

Public Relation as Catalyst for Effective Public Library Services Delivery in Anambra State

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Abstract

The paper discussed public relation as a catalyst for effective public library service delivery in Anambra State. Six research questions guided the study. Survey research design guided the study. Random sampling was used to draw the sample. Questionnaires was instrument used for data collection. Three public libraries were randomly selected from a total of fifteen libraries in Anambra State Library Board. The method of data collection adopted for this research consisted of three major steps: documentary study, questionnaire and personal contact. Data analysis technique adopted was simple calculation of percentages. Population of the study comprised library patrons in Anambra State Library Board. Three public libraries were randomly selected from a total of fifteen (15) libraries that are controlled by Anambra State Library Board. Findings shows that the resources and services at the public libraries were used by people from all works of life. It was found that the public library was highly utilized by adults in these communities. It was also discovered that the degree of use in the library was very high especially when users are faced with research or examinations. Another findings shows that most of the users spend about one - two hours plus which is 80% when they visit the library daily. Findings also showed that public library provided services such as loans, current awareness, quick reference and delivery services regularly. Readers however acknowledged the existence of public relations in public library services in Anambra State. It is recommended that librarians in public libraries ought to acquire the necessary skills needed in modern day librarianship. Part of this skill is ICT skills needed for modern day advocacy. Such skills include knowing how to reach the user population via the social media handles.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Public Relations, Advocacy, Library, Services and Anambra State.

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I. Introduction

According to Okojie and Okiy (2019), the public library is defined as organization established, supported and funded by the government or through some other forms of community organization. It is usually established to meet the informational, educational and recreational needs of members of the public in all spheres of life. It is operated by librarians and para-professionals, who are also civil servants. The public library has five fundamental characteristics as follows:

- (i). they are generally supported by taxes (usually local, though any level of government can and may contribute)
- (ii). they are governed by a board;
- (iii). they are open to all, and every community member can access their collection;
- (iv). use of the public library is entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the public library; and
- (v). they provide basic library services to all without charges.

Furthermore, Abumandour (2020) define the public library as hubs of information, providing all kinds of knowledge available to users nationally and internationally. Public libraries exist in many countries of the world and are often considered an essential for having an educated and literate population. Public libraries are distinct from school library and special library in that their mandate is to serve the general public information needs rather than the needs of a particular group or sectors of the society, school, institution, or research population (Rubin, 2010). They also provide free services such as preschool story time to encourage early literacy, quiet study and work areas for students and professionals, or book clubs to encourage appreciation of literature in adults. Maximum or effective utilization of library services by the users is the main motive of a public library (Stejskal, & Hajek, 2015).

The general public is expected to make effective and efficient use of public libraries to satisfy their information and research needs. The satisfaction derived by users greatly influences the utilization of library services rendered by public libraries. In order to justify the existence of any public library, provision of effective

library services is necessary to attract potential users. Providing effective library services entails offering information/services that will adequately satisfy the information needs of their clientele.

According to Ibe (2014), effective public library services are those services performed by public libraries for the benefit of the general public whom they are meant to serve. Thus effective library services are those services public libraries provide to meet the interest of their users and the general public. Effectiveness in this sense means that those services should be up to date, relevant and targeted at the special interest of their varied users. International Federation of Library Association (IFLA, 2011) emphasized that effective public library services include the loaning of books, reference services, referral services, circulation services, children library services, digital/Internet services, provision of books and other materials for use in the library. Other information service delivery includes provision of print and electronic media, readers' advisory services and reservation services. Furthermore, extension service is one of the most effective library services carried out in the beginning of public libraries existence in Nigeria. These services are aimed at meeting the needs of information hungry persons that cannot come to the physical building (the public library) because of distance or other reasons (IFLA, 2011).

