

# Sustaining Lifelong Education through Public Library Services in the Electronic Age

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## Abstract

The research work was on sustaining lifelong education through public library service in the electronic age. Public library services are free public services to any person in the society. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, age, nationality, ages, gender, religion language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. Therefore, lifelong education could be sustained through library services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because the public library is open to all categories of users in a community for their information needs that relates to life and workplaces. The article discussed services offered in public library at this age of technology era and Some of services provide by public library to sustain lifelong education in society include: mail service, SDI, bookmobile, outreach programmes, referral and information services etc another area that was in the article overview of lifelong education, goals of lifelong education and impact of ICTs on public library and lifelong learning were also reviewed in this paper. The researchers made some recommendations to librarians in public library.

**Keywords:** Lifelong, education, public library, library services, and ICTs.

## Introduction

Public libraries are community agency providing access at local level to a range of knowledge and information for the society as a whole. A public library is an organisation established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government, or through some others forms of community organisation. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, age, nationality, ages, gender, religion language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. Therefore, lifelong education could be sustained through library services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because the public library is open to all categories of users in a community that needed information that will help them in life and working environment. Sustain lifelong education is possible if the state have functional library services of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for their patrons.

According to international federation of Library Association (IFLA) (2004) opined that public library's established under state enabling laws or regulations to serve a community, district or region. In this modern day, developments in ICT (information communication technology) have resulted in great changes in people's live for work, learning and leisure. These developments have changed the demands being made on Public Library and Information Services (PLIS) in terms of the expectations of their customers or patrons, the national and local policy agenda within which the public library operates and the means by which type can deliver services(Dike, 2007). In other to maintain the level of services required in fulfilling their functions. Public libraries presently are incorporating information communication technology facilities into her services. Many Nigerian public libraries which out- dated have been able to procure information communication technology to its services. In meeting world standard, example of public library with a standard information communication technology services in Nigeria are Anambra State Library Board at Awka which was build under Mr Peter Obi regime as a Governor and Edo State Library Board at Benin City Chief Lucky Igbinedion also as a Governor regime.

## Literature Review

### Services offered in public library at this age of technology era.

In addition to print book and periodicals, most public libraries to day have a wide array of other media including music CDs, Computers software, movies on video tapes, and DVD, as well as facilities to access the internet and inter-library loan reservations. Some public libraries, use outside services, such as Over Drive, Inc or OCL's net

Library, to provide patrons with downloadable books, audio books, music, and videos. Readers' advisory is a fundamental public library service that involves suggesting fiction and non-fiction titles (often called "reader likes"). Public libraries may also provide other services, such as community meeting rooms, storytelling for infants, toddlers, and children or after school programs; person and on-line programs for homework help, language learning and other community services programs are common offering. One of the most popular programmes offered in public library may have, in addition to its main branch, a mobile library service, consisting of one or more buses furnished as a small public library serving the countryside according to a regular schedule (Powell 2006).

Public libraries also provide material for children that includes books, videos and DVDs, music CDs, and other material (both fiction and non-fiction), often housed in a special section. Child oriented websites with no-line educational games and programs specifically designed for younger library users are becoming increasingly common public libraries may also provide services for other particular groups, such as large print or Braille materials, young adult literature and other materials for teenagers or materials in other than the national language. Librarians at most public library provide reference and research help to the general public, usually at a reference desk but can often be done by telephone interview. As online discussion and social networking allow for remote access, reference is becoming available virtually through the use of internet and e-mail. Depending on the size of the library, there may be more than one desk, at some smaller libraries all transactions may occur at one desk, while large urban public libraries may employ subject specialist librarians with the ability to staff multiple reference or information desks to answer queries about particular topics at anytime of the day or night. Often the children's section in a public library has it owns references desk (Alistair and Hoare 2006).

