

ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN MEETING INFORMATION NEEDS
FOR LITERACY AND ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses the roles of public libraries in meeting information needs for literacy and adult education. It equally established the indispensability of public libraries for literacy and adult education. This is because the public libraries stock resources in different formats which are in book format, audio formats, visual formats and audio-visual formats. The paper discussed the concepts of literacy and adult education. It went further to analyse how public library resources like reference and factual books, fiction books, help adult education students to achieve their aims. Magazines and news papers, government publications, non-print or audio-visual resources equally help adult education students to achieve perfect literacy and adult education. The paper concluded by establishing the fact that, the resources of the public library makes the adult education student a "Total man."

Introduction

Libraries stock print and non print or book and non book materials of different formats. These materials must be organized for easy retrieval and must be administered by professionally trained librarians. Libraries are indispensable tools in literacy and adult education.

The library is an agent of social organization of knowledge. Libraries in the broadest sense of the term have existed almost as long as written records themselves. The instinct to preserve and passion to collect have been the determining factor in their establishment, maintenance and development. What the library does in essence is to gather in one place a portion of stored thought of humanity. In recent times it could be in any format, book form or in audio or visual or audio-visual form.

This behaviour or characteristic of libraries is applicable to all the different types of libraries. There are six major types of libraries namely Public, private, Special, National, Academic and School Libraries. They all have the same function and are all indispensable in literacy and adult education. When we talk of role of library in literacy and adult education, the Library that readily comes to mind is the public library. It is not as if all the other types of libraries do not support literacy and adult education. They all work towards mass literacy and mass adult education but the Public Library appears to carry the day because of the fact that it is a library for the mediocre, geniuses, intellectuals and all categories of human beings.

Public Libraries are established and funded with tax payers money for the free and unrestricted provision of book and related material to the members of the public for study purposes and for vocational, cultural and recreational use. One cardinal principle of public libraries is that access to them, either for reference or for borrowing must be free. They mostly support literacy and adult education because they are by their nature veritable instruments for both formal and informal education, existing for the overall development of the individual and society in an atmosphere of freedom. The public library has many roles to play in overall development of a nation, especially in developing countries. It can be regarded as an institution for socio- , political and educational development. .It provides ample opportunities for individuals to work independently in their search for knowledge, power and self actualization, by providing them with research materials, reference books and valuable documents or works of those who have exploited the frontiers of knowledge. All library collections especially public libraries reflect the long term needs of the information based society for life long continuing education. The public library also serves as guide towards nation building by providing link to educational policy planning, thereby improving the education development of a nation, that is to say a people's university.

Definitions of Literacy

Literacy is regarded as a very effective instrument in the development of man and the society, simple statements on his everyday life. Aderinoye (1997) agreed with UNESCO definition of a literate person as a person who can with understanding , both read and write while an illiterate person was described as one who cannot ,with understanding, read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life .In the 1960's, UNESCO again came up with another definition of literacy as the "ability to read and write in the Mother tongue, as cited by Aderinoye (1997). These definitions had been proposed while many of the the Asian and African countries were still being colonized .At that time ,the language of literacy institutions were those of the colonial masters namely: English, French, German and Portuguese. In another definition, Aderinoye (1997) citing (UNESCO bulletin of (1978) page 18) described a literate person as a person who has the required knowledge and skills indispensable in the performance of all activities for which literacy is necessary in order to play an effective part in his group and his community, and whose achievements in reading ,writing and arithmetic are such that they enable him to continue the development of the community and to participate actively in the life of his community. In another definition a literate person is a person capable of reading, writing and understanding a simple brief account of fact relevant to his daily life (Ryan 1989 as cited by Aderinoye {1997}).

Rogers (1993) as cited by Aderinoye (1997) defines literacy as the degree to which an individual possesses mastery over symbols in their written form ,or is able to encode and decode, the symbols .which may be letters, or numbers .By this definition ,literacy would thus include numeracy.

