needs of stakeholders and society at large. Therefore, libraries and library services must be accessible to all individuals, regardless of age, gender, race or disability. Public Library can be defined as an institution which provides priceless services to the society. It provides a wide range of benefits by bringing educational, recreational, inspirational and

informational services to the community. The fundamental aim of libraries, in general, is to provide timely, accurate, pertinent, and reliable information for their clientele.

A Public Library is seen, according to FSCS in National Center for Education Statistics (1996) as an entity that is established under government enabling laws and regulations to serve the community, district, state, region or nation and that provides at least the following:

- An organized collection of information resources, i.e. printed or non-printed materials, or a combination thereof;
- Paid staff; i.e. professionals and Para-professionals
- An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the general public;
- The facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, schedule and services; and
- Is supported in whole or in part with public funds.

Need for the paper

Public Libraries are created as places to exercise the right of access to information, culture and reading. They are places that facilitate life-long learning for the community to guarantee future opportunities. They offer special services and materials for those users who cannot use ordinary services and materials. They offer programmes aimed at all members of the public, adapted to users' different needs along with supporting materials and documents to enable access to reading, information and culture under similar conditions for all library users. However, since the first Public Libraries were opened, users' needs have changed as society has evolved. Despite the fact that Libraries are now immersed in modernity and an avalanche of technological advances that have modified access to information, culture and reading, there is frequently an imbalance between the needs of the most vulnerable citizens and the facilities, services, activities and collections provided for them in Public Libraries which create declining users patronage and uncertainty. The changing roles of Public Library precondition the organizational change to become an inclusive organization that meets not only users' needs but also the growing needs of society

Objectives of the paper

1. To highlight some of the inclusive library initiatives
2. To determine if these inclusive library initiatives enhances access to Public Libraries

Inclusive Libraries Initiatives Overview

A library is a collection of books and other forms of records and resources, housed, organized and interpreted to meet the broad varying needs of students, staff and others for information, recreation and inspiration (Adegoke in Sobalage&Ogunmodede, 2015).Recently, librarians are forced to focus on innovations in order to be more relevant in the era of globalization. Hamel (2000) defines management innovation as “a marked departure from traditional management principles, processes, and practices or a departure from customary organizational forms that significantly alter the way the work of management is performed”. The assumption here is that innovations can be a vital factor in the transformation of library systems. In the library, the bureaucratic traditions and the norms of the profession create limits in the librarian’s ability to innovate. Libraries that are well established find it difficult to change easily, and there is always considerable emphasis on preserving the status quo, due to fear of losing relevancyand thus avoiding the risks that might lead to major innovations.The changing role of libraries is a relevant topic for research and has been studied by such authors as Strover (2019), Appleton, Hall, Duff &Raeside (2018), Mcquire& Butt (2018), Pečeliūnaitė (2017), Pressley (2017), Juchnevič (2016), Casselden, Pickard & McLeod (2015), Delaney & Bates (2015),Wyatt, Mcquire, & Butt (2018), Yılmaz, &Cevher, (2015),Subramaniam, Oxley, & Kodama (2013)andJohnson (2012). Changing requirements oblige libraries to meet the needs of the society and all stakeholders and to contribute to the inclusion of people within the immediate community without discrimination. The obvious challenge being faced is how to bring about these changes in a world where most of the major library organizational changes simply do not work easily according to plan. Martell (2000) eloquently task librarians “to create arange of services unthinkable in the twentieth century, but mandatoryin the twenty-first century, if we are to provide society with thevalue added services it will need from its professionals.”

The role libraries plays in the 21st century is changing from book lending to community services with a wide range of aims such as: teaching of digital literacy, organizing lifelong learning, conducting cultural, informational and educational activities, and reducing social exclusion (Appleton, Hall, Duff &Raeside, 2018; Johnson, 2012; Pečeliūnaitė, 2018; Yılmaz&Cevher (2015). Presently, there is a direct connection between the library and society, due to the inseparable nature of its social functions and meeting the needs of immediate society (Juchnevič, 2016). Furthermore, in his articleabout the 21st century library, Atkinson (2001) stated that “The newlibrary must be mainly a social gathering place, somewhat noisy, with plenty of coffee.

