

# Utilization and User Satisfaction of Public Library Services in South-West, Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Survey

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**Abstract** User satisfaction of public library services has become an imperative concern in recent times. There is no doubt that satisfaction of library services influences the degree in which the services are used and it has been found to be an important factor that affects the use or non use of library services. This study investigated the utilization and user satisfaction of public library services in south west Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed for this research and a total of 400 (four hundred) library users chosen across four states in South-West, Nigeria were used for the study. Questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection. Frequency counts and simple percentages were used to analyze the obtained data. The results showed that there is an improvement in the use of these libraries. Also, lack of adequate facilities, inadequate/outdated information resources, internet /ICT services in Nigeria public libraries were revealed by the users as major factors affecting user satisfaction of public library services in this 21<sup>st</sup> century of information and communication technology. Based on the findings, it was recommended that funding should be increased by the government so that adequate information resources and ICT facilities can be acquired in public libraries. And this will also boost the utilization of public libraries among the Nigerian population who desperately need a place where their information needs would be met.

**Keywords** Public Libraries, User Satisfaction, Library Services, Utilization, Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

The library is a repository of knowledge and a dynamic social institution, an indispensable resource centre for reliable information and meant to preserve the recorded knowledge of man for use. [1] emphasized that a library is concerned with the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of recorded information for the purpose of reading, study and consultation. He stressed that for any library to attain this goal; many activities are performed by the library that translates to library and information services.

Public libraries are libraries established and maintained by public funds. They are meant to provide the informational, educational and recreational needs of the people in the community regardless of nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status, political inclination and educational attainment [2]. Public libraries are considered as agents of social, political and cultural change in any society and provide a wide range of readership than any other type of

library.

The general public is expected to make effective and efficient use of public libraries to satisfy their informational and research needs. Users' satisfaction of the services rendered by public libraries relates to effective use of the services and resources provided by the library. The satisfaction derived by users greatly influences the utilization of the services rendered by the library. Therefore to justify the existence of any public library, provision of effective services and resources is necessary to attract potential users.

Therefore, this study is imperative to assess the utilization and how best users are satisfied with public library services in this 21<sup>st</sup> century where Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is essential for information delivery.

The objectives of this research are to:

- i. Assess how often users patronize public libraries.
- ii. Find out the services used by public library users.
- iii. Find out the main purpose why patrons use public library services.
- iv. Examine if awareness of services offered is sufficient to propel effective use of public library services.
- v. Examine whether users are satisfied with public library services.
- vi. Assess the factors affecting users' satisfaction of

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public library services.

The following are the research questions answered by this study.

- i. What is the patronage frequency of public library users?
- ii. What are the services used by public library users?
- iii. What are the purposes for which users' use public library?
- iv. Is awareness of services offered sufficient for effective use of public library services?
- v. Are users' satisfied with public library services?
- vi. What are the factors affecting users' satisfaction of public library services?

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Library services are the activities that libraries and their personnel render to meet the information needs of their users. Such services are core and traditional library services [3]. [4] advised that it is vital that the views of the service users are sought to help inform the debate about the library's performance. Satisfactory service cannot be provided unless the views of users are considered. Also, [5] asserted that users' views about the services they use should be sought regularly and systematically to inform decision makers about what services should be provided.

[6] conducted a study on the roles and effectiveness of public library in nation – building in Nigeria and found that Nigeria public libraries are performing poorly in most aspects due to appalling resources. Library must not only provide the resources but also ensure effective use of the resources by its clientele/community [7]. [8] corroborated this and posited that for the library to perform its role adequately, its resources must be effectively utilized. Thus, access to relevant information resources is very necessary.

In view of the effective utilization of information resources and services in public libraries, [9] advocated that public library need to take proactive approach in motivating users to use their resource collections, provide access to the internet and offer community-based services including literacy programs.

Perceived ease of use may be the occurring factor influencing whether or not a particular information service of the public library is used [10]. The Librarian has to know whether the right materials are acquired, available and used. This can be achieved through systematic evaluation of the library's collection; there need to be proper library orientation to users because without the knowledge of the use of the library's catalogue and the entire library, one cannot retrieve materials easily from the library. [11] believes that instruction in library use aims at developing the bibliographic skills of library users so that they can make the most effective use of the library and information resources.