In most countries the mastery of the Mother tongue does not necessarily qualify a person to be recognized as a literate person, since reliance is on the national or official language in use for example, as English is the official language in Nigeria, it simply means that one can be reckoned with in the data of literacy only if one can read or write in English.

Thus it is becoming more and more evident that a literate person should be defined in the national context only with particular reference to the languages that are spoken by the major ethnic groups, especially the languages that are commonly used for communication purposes.

Definition of Adult

To look at the concept of adult; there is no agreeable definition of this concept. This is because the concept of adulthood differs from one society to another. To some societies, an adult is a matured person, a person who is ripe enough to take his place in the society to take some social responsibilities. (According to Brown and Okedera (1981) as cited by Paiko 1997, in civil law, an adult male is somebody who has attained the age of 14, and female, the age of 12. In North America, from another dimension, an adult could be determined from the legal age set aside by a country as voting age. In Nigeria, the voting age is lowered to 18. This lends credence to the fact that the stage of determining who an adult is differs from one society to another, and it is mostly based on the degree of social responsibilities placed on the person.

What is Adult Education?

Many definitions also exist on the concept of adult education. To some people, adult education comprises the instruction given to adults according to Omolara as cited by Paiko (1997) agrees with the first International congress on comparative study of adult education which defines adult education as "a process whereby a person who no longer attends school on regular full time programmes is exposed to education. It is specially designed for adults to undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, undertakings and skills, appreciation and attitudes, or for the purpose of identifying or solving personal or community problems. Secondly, adult education could be seen as education aiming at the overall development of an adult, not only as an individual but also as a member of the community. This form of education helps the adult individual to live more effectively in the society. Furthermore, there are those who take adult education to embrace the education undertaken voluntarily by people in their mature years. Adults need to be aware of their individual needs and their community needs. They also want to cope with the current problem facing them, This view of adult education tend to support UNESCO's Anyanwu (1987:17) as cited by Paiko 1997, that adult education is concerned with the development of social, moral, and intellectual responsible citizenship. UNESCO as cited

by Paiko (1997) has comprehensively defined adult education as the entire body of organized education prowess, in any context, level and method, whether formal or otherwise.

The contribution of libraries to literacy and adult education.

As earlier mentioned, it was seen that as early as the 1950's UNESCO had already defined literate person as a person who can with understanding, both read, write short simple statements on his everyday life. UNESCO equally defined a literate person as a person who has acquired the knowledge and skills indispensable to the performance of all activities for which literacy is necessary in order to play an effective part in his group and his community, and whose achievements in reading, writing and arithmetic are such that they enable him to continue the development of the community and to participate actively in the life of his community.

Adult education on the other hand has been seen as education aiming at the overall development of an adult, not only as an individual but as a member of the community. From the above concepts of literacy and adult education, one can see that adults cannot achieve literacy and education without using public libraries. The libraries would stock materials in all formats that is print and non print or book and non book materials or in audio-visual formats to help adults achieve literacy and education for self development and national development.

Public libraries serve a leadership role in literacy and adult education. They supply books which are essential to adult education. It has been suggested that public libraries should be made permanent centers of adult education provided a community focuses on the changing tasks and interests of those adults who might seek their own continuing education. Paiko (1997) agrees with the recommendations of Judson Tennings who was the chairman of Carnegies commission on the library and adult education. He set to investigate the public library's role in that field, and has recommended three major roles in which libraries could provide services related to adult education. These areas include: (i) Provision of readers advisory services to those who wish to pursue their studies individually rather than in organized groups and classes (ii) Provision of information through local opportunities for adult education outside the library (iii) Provision of books and other printed materials for agencies engaged in adult education programmes.

Jennings report had significant impact on public library development in relationship to adult education in Britain. It can be said that public libraries and adult education bodies in Britain have now become interrelated and inter dependent to a large extent.