“Professional librarians require no formal training that will prepare them to create these truly innovative approaches. A focus on inclusive library will require reorientation in order to innovate in the critical dimensions of library practice. Among these innovation by professional librarians is inclusive library initiative which focus on carrying along all the categories of library users without discrimination of any kind. The changing demands and roles of Public Library expected by the society precondition the organizational change to become an inclusive organization that meets not only users’ needs but also the growing needs of society. With reference to the library environment, inclusive library is looked at enhancing access to Public Libraries.

Enhancing Access to Public Libraries

The library community consists of the users who differ in their social status, education, mentality, therefore, Public Libraries’ aspires to be accessible to every member of the community (Pečeliūnaitė, 2018) and public pressure on libraries to increase the accessibility of their services affect libraries’ activities and roles. Inclusion can mean different things to different people. An inclusive library is a vital community resource, addressing the diverse information needs of all members in the community (CLA in Moisey, 2007). According to Grassi (2013), inclusion is an approach to library service that involves patrons with disabilities in an equitable way. One of the target goals under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive, and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all (United Nations, 2015). According to American Library Association (ALA) code of ethics, one of the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians is to provide “the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous response to all requests” (ALA, 2008)

Access to basic information is essential for the empowerment of individuals in a community, the effectiveness of policies, and the accountability of governments. When every member of the community can enjoy it, it is a driver of sustainable development across all of its dimensions. When it is absent, insufficient or unequal, opportunities are missed, decisions are poorer, and progress of the entire community is stifled. Libraries are vital in ensuring that everyone can benefit from access to information, making stronger, fairer societies a reality for all.

Inclusive Library Initiatives Programmes

This deals with inclusive library initiatives programs from the perspective of the librarians. The basic aim of every librarian is to provide the community with easy access of information and recreational resources, in as much as a library without a librarian is just a collection of books. To discharge these responsibilities, Public Libraries Associations (2021) highlighted some of the steps librarians have taken with innovative ideas in inclusive libraries which include the following:

Ipad Lending Scheme

The librarian of Suffolk, an East Anglian city of England created an initiative of lending iPad to use in the community by who cannot afford to buy one. By so doing the library carries the community along and making life a bit easier for them and also creating more awareness and patronage for the library.

Mobile Workplace

In St Paul, U. S. A. librarians have a long history of serving their communities by providing access to information resources. When the St. Paul Public Library saw the growing need for computer and job search skills, the library created a new way to bring its community the required tools and access they were searching for by providing mobile workshops to cater for the ever growing needs. These mobile workshops give assistance to library users at their convenient and thus create more awareness, accessibility and patronage.

Software Lending

Kansas Public Library initiate lending programme whereby Loan of MS Office, Photoshop etc are given out to the community. The Software Lending help bridge the digital divide because, in addition to being accessible by those with home computers and Internet access, it also enable the library to offer access to these programs at branches and computer centers that don't already have a dedicated station set up to run a given program, such as Adobe CS or Microsoft Office.

Repair Cafes

Toronto Public Library, Canada introduces another initiative by librarians, Repair Cafés are free meeting places created in the library and they're all about repairing things (together). Usually space is being provided by the librarian. The types of items that can be repaired and reused include clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, appliances and toys. This offers the users an easy opportunity to learn to repair things.

Seats 2 Meet

AlmerePublic Library, Netherlandsconnects library users in real time through an initiative of Seat2meet. The library is also a Seats2meet (S2M, a sponsor of Shareable) location where patrons are empowered to help one another in exchange for free, permanent, co-working space, and they utilize the S2M Serendipity Machine to connect library users in real-time. They also have a bustling cafe, an extensive event and music program, a gaming facility, a reading garden and more. The New Library surpassed all expectation about usage with over 100,000 visitors in the first two months. It is now considered one of the most innovative libraries in the world.

Makeityourself

In many places majority of the customers are used to visiting their local Public Library to borrow things, but Piscataway Public Library in New Jersey gives users an opportunity to be creative. Through their “Makeityourself” initiative program, the library offers a makerspace for the community. Whether be itthrough special programs or during open hours, library patrons have access to 3D printers, a 3D scanner, audio-recording equipment and even a digital vinyl cutter. More low-tech library customers can stop in to use a sewing machine or a button maker. By so doing the number of users increased immensely within a short period of time.