### **Public Library Services for Lifelong Education**

Some of services provide by public library to sustain lifelong education in society include:

#### **Book by mail services**

One of the oldest public library services is mail services. These sustain lifelong education for people at home. Best (2007) stated that books by mail are only for individuals who are unable to leave home because of a temporary or permanent disability. An application is required and must be signed by a physician, nurse or social work, who can verify that you are disabled and unable to leave home. The application asks about your reading interests. The sections labelled "the interest levels", "Formats preferences", "reading preferences" and language preferences" must be filled out. If you check "please select books for me", then you should indicate your areas of interest under fiction and/or nonfiction. All of the questions are about the kind of materials you want the library to provide. Once you are registered for the books by mail service, materials are sent in a reusable envelope by book rate through the postal service. The packages are then delivered to your home and can be returned in the same envelop by depositing them in a mail box or by having the letter carried prick them up. The address card in the front envelop should be reversed so that the address and the return postage are showing.

#### **Mobile service or mobile library**

Another service that can sustain lifelong of people interior villages is bookmobile. Bookmobile service was introduced in Nigeria by the regional governments in the 1960s and 1970s. The level of success varied. A book mobile or mobile library is a large vehicle designed for use as a library. They are designed to hold books on shelves so that when the vehicle is parked, the books can be accessed by readers. They usually have sufficient space that people can also sit and read books inside them. Research shows that bookmobile services have the potential for a greater variety and quality of service. Mobile services have reached segments of the rural population that would not otherwise have any library facilities at all. The bookmobile and its counterparts in the Philippines have brought improvements to rural areas, stimulated reading interest, and have increased general awareness on health, nutrition, child care, family planning,

Mobile libraries are often used to provide library services to villages and city suburbs without library buildings. They also service those who have difficulty accessing libraries, with retirement homes being common stops. They may also carry other information or computer equipment, such as might be found in a library. Some libraries also use their book mobiles to deliver materials such as audio books and large print, novels, to homebound patrons who don't have anyone to go to the library for them.

#### **Outreach Programmes**

Ebiwolate (2010) opined that outreach programmes are organized to meet the information needs of the rural population. The objectives are awareness of library and information resources, and the creation of a reading habit among rural dwellers. Furthermore, Ebiwolate (2010) quoting Boyce and Boyce (1995), library outreach programmes are a way to distribute library services across a large and sparsely-populated rural area. Distance learning and other educational programmes can also be extended to rural areas. A well-planned library outreach

programme can improve the quality of life in rural areas and sustained lifelong education as well.

### **Information and Referral Services**

Information and referral services guide people to sources of information and to agencies capable of handling problems or questions. Libraries participating in information and referral services generally have a referral network and a calendar of community events. Libraries are at the forefront in providing information and referral services in rural areas in developed nations.

### **Current Awareness Programmes**

In spite of the establishment of state library boards and the considerable resources spent by state governments, library service and public libraries still remain inaccessible to the rural population in Nigeria (Ebiwolate, 2010). Public libraries in developed nations function as social development agents by extending services, sharing books, lectures on topics such as child labour, AIDS/HIV, epidemic diseases, reading habits, environmental protection, etc. But in African countries the story is very different. Libraries in these areas can plan current awareness programmes based on farming seasons, pond management, agricultural marketing authorities, market prices, etc., as well as general information on health and nutrition, infant care, loans and financial aid. Current awareness services keep the users up-to-date, save time, helps create new ideas, saves time and money spent on journals, and reduces paperwork (Oghuvwu, 2007 quoted by Ebiwolate 2010)

### **Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)**

To effectively render SDI service, the librarian must have a profile of the client. When the information needs of the rural population are identified, such service will be relevant to them. Nigeria is a developing country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas (Ebiwolate 2010). The majority of these rural dwellers are either non-literate or semi-literate. Libraries exist to serve as many people as possible, disseminating information, preserving culture, and contributing to intellectual and social life. Therefore, information pertaining to fishing and farming activities of rural areas needs to be repackaged in local languages and disseminated to all of categories of users.

### **Overview of Lifelong Education**

Lifelong learning formally came into existence in 1970 after the advocacy of Council of Europe for Permanent Education, recurrent education from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO Report of "Learning to Be". In the Faure Report of "Learning to Be" the term lifelong education was used instead of lifelong learning. It was in the 1990s when idea of lifelong learning again gained momentum and became global in its nature. It is a concept that claims it is never too late for learning. It is an attitude of openness to new ideas, decisions, skills and behaviours. One is provided with learning opportunities at all ages, all levels in various contexts.