In Nigeria and all other countries, Public libraries play significant roles in enhancing the literacy and growth of Adult education. With the cooperation of public libraries and adult education bodies, the adult readers develop their potentials. This is because a good public library for example would give an ordinary citizen the chance to appreciate changes which occur around him, and provide for him the access he needs to take intelligent decisions on issues of national interest, to debate and find meaningful solutions

to civic problems confronting him .Public libraries offer to adult students the chance to appreciate changes which occur around him and provides him the access he needs to take intelligent decisions It gives them the opportunity to keep in touch with their times, and to educate themselves continuously, and keep abreast with progress in science and arts. The public library when active and positive in its outlook would enhance the value of its services and encourage their use.

Given the tremendous pace of social, economic and cultural developments of Nigeria today, it could be said that public library services to adult education bodies and adult readers are indispensable .For the sake of literacy and adult education, public libraries gear their services towards the immediate needs of the public and by making adequate provision for the library needs of adult readers and life long education.

The objectives of any type of library especially the public library is for education Information, recreation, cultural and research roles. Public Library materials are those resources made up of books, audio-visuals -software, audio-visual, hardware, and other pedagogical materials, used in teaching ,and learning process . Library materials are synonymous with educational resources, learning resources or media resources.

New trends all over the world, Nígeria inclusive, are advocating a multi-media approach to education .This is another angle where the indispensability of the public library comes in to help literacy and adult education. The adult education student is supposed to be an all rounder and as a result, he gets books for education in the public library .These books would supplement and complement classroom instructions as posited by Obi (1977). He would see newspaper and magazines for recreations and information. There would equally be some audio-visuals for recreation e.g Video cassette discs (VCD) for entertainment. In public libraries, there are usually materials for cultural preservation, examples are cowries, shells of snails that have been preserved for a long time for purpose of instructions in the library etc .The library equally stocks those materials that the community holds in high esteem in the olden days. This will help in educating, informing and recreating the adult user. The adult education student that uses the public library does not engage in research but need needs and gets all materials in all formats for the purpose of writing assignment and individual reports in the public library.

New public libraries now making provision for adult education classes in their buildings, to this extent, adult education bodies and organizations provide Public libraries with adequate information about their courses. What the public libraries do with the information is to provide comprehensive services to the public about the adult education curriculum, subject, meeting places and enrollment.

Adult education student are advertised for, when leaflet of a particular adult education course are kept with relevant books in the Public library.

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Public library stock and their relevance to adult education programs and literacy

From the topic being discussed, one would know that the Public library would need to stock books for beginners in education because literacy is involved. The adult education student involved has been an illiterate. Every public library has at least two sets of encyclopaedia in the children's section which these adult illiterates who now want to become literate would make use of. They equally stock some general dictionaries as well as language learning dictionaries; a handbook of general facts, elementary handbooks, standard atlases, and such other titles which the individual libraries in liaison with the adult education bodies can afford. The children's library does not need to have the extensive set of reference collection that may be required in other types of libraries or even in the adult section of the public library where conventionally educated people go. All children's libraries have at least three sets of encyclopedias in multi-volumes with one biased towards science, different types of word and language learning dictionaries, and so on.

Reference and other factual books and their roles in adult education and literacy:-

Encyclopaedias and dictionaries are perhaps the most widely used reference books in a Public library. The children's section of public libraries stock simple encyclopaedia's for children and Adult students. This encyclopaedias give them information on every branch of knowledge. They give them information on all subjects by giving an over-view of a topic, background, accounts and description, and a list of books to be further read on the topic. Such encyclopaedia give the adult students an introduction to a topic with sufficient information to allow the reader decide whether he wants to pursue the matter further or not.

The dictionaries provide information about the words of a language, synonyms and, antonyms, syllabification and current status of the word. Frequent usage of the dictionary helps the adult student who is familiarizing himself with literacy to be familiar with words and their usage as well as alphabetization. Most dictionaries are arranged in alphabetical order. There are two types of dictionaries, abridged and unabridged. An unabridged dictionary comes in several volumes. The abridged dictionary is highly condensed.