Tool Lending

Whenever the need to borrow a concrete cutting saw, a posthole digger or even a staple gun arises, chances are that you wouldn’t think of going to a library. The Oakland Public Library offers all of these at its tool-lending section of the library. Offering over 3,500 different tools, this Public Library lends two tools at a time for up to a week. They also offer workshops, books and how-to DVDs to help do it yourselfers with their home improvement and repair projects. This create more patrons within a short period of time.

Kitchen Equipment

The nonprofit Toronto Kitchen Public Librarypurchase a full pantry of cooking equipment and allows its membership access. Whether the member need a 36-cup coffee maker, a breadmaker or even a raclette, the Toronto Kitchen Public Library has it. Items can be borrowed for seven days. This greatly increase number of users

Extend opening access via self-service and card-only entry

In Denmark, assisted by a national library agency and a nationalRadio-Frequency Identification(RFID) standard for libraries,Self-service libraries, known as open libraries,

are popular. About 180 of Denmark's 450 Public Libraries are now open libraries and more are on their way.

It started at Silkeborg Public Library in Jutland in 2014. The municipalities were to take over the library service in Gjern, a rural municipality with very small local libraries. It would require heavy staff expenses and the municipality had to economize but the library's wish to provide a better offer within the economic framework led to the idea of trying to let the users unlock the libraries themselves. Funding from the Danish Library Agency (now part of the Danish Agency for Culture) kick-started the experiment and in collaboration with the innovation firm Cordura the technology was developed, and the borrowers were very satisfied with the new library.

Hijab Days

Members of Halifax's Muslim community in Canada are creating awareness sessions on Islam (or other culture), faced with misconceptions about their faith by holding an information session about the hijab. A particular date was set aside for anyone who stops by the Halifax Central Public Library for "Hijab Day" will be invited to try one on. It is hoped that the first-person experience will help people better understand those who wear the hijab, which covers the head and neck but not the face.

The librarian says "Hijab is no longer something that is related to a minority or a couple people, it has surfaced as a matter of concern to Canadian citizens," He went on to say that Hijab is being seen as something imported from outside, from the Middle East, whereas it is now a Canadian thing."

"It's a great way for non-Muslims to have a chance to meet and engage with people that are in their community and in their neighborhood and have a really interesting conversation."

Credit Union Collection Points

Derbyshire County Council has opened up credit union collection points in its Public Libraries to encourage residents to use them to start saving and as a source of safe, affordable loans. The council has now opened up collection points for Bolsover-based 2 Shires Credit Union at its Public Libraries in Clowne, Creswell and Shirebrook making it easier for people to visit. "Credit unions are playing an increasingly important role in supporting people in times of financial difficulty by encouraging saving and providing access to affordable credit.

“We are very pleased to be able to offer three of our libraries as collection points to make it easier for residents to use the service and are now looking at the possibility of bringing in other branches.” The librarian said. Repayments can be made by cash, by standing order from a bank or secured by direct deduction from benefit payments to help prevent debt.

Food for Fines

St Helens Public Libraries initiate a programme where forgetful borrowers are being given the option of paying library fines with donations to food banks instead of cash payments. The librarian launched the scheme in order to help the number of people struggling to cope with rising food prices. Now, anyone who is late in returning books to St Helens Public Library will be able to knock £1 off their fines for every item donated.

The project is thought to be the first of its kind in the country. According to the Librarian “The St Helens Food Bank is doing a huge amount of good and is a lifeline for many families on a low income, who may have suddenly experienced redundancy or received an unexpected bill.”

Mostly tinned or dried foods are accepted but fresh groceries will be turned down. Under the scheme, any fine less than £1 will be written off for any one item offered. Food items may be taken along at any time during normal library opening hours.

Movies Clubs for the Homeless

All members of the community are welcome at the new movie club at Auckland's Central City Library New Zealand. The club gets together in the Public Library at 10am every Monday and members have a cup of tea and a biscuit before watching a film. The idea for the movie club came from a Lifewise report that shows many of Auckland's rough sleepers visit the library during the day. The library saw how important it is to them and wanted to show support for those sleeping rough and encourage all to continue to visit the library.