Generally, education is processes, events, activities and conditions those assist and encourage learning. Education may be planned or random but it helps in learning. Thus education is a service. Lifelong education requires that someone i.e. government or other agencies who develop policies and devote resources to education; these cover a broad array of informal, non-formal and formal settings where deliberate choices are made (Iqbal, 2009)

Human beings consciously or unconsciously keep on learning and training themselves throughout their lives. This may be a result of the influence of the surroundings which mould their behaviour, their concept of life and the content of their knowledge. In recent time scholars and planners put the education in a broader view by promoting the concept of lifelong education. Advocates of lifelong education view that education is a process that continues in one form or another throughout life. Its purposes and forms are to be adapted to the needs of individuals at different stages in their development (Rashid, 1993). Education is seen as an integral part of life and all the institutions of society with an educative potential are considered resources for learning. It is that educational process by which individuals become more competent in their knowledge and skills so that they gain more control over their environment. Lifelong education is a blend of pedagogy and andragogy. It can be provided through various modes like distance learning, e-learning, continuing education or correspondence courses. The concept of lifelong education has been under the process of continuous change because of increased duration of formal education and insufficiency of skills attained in schooling for future career and success. Lifelong education was initially emerged as a blend of informal, formal and non-formal education with the aim of improvement in quality of life but now the concept covers all times and all places, starting from birth and ending at death (Iqbal, 2009).

### **Goals of Lifelong Education**

An understanding of the goals of lifelong education is important. These are based on the ideas of "Learning to

Be" and the "learning society". The "Learning to Be" incorporates the goals of learning to think, of becoming a productive citizen, of learning to act and react as a full member of society, but it comprises something greater and deeper than these. For "Learning to Be" involves a process of self-discovery and the achievement of an awareness of our capabilities - as well as own shortcomings (UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005)

Because life involves continuous processes of learning, adapting and discovering ignorance, so the process of "Learning to Be" is also a dynamic process. One should know more about oneself and one's world. The learning society in which learners participate is also a continuous dynamic. It does not have a finite bank of knowledge to pass on, it is a society whose stock of knowledge is continuously expanding, being evaluated and updated where the process of learning is as important as its product (Rashid, 1993) An essential attribute, therefore, of an individual in a learning society is the quality of educability, which means to learn and to go on learning. The idea that individuals can go on learning, may choose their own paths to learning. They continually seek to gain more enlightenment and must do all this within a "learning society".

### **Impact of ICTs in Public library and Lifelong Education**

The rapid developments and innovations in information and communication technology (ICT) have changed the work done in the library worldwide. These technological-driven innovations have transformed library services. New concepts such as hybrid library, digital library, virtual library, Internet public library, paperless library, etc., have emerged.

Anyira, (2011) quoting Bradley (1999) which identified the following characteristics of 21st century library:

1. The use of information professionals and subject experts in collecting and organizing web-based information resources.
2. The use of technology-compliant criteria in evaluating or selecting library resources.
3. The provision of current and value-added information services.

Furthermore, Anyira, (2011) quoting Sherwell (1997) gave the characteristics of 21st century library to include the following:

1. There is no corresponding physical collection. An example is the NUC's Virtual Library Abuja, Nigeria.
2. Availability of documents in electronic form.
3. Documents are not stored in any physical/ geographical location.
4. Accessibility of documents from any workstation linked together.
5. Retrieval and deliverance of documents as and when required.
6. Availability of effective searching and browsing facilities (e.g. search engine).

Fabunmi (2009) described a 21st century library service as:

“a well selected collection of units of documentary resources spread everywhere, accessible always, where individuals and groups such as authors, publishers, vendors, and readers are linked through hyperlink technology, across the global electronic network to relate in different ways, documents that are fast and easily obtainable and available in their full version in view of satisfying multiple cultural exigencies”.