Other reference books that are usually stocked in the public library for the benefit of the children and adult users are biographies, year books, handbooks, directories, atlases, gazetteers, etc, which help the adult users to become educated.

The single largest group of books in a children's library section of the public library which is being used by adult readers and the children are the non-fiction or factual books. These books complement or supplement what is taught or learned in the classroom. Fayose (1995) opines that they are not necessarily classroom texts but have relevance to the curriculum. When these books in this library they provide extra reading which will lead to a mastery of the subject, and provide these students with perfect literacy. Adult education supportive reading helps to make learning more meaningful and complete.

The roles of fiction in adult education and Literacy

Fayose (1995) agrees that these are works of creative imagination. They deal with man as social entity in his world. Fiction which mostly consists of story books come as novels, short stories, essays and the like. They provide recreational reading after the drudgery of heavy textbooks. Besides, its usefulness is for relaxation. Fiction, develop in the adult readers, the sensibilities and empathies that are needed for perfect literacy. It helps the adult users to feel at home with the rest of humanity.

This it does through vicarious experiences, situations and characters which adult students encounter in their Knowledge of immediate environment and the world at large. There are traditional folk stores, stories of family and schools, stories set in other lands and fantasy stories set in worlds other than our real present world. Many adult students have not left their immediate environment but would know how Australians live by reading. Fiction creates cultural awareness and empathy which the adult education student needs for perfect literacy and education. Besides the above un-quantifiable benefits, fiction confers on the adult education students utilitarian benefits. It helps them develop various language skills and they can acquire a vast vocabulary through their reading of library materials. They encounter different forms and styles of writing and thereby learn to improve on their own. Mystery, crime and detective stories stocked by the library, help the adult education student to develop or improve their reading skills. As they race from one page to the other to find out what happens next, they improve their reading speed. Fiction develop social and moral awareness as they see vice punished and virtue rewarded. They also see the type of actions and behaviours which the society frowns at, even though they are adults. Some fiction books stocked in the library provide information which may have relevance for a better understanding of classroom texts.

Relevance of Magazines and Newspapers to Adult Education Students:

They are produced daily or weekly. They are current in their news items and information. They carry information on local as well as international matters focusing on politics, government policies economics, social affairs and sports with occasional features on the arts, music and drama. Some newspapers carry book reviews or articles on tropical issues on a weekly basis. Thus, newspapers are invaluable source of information for educational, social and cultural purposes. They keep the adult students informed of what is happening around them, and the world at large. With newspaper and magazines stocked in the public library which adult education students use, their education becomes all round and perfect. This is because by reading newspapers and magazines or some journals, the adult education students are exposed to all-round education

Relevance of government publications in the public library to adult education students:

The Public library stocks a reasonable quantity of information generated by government and government parastatals. These information may have to do with development, civic responsibilities, the state or even individuals. They may not be of immediate relevance

to the adult education curriculum but their teachers may find them useful for teaching civics, citizenship education, family education, family living or economics. Government gazettes for example are useful for the historical accounts of government procedures. Fayose (1995) is in agreement to all these.

Relevance of non-printed or audio-visual resources stock of the public library to adult education and literacy.

Most public libraries that adult education students use have sections called Audio-Visual rooms. These audio-visual materials are learning resources which are expected to play dynamic roles in the provision of educational excellence for the adult students. There are two main types of audio-visual media. The hardware or equipment and the software. Audio-Visual software comprise the following:-(a) 16mm sound projector and film strip/ viewer (b) Film projectors, video cassette recorders and viewer, radio etc (c) Videos cassette recorder and viewer (Audio-Visual software include (a) Graphics, pictures, postcards, graphs, illustrative materials (b) Recordings: Tape and video recordings. © Slides, film stripes, motion pictures, films (d) Multimedia study kits, programmed packages) There is another group of audio-visuals materials which combine software and hardware such as radio and television. Fayose (1995) posits that audio-visual resources in the public library can be divided into eight major categories according to type or usage. These include (1) graphics. Graphics are instructional materials that summarize significant information through a combination of drawings, words, symbols and pictures, Graphics, charts, diagrams sketches are all collectively called graphics they are useful for the initial education and literacy of the adult student so as to retain what they have been taught. Their value lie in their capacity to focus attention and certain types of information in a condensed form. A graph of crude oil production in Nigeria for example shows at a glance whether more or less oil was produced during a given period. A chart of the human body shows at a glance the essential features of the body. The essence of the graphic message is brevity, sharp focus on key information and if well produced heightens the level of viewers interest, understanding and assimilation. This is why it has to be integrated into the library stock for the adult student who wants to achieve literacy and education.