The original plan was for the club to run for five weeks but it has proved a hit and has become a permanent feature.

Chat and Chill' Sessions

Suffolk England Public Libraries shared an initiative programme they run which helps the more vulnerable members of their community. The 'Chat and chill' model is aimed at women who are newly arrived to Britain and whose English is very limited. It's not an ESOL course; it's a group to help women acclimatize to British culture and it equips them with everyday skills such as making doctor's appointments, how to chat with their child's teacher, etc. There's a whole range

of soft and hard skills gently taught through a really informal programme with brilliant resources on hand to support the programme. Also, it's about helping these ladies make friends as it's an isolating and lonely thing to come to a new country.

Women who have been coming a long time, who are then quite confident, become ambassadors for this in communities and help spread the word to people who might need it or bring them along. As its women only, it's seen as a safe space to discuss issues which worry them.

Technoclubs

A small-scale and low budget initiative by Neath Port Talbot Public Libraries, Wales. The aim of Technoclubs is to get children and young people excited about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects. The initiative is being run in partnership with local schools, these clubs involve library staff with helping participants build and program Lego Mindstorm robots, and code with Scratch software. This created impressive turnout of users.

Alphabet Soup

Alphabet Soup is a health and literacy initiative project started in early 2020 by Inverclyde Public Libraries, Scotland, funded by the Scottish government through the Scottish Library and Information Council. The programme involved a recipe competition, cookery demonstrations, and the promotion of health and cookery related books and online resources. Libraries also held free storytelling and drop-in face painting sessions to promote the project.

Fab Lab

Fab Lab is one of the UK's first Public Library-based digital Fabrication Laboratory by Exeter Public Library, England. It was opened in May 2017, it houses 3D printers, CNC Routers, Raspberry Pi, 3D scanning machines, digital sewing machines, solder stations and lightboxes. It's an open-access community resource, it runs courses and workshops on how to use these machines, and aims to foster learning, helping library visitors become creators rather than just consumers.

Job Clubs

Majority of Public Libraries across Northern Ireland are home to job clubs. Library staff work in partnership with jobs and benefits office staff, offering a personal, tailored service which aims to provide people of the community looking for work with the confidence, skills and expert local

advice they need to find suitable employment. Public Libraries in NI have teamed up with the Department of Employment and Learning to make the clubs a successful innovation across Northern Ireland.

Health Information and Advice

Kota Divisional Public Library is pushing for libraries, particularly in rural areas, to work with healthcare professionals to help educate patients. Libraries could help promote informed consent for medical interventions and assist in finding information about health conditions.

Lack of time and resources in general practice meant some patients were not properly informed about their conditions and treatment, and libraries can fill the gap. 'Libraries have always served that educational purpose for many people.

In rural areas, where there is reduced access to services and internet access, libraries could be used to provide public health information and 'guided web surfing', with healthcare professionals on hand to help patients understand their conditions using online resources.

'General practice has become a bit of a nightmare for many doctors, because patients keep asking questions. And doctors still only have the five- to eleven-minute consultation. Therefore libraries are the best allies and partners, and future lies in getting into bed with them.'

Senior Citizens Services

The Suffolk Public Library initiate a programme which provide a relaxed, comfortable area with armchairs, newspapers, book and dedicated programming, giving senior citizens a homelier library space where vital information on health and wellbeing is provided. The library also provides some exercise bikes that allow senior citizens to read at the same time as they pedal for exercise.

Table Tennis at the Library

Queens Public Library at South Hollis NY, has a large number of teens and kids and many of them are playing ping pong for the very first time. The library likes to think that when these kids grow older, they'll remember their first experience of ping pong at the library, and they'll be ardent supporters of the library. Ping pong is a great fitness activity that helps teens release energy after school. But teens aren't the only ones who play, adults also do play. The ping pong table is out on the floor basically every day. It has wheels so it can be put away for special events or wheels it to events nearby.