One way to stimulate the effective use of books and other services of public libraries is to teach library users how to obtain information from available sources or services and this is usually done through user education. [12] argues that

user education is intended to acquaint users with the basic library skills necessary to enable them use effectively with minimum problems the library materials which are most suitable to them for the purpose of learning, research and recreation. Furthermore, an information literate person is able to recognize when information is needed and has the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information.

[13] agrees that use of public library depends on the services provided or made available in the library. If the services are not adequate for the needs of public library users, it is not likely that the library will be heavily used. [22] cited by [14] argued that for a library to be functional, the services it provides should correspond as closely as possible with the needs of its users. Creating access points to library resources by the library encourages the users to visit and use the library more often. [15] opined that, the use of library by users and indeed their satisfaction with library services depends on availability of suitable learning materials, accommodation and competent staff in the library. This main objective of any library is to support the community, an objective which is achieved through systematic acquisition and organization of all forms of recorded and undocumented information in all fields pertinent to the goals of the public and making such information available for use.

The use of the library include how to locate information including the techniques of using the catalogue, the classification system in use, getting assistance from the library staff and having knowledge of library approach to reference services, borrowing pattern knowledge of opening and closing time in the library and others [15]. In other words, availability of library information resources, the knowledge of their existence and acquisition of some basic skills on how to locate such materials and information depend on the objectives and pursuance of library.

[16] found that there is low patronage of library services by many users because they have not fully realized the potentials of the library in various endeavors .In addition, [17] asserted that, there is a widespread recognition that public library needs to tackle the issue of non-use of public library services. [17] also found out that use of public library for children at the secondary school declines as other activities begin to take up their time but, young adults (15-19 years old) in full time education use public library services more. Although they may not borrow books, they use the facilities to study and to access resources not available in their school libraries. "19-15" years old do not use public library services heavily and their use tends to be borne from necessity rather than pleasures, it's difficult to generalize about library use of "mature adults" in 35–60 years range as use is often dependent upon their circumstances. Finally, "elderly people" use public library primarily for pleasure and are heavy users of local community libraries.

Public library is to serve its users at any point in time and to do this effectively, there should be quality information in terms of its relevance, currency and accuracy that would meet and satisfy user's needs. If the library fails to meet the

information need of users, then effective services have not been rendered. In other words, the library users must be satisfied with the services rendered by public libraries. [17] opines that “satisfaction of user’s needs and attention to their complaints” must be the guiding principle for public library.

The library should re-design its services as most statistics on the use of the library was declining. [18]. “Too many times library planning has resulted in the creation of structures that dictated how people must use the library and consultation enables library management to determine what users really want which will help public library design and refine services in users expectations, monitor service and identify service problem [5]. Lack of need and interest appear to be the main factors keeping people away from public library making them have no desire interest or need to use public library services. [17].

User satisfaction is a concept that includes how good users’ feels after visiting and using the public library, their likeness to return back to that library when next information is needed by them. Mohammed (2006) sees “user satisfaction” as the extent to which a library user information needs are fulfilled with the available service and information resources of a given library. [19] sees users satisfaction of public library information resources and services as how users judge the services of the public libraries and whether users of public library get the desired information resources, facilities and services expected to be provided by the libraries.

Satisfying the requests of users implies providing the actual information or services that will meet the needs of an information seeker (user) [14]. Sowole (1983) as cited by [14] found out that the quality of services rendered to users or readers in any library reflect the quality of the staff. He argued that if a library is managed by well experienced and cultured staff, users will always be encouraged to make use of the library.

Public library is to serve its users at any point in time and must be able to give out quality information in terms of currency, relevance, accuracy and ease of use to meet and satisfy the information needs of its users. If the library fails to meet the information needs of its users, then satisfactory and effective services have not been rendered. In other words, the library users must be satisfied with the services provided by the public library and the services provided must be able to meet their information needs in the right time and format as desired.

Satisfaction of users’ needs and attention to their complaints” should be the guiding principle for public library services in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. To support this, Sowole (1995) cited by [14], posits that users are described as the “raison-detre” (reason for existence) of the library. It is entirely on their behalf that the organization and administration exists. Sowole also suggests that librarians should make maximum efforts to ensure that their library user derived the best possible benefits from the services they render. Libraries should provide materials in support of the learning process, research and advanced study, assist the

users in self development.