The second category of audio-visual resources in the public library are motion pictures and films:- These are the true audio-visual materials in the media-resource centre because they — employ both the aural and visual forms of presentation. The pictures are alive and moving. Fayose (1995) posits that the viewers become part of the movement and a group feeling is created. Motion pictures add realism to learning situations and help to overcome inhibitions in the adult students who would have been stereotyped over a long time with wrong concepts-of life. They also help to remove barriers to learning especially when abstract ideas are verbalized. Motion films show all the essential steps, processes or explanations in ways which provide close up views for every adult education student for good literacy and

education. The use of films can generate much verbal discussions in class which in itself is a profitable way of encouraging self confidence and building up word power among all categories of learners especially the adult students getting exposed educationally. The third category of audio-visual resources are filmstrips and slides:-A film strip is a sequence of related still pictures imprinted on a strip 16mm or 35mm film, varying in length up to fifty frames. A slide is a single frame of film on glass. There can be several slides mounted on a card or plastic mount with photographic or handmade pictures or images. The educational basis for using film strips and slides is similar. Various information can be contained on slides and film stripes. These library resources help to consolidate learning as they provide a base for understanding or perfecting ideas and symbols. They help to stimulate aesthetic appreciation like films, they help to arrest and sustain attention of the adult learners.

The Fourth category of audio-visual resources are the over-head transparencies which is commonly used by the teacher. It can become a replacement for the chalkboard which cannot be easily moved about. It enables the teacher to face the adult class as he uses it, thus maintaining eye to eye contact with the students. The teacher is able to draw or write on the transparency at the same time as he is talking to the class because what ever is done is projected on the screen. This enables the adult student to become literate and educated.

The fifth category of audio-visual materials is the television and video-Tape recordings. They can provide a team production approach to learning problems. They can magnify or reduce demonstration or illustrative materials. They can capitalize on immediacy and at the same time, reach audience of any size. Television and Video accelerate the teaching learning processes as well as provide for special instructions. They permit the viewing of widely different subjects at any time which will encourage learning for the adult education students and facilitate their literacy.

The sixth category of audio visual resources in the public Library is audio-recordings. They include phonograph records, recorded tapes, cassettes and the like. These resources appeal to the senses of both teachers and the adult students. They are useful in learning or teaching foreign languages, phonetics, history, culture poetry and of course music. They are also useful in developing or improving listening skills, an invaluable aspect of the teaching-learning process. They are easy to use because they can be played and replayed at will. This helps the adult students in retaining what have been taught them and enhance long life learning.

The most recent non print library materials is the computer. They are used for teaching computer literacy, storing library information, and as a resource for teaching and learning. The in-thing now is computer literacy which every adult education student should strive to achieve.

Conclusion

This write up has dwelt on the resources of the public library and it could be seen that public libraries stock monographs, periodicals and audio-visual resources and all these make it possible for the adult education student to achieve literacy and effective adult education. The public library is indispensable in literacy and adult education because, it (1) promotes the development of reading skills and encourage long-term learning habits.) The library as an indispensable tool for literacy and adult education, provides adult education students with vocational information leading to the choice of a career to get very literate and educated after using the resources of the public library that will catapult him in to a "Total Man"

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