Anyira, (2011) opined that libraries are no longer what they used to be. This implies that librarians are also no longer who they used to be. This evolution or revolution has led to the evolution or revolution of librarians' roles all over the world, and Nigeria is no exception. Nevertheless, librarians in the developing countries (Nigeria Included) are lagging behind the changes brought by advances in ICT. Many librarians assume that a 21st century-library means a collection of MARC records, CD-ROMs, and other physical collections. However, that has already been displaced by virtual libraries. Meanwhile, only a few libraries in Nigeria are 21st century libraries and only a few librarians are 21st century librarians. There are a number of reasons for this trend. One important one is the librarian him- or herself (Anyira, 2011).

Library sources, services and operations have been greatly influenced by the rapid technological innovations over the years. The way information is disseminated, captured, collected, stored and transferred has provided a new impetus to library functions and services. (Anyira, 2011 cited Saddigui, 2003).

With development in information technology libraries are being called on to offer broad access to global information and becomes less dependent on printed collections (Rowley and Black, 1996, cited by Kiondo 2004). Consequently, libraries must be able to be an “access organisation” providing access to an array of information resources. This means having access as the right of use and not ownership of the resources, which makes licensing agreement critical (Kiondo, 2004). The application of information technology into library routines may also be referred to as “library automation”. Library helps in providing efficient and quick library services, it is economical because it saves human labour, eliminates duplication of jobs, and processes many data involved in the operations of the library operations and services, especially when budgets cut by many parents institutions, fluctuations in exchange rate of currencies, and the rapid growing cost of periodicals are the main difficulties faced by most libraries and on the contrary, when information needs of users are increasing and diversified.

ICTs, has contributed to public and other types of library in the following ways:

- 1) Selection and acquisition operation
- 2) Registration of users
- 3) Resources sharing activities
- 4) Online catalogue
- 5) Fast and reliable library services
- 6) Selective dissemination of information resources
- 7) Reference services etc.

The ICT Networks support the building of partnerships and the networking of learning communities with a view to exchanging ideas and experiences related to ICT enhanced learning. Networks should support knowledge sharing, they should increase the visibility and awareness of the benefits and impacts of ICT enabled learning, and contribute to the uptake and efficient use of ICT for learning. Dinevski, and Kokol( 2009) said that technology can make lifelong learning a reality" is in a nutshell presented the North American point of view. With electronic tools, people can (theoretically) learn virtually anytime and anyplace they choose without obstacles in place, time and social status.

The impact of ICT on learning is currently discussed almost entirely in relation to use of digital media, primarily the World Wide Web. However, ICT impacted on higher education before the widespread use of the Internet. Through the application of print, audio-visual and broadcast media to distance education, it has enabled those with adult roles and responsibilities to continue formal study leading to higher education qualifications on a mass scale. The practice of lifelong learning itself has been facilitated by the demonstrable fact of thousands (now millions worldwide) of adults studying beyond school age using a range of media, and pursuing both occupational and leisure goals (Daniel, 1996). Lifelong learning has been an inspirational concept for decades, receiving attention now for a variety of economic and social development reasons. In practice, it is dominated by provision of learning opportunities for adults and research into the effects and significance of learning beyond formal schooling.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Sustaining lifelong education through public library services in electronic age has fully been established in this paper. Public library is an organisation established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government, or through some others forms of community organisation. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, age, nationality, ages, gender, religion language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. This paper discussed issues related to lifelong and public library services, impact of ICTs to lifelong learning, overview of lifelong education, and services offered in technology era in public library. The following recommendations for Librarians, information providers, and other people involves in lifelong education to society.

- There is the urgent need for librarians or information provider in public library particular to develop themselves by undergoing self-sponsored ICT skills. With the knowledge obtained, they will impact such skills to their work.
- The librarians who have access to non-self sponsored ICT training should take full advantage of the training and develop themselves rather than abscond from conference venues after registration.
- Other governors in Nigeria should look into public library as a storeroom of knowledge for both formal and informal education to people in the society.
- ICTs resource centre should be establish by Governors of Nigeria in villages and other interior parts in a country to helps rural people have quick access to information needs.
- Lifelong education related issues and public library services should be incorporated to curriculum of secondary schools as a way of teaching children in early age on how to use library.
- Public library in Nigeria should be most paramount thing for any Governor in any regime. When enough funds is given to public library, information/equipments to sustain lifelong education will available to the public free.

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