[15] observes that the use of library by users and indeed their satisfaction with library services depend on availability of suitable learning materials, accommodation and competent staff in the library. [15] further comments that the main objective of any library is to support the parent institution, an objective which is achieved through systematic acquisition and organization of all forms of recorded and undocumented information in all fields and making such information available for use.

[5] opines that the once traditional assumption that “public libraries operate on a minimum level of user satisfaction, surviving largely on the goodwill, low expectations and relatively easy demands of the majority of users” has now largely disappeared. Furthermore, with user studies extending into the realms of lapsed library users and non-users of library services, public library are shaking off the presumption that they “do not promote themselves adequately and dismiss unmet needs as either already satisfied, all too easily.

### 3. Research Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. A sample size of 400 public library users from Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti and Ondo states were selected and out of the 400 copies of questionnaire administered, 350 were retrieved and found useful for analysis.

The structured questionnaire and interview was used to collect requisite data from the users’ of the public libraries used for the research. The questionnaire was personally administered and retrieved by the researchers to enhance return rate. Data gathered were analyzed using frequency count and simple percentage.

### 4. Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What is the patronage frequency of public library users?

Table 1. Frequency of library use

ITEM	RESPONSES	
	N	%
Daily	168	(42)
Once a week	67	(16.8)
Fortnightly	49	(12.3)
Once a month	16	(4)
Occasionally	100	(25)

Looking at Table 1, It can be seen that majority of the users (42%) used the library on a daily basis. This indicates that, majority of the registered users did use the libraries quite frequently.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What is the purpose for which users use public library services?

**Table 2.** Purpose of library use

S/N	ITEM	Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
1	Obtain general Information	256	(76.9)	77	(23.1)
2	Research	212	(65.6)	111	(34.4)
3	Borrow library materials	182	(58.1)	131	(41.9)
4	Leisure	146	(46.9)	165	(53.1)
5	Read for examination	276	(77.7)	79	(22.3)
6	Supplement education	205	(62.1)	125	(37.9)
7	Entertainment	5	(1.4)	355	(98.6)

Table 2 reveals that majority of the library users (77.7%) visit the library to read for examination while 76.9% of the users visit the library with the purpose of obtaining general information. Just 1.4% of the users visit the public library for entertainment.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What are the services used by public library users?

**Table 3.** Library services use

S/N	ITEM	Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
1	Lending of materials	168	(53.7)	145	(46.3)
2	Reference services	231	(69.4)	100	(30.2)
3	Children/school services	21	(7.0)	277	(92.9)
4	Computer/internet/ICT	20	(6.6)	282	(94.4)
5	Referral	37	(14.2)	223	(85.8)
6	Translation	-		320	(10.9)
7	User education	221	(71.8)	87	(28.2)
8	Current Awareness Services	194	(60.8)	125	(39.2)
9	Outreach and extension	-		248	(10.0)
10	Photocopying	134	(45.4)	161	(54.6)
11	Adult Literacy Programs	-		276	(10.0)
12	Consultancy Service	48	(17.1)	232	(82.9)

Table 3 shows that the services mostly in use by users of the four state library boards were Users' education (71.8%) Reference Services (69.4%), lending of materials (53.7%) and current awareness services (60.8%). Even though extension services, adult literacy services, and translation services are very essential services in any public library, it was revealed from Table 4 that these services were not in use by these users. Also, it was revealed that only 6.6% of the users of the four public libraries had used Computer/ICT services before in the library. This implied that ICT services were acutely poor in Nigerian public libraries and probably not available but just computers.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 4: Is awareness of services offered sufficient enough for effective use of public library services?

**Table 4.** Sufficiency of awareness of services offered

ITEM	Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%
Sufficient awareness of services offered	169	(49.1)	175	(50.9)

The Table above shows the awareness of services offered are not sufficient to propel effective use of the library indicated by 57.2%. This calls for an improvement on the awareness of services offered by public libraries.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 5: Are users satisfied with public library services?

**Table 5.** Users' satisfaction

ITEM	Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%
I am very satisfied with the library Services	146	(42.8)	195	(57.2)

Table 5 shows that many of the library users (57.2%) are not satisfied with the library services. During the interview, some users reported that they were not satisfied because sometimes they do not get the relevant materials needed. Also, lack of adequate facilities like internet or online services were revealed by the users as a major factor that hinders satisfaction of the library in this era of information and communication technology.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 6: What are the factors affecting the satisfaction of public library users?