Smart Scales

Sandwell Public Library UK initiate a scheme where Body Mass Index (BMI)/Weight scales are available. People keen to lose weight are getting help with unique smart scales located at Sandwell libraries as part of a ground breaking health scheme. Sandwell is the first council in the country to introduce SMART scales as part of its Weigh2Go weight loss scheme. The scales are free to use and measure people's weight, BMI and body fat and send the data straight to the user's phone or email so people can track their weight. People only need to sign up with Healthy Sandwell, part of Sandwell Public Health, to register to use the scales, which are currently located at six borough libraries.

The scheme is part of a wide-ranging package of measures to help people lose weight and keep healthy. Healthy Sandwell offers free support to all ages, families and individuals to get people more and more active, eating better and maintaining a healthy weight for good.

Dementia Information Service

Australian national library service provides access to quality dementia related information. The service supports people living with dementia, family carers and friends as well as people working in dementia care practice and allied health areas.

Resources contained in our library range through books, journals, ebooks, audiobooks and video content. Coverage by the collection is vast including dementia care practice, memoir, fiction, resources for children, clinical information about different types of dementia as well as practical information for caregiving.

Open Library 24/7 for Homeless

The Salt Lake City Public Library (SLCPL) in Utah stay open 24/7. Opening all hours is unprecedented, and as a result of SLCPL webpage created to address their community's questions and concerns. The idea for the Public Library to remain open all night came out of a discussion and concerned with Salt Lake City's teenage homeless problem, and inquiries made if it was feasible for the library to provide space for the teens at night. The library did not want to open the library up at night for only the homeless teens, but instead suggested keeping the library open at night for everyone. As expected, there are some concerns from the community. These concerns are primarily about security issues, the homeless, and alcohol/drug use. Anybody who has ever worked in an urban library knows something about each of these issues. We keep hearing how libraries need to adapt or risk becoming obsolete, but is there really a demand for our urban libraries to be open 24/7, the answer is yes

Community Skill Sharing

The Red Hook Public Library organizes workshops and courses provided by community members. In the village of Red Hook these programmes recently included languages, bee-keeping, brewing and maple tree tapping. The idea is also seen as a good link for the library which already has a number of professionals working from it, to including community midwives, a child and adolescent mental health service and weight management service.

Silent Disco

Library users dance to their own music, on headphones, it was billed as one of the quietest events of LightNight outwardly at least but that didn't stop the Shush Silent Disco at Liverpool's Central Library being one of the biggest crowd-pullers of the night.

The free event, gave LightNight goers the chance to grab some headphones and create their own party. All ages joined the temporary dancefloor, although they weren't all listening to the same songs. Disco lovers had three different channels and types of music to choose from. One or two tracks did have the crowd breaking the Shush though they couldn't resist joining in a singalong with Blondie's Heart of Glass.

Annual Party at the Library to make sure everyone feels welcome

Oslo (Norway) Main Public Library throws an enormous party in the library building with DJ-s, booze, lights and all once every year to get more into people's head that library is for everyone. The library doesn't worry too much about crowd, people dancing on bookshelves and such because they have been doing it for a while and things go fine. They also don't bother removing the books for the party because they don't get stolen.

Conclusion

The Inclusive Libraries Initiative has made, and will continue to make, significant improvement in attracting and serving library patrons within the community it is located. Through this project of inclusive libraries, individuals within the community are becoming enthusiastic Public Library users; growing numbers of individuals are attending Public Library weekly to access one of the inclusive initiative programme and participate in other web-based activities. Some are using the library more frequently and have become adept at accessing information and other recreation facilities and incorporating it into their day-to-day lives.

The project of inclusive library initiative is increasing Public Libraries' capacity to serve members of the community. Developing the capacity of Public Libraries to include and serve individuals within the community without discrimination no matter their status, has tremendous potential. Through this inclusive library initiative, members of the community are witnessing that Public Libraries are an effective means of providing natural supports to individuals and promoting their inclusion in both their own communities and the "global community," through increased access to information resources and other recreational services. Investing in local Public Libraries is a sound strategy for developing community capacity, increasing access for patrons and enhancing the inclusion of individuals in their various communities.

Way Forward

The following suggestions were made:

- That Public Libraries should develop a general policy to guide the public library initiatives programmes.
- Librarians in Public Libraries should be encouraged to create more library inclusive initiatives programmes.
- Public Libraries should be well funded so that more can be built to cater for the increasing population of the community.

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