**Table 6.** factors affecting users' satisfaction

S/N	ITEM	Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
1	Unhelpful/unfriendly staff	88	(29.3)	212	(70.7)
2	No internet/ICT service	263	(75.1)	87	(24.9)
3	Inadequate facilities	211	(63.9)	119	(36.1)
4	Inadequate/outdated collections	231	(69.6)	101	(30.4)
5	Poor ventilation & lightening	182	(59.2)	125	(40.7)
6	Location of library	112	(39.7)	70	(60.3)

From Table 6 it can be seen that the major factors affecting satisfaction of the users of public libraries were: lack of internet/ICT service (75.1%), inadequate facilities (63.9%) and inadequate/outdated collections information materials (69.6%). This implies that the public libraries are lagging behind in the provision of ICT services and the collections of books in the library are equally not sufficient to meet users' needs.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

The result revealed that most of the public library users in this study visit the library at least once a week. This calls for an urgent improvement in the quality of services rendered by public libraries in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to keep the actual and potential users for coming. This disagrees with some studies that indicate public libraries are not used by the public. It should be noted from this study that, there is improvement so far on the use of public libraries in this century since people no longer regard it as a mushroom.

It was evident from the investigation that the services mostly in use by the users were: users' education (71.8%), reference services (69.4%), lending of library materials (63.7%) and current awareness service (60.8%). This calls for more current services and re-development emphasis on the services rendered by public libraries in Nigeria in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. This call is in agreement with [12] who pleaded that there should be new services to attract users, social inclusion policies and strategies to open up library service to excluded groups through targeted initiatives employing community development and other ways whose aim is to increase library use. In addition, [17] suggests that there should be change to revitalize public library service to bring back people into the library and performance should be increased.

Majority of the users of these public libraries visit the library to read for examination (77.7%), to obtain general information (76.9%), for research (65.6%) and to supplement Education (62.1%). The study also found out that users are not satisfied with the services rendered by these public libraries. This can't be far from the truth and in a situation where information materials are not available and sometimes outdated, inadequate/ICT facilities and perhaps lack of other facilities in this era of Information and Communication Technology, there is no doubt, that these information users would not find maximum satisfaction. This finding agrees with [20]'s claim that most public libraries are not automated making the library difficult to cope in this era of ICT where it is used to facilitate provision of services to users. Also, [1] noted that the information resources are the raw materials with which librarians work with and an information system that cannot provide information resources to meet the information needs of its users is therefore moribund because it has lost its vitality. This is the current state of public libraries in Nigeria with few exemptions.

The results also revealed that the factors affecting users satisfaction of these public libraries are, lack of internet/ICT services (75.1%), inadequate facilities (63.9%) and inadequate/outdated collections (69.6%). This agrees with the findings of [21] that due to lack of funds, many public libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa find it difficult to implement ICT project and this result in poor ICT services. Also, in agreement with [20] that poor economic situation and lack of finance from government have made collection to retrogress rather than develop and modern facilities are lacking in public libraries.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Public libraries have been lauded as the "People's library" and they are expected to provide services aimed at satisfying the general public through the provision of relevant services and resources in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the study has brought to the fore once again, the situation of public libraries in south west Nigeria in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and revealed the fact that, it has not fully demonstrated

appreciable seriousness in terms of satisfactory services even though public library recognizes that it's an integral part of the society, the facilities (internet/ICT among others) and services that are meant to make these libraries a functional and strategic part of the public library system is actively lacking.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Public libraries should be stocked with up-to-date information resources to encourage users and outdated/obsolete resources should be weeded regularly. Electronic resources should be included.
2. Network and related online facilities should be available in the library to attract more information seekers and users since the need for connectivity can no longer be ignored in this era of information and communication technology.
3. There should be new services to attract more users; and the physically challenged people should be considered and there is need to recruit more qualified librarians to enhance library services.
4. Public libraries should organize sensitization programs to attract more users to the library including those with no formal education; and whatever information they disseminate should be factual.
5. The recommendations above cannot be implemented without fund. Adequate fund should be provided by government for the smooth running of the library and should ensure the funds are used for the intended purpose.

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