To ensure, effective service delivery, the UNESCO Public Library Standard cited by Nwabueze and Ntogo-Saghanen (2017) stated that public libraries should provide:

1. services for 100,000 population with a book stock of 200,000 volumes(2 books per head);
2. an adequate choice of up-to-date books and materials to meet the information need of the community;
3. relevant books and materials in different indigenous languages;
4. up-to-date magazines, periodicals and newspapers as part of its collection;
5. at least, one television for users, non- print materials in the form of CD-ROM, DVD, videos and tapes, and
6. fixed telephone lines, fax machines, a printer, scanner, photocopying machine and ICT, in order to provide and communicate with users and other libraries

In addition, Joy and Idowu (2014) opined 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. Going by the UNESCO standard, it is common knowledge in Nigeria that public libraries are not providing effective library services to their clientele and as such has not been playing the role it is expected to play in nation building.

Libraries must not only provide the information resources but also ensure effective utilization of these resources by their user community. The ultimate goal of the public library is to serve its users at any point in time as well as give out quality information services in terms of currency, relevance, accuracy and ease of use to meet and satisfy the information needs of its users. Where the library fails, then satisfactory and effective library services have not been rendered. In other words, 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 effective public library services in this 21st century (Joy & Idowu, 2014). Therefore, satisfaction is a parameter to judge whether a user was satisfied with the service provided at the level of consumption.

For public libraries to provide effective services to their clientele, they must engage in public relations. Public relation in this context means that the library staff should not sit at a place and wait for users to come, rather they should be able to reach their users with needed information and through this means attract them to the library (Kwawal, 2015). Kwawal also observed that effective or maximum public library services are not fully exploited by their communities because they are mostly not aware of the services offered, due to lack of publicity or public relation tools to create awareness. Hence the need for advocacy and public relations tools which is essential to provide effective public library services to the general public.

According Okon, Uwem and Simon (2015), public relations can be defined as the art and science of managing relationship with the public. It attempts to establish and sustain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization (commercial or non-commercial) and the stakeholders or public. Those public relation tools, here simply means those apparatuses, devices or equipment that are employed in the process of implementing public library relations programmes. They range from the simple and manual to the complex and electronic. Therefore, public relation tools in public library services are those apparatuses, devices or equipment that are used in the process of implementing library public relations programme or carrying out effective library services to users in close by or in distance environment from the public library (Okon, Uwem & Simon, 2015).

Unfortunately in spite of the lofty goals and laudable aspirations discussed above, public libraries are still grappling with a number of challenges in Nigeria. Some of the challenges are poor funding, lack of mobility, inadequate staff, poor awareness of public library services, insufficient current materials and lack of tools. The cases of public libraries in South-East States are not different from the deteriorated conditions of

other public libraries in other part of the country. In South-East, library boards have various functional branch libraries across the states. Despite the significant roles played by public libraries in bridging information and knowledge gap as documented so far, the services rendered by the public libraries with use of public relation tools seem not to be available in Nigeria. It is against this background that the researcher sought to ascertain the application of public relation as a catalyst for effective public library services delivery in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Satisfaction of users' needs and attention to their complaints should be the guiding principle for effective public library services in this 21st century. Satisfaction is thus a parameter to judge whether a user was satisfied with the service provided at the level of consumption. To properly ascertain the needs of users, the public library must engage in public relations which is the art and science of managing relationship with the public. It aims to establish and sustain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization (commercial or non-commercial) and the stakeholders or public. Public relation tools in public library services are those apparatuses, devices or equipment that are used in the process of implementing library public relations programme or carrying out effective library services to users in close by or in distance environment from the public library building. Since this is a UNESCO Manifesto of Public Library Requirement, this study therefore sought to find out from library users, if public relations tools are deployed in public library services in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Research Questions:

- 1 What is your highest educational background?
- 2 How many years of library experience do you have?
- 3 How often do you visit the public library?
- 4 What are your reasons for visiting the library?
- 5 Do the public library staffs through their public relations programme invite you to their library?
- 6 Do you consider public library services in your area adequate

II. Literature Review

Public relations programme of the public library is a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the library and their community of users. It helps to provide a coordinated effort to communicate a positive image of the library as well as create the awareness on the availability of the library's materials, programmes, and services. The importance of public relations activities cannot be overlooked in any library; especially in public libraries (UNESCO, 2014). The concept of public relations as an essential component of a well-managed library is not new. As early as 1958, the importance of public relations was discussed in the professional journals of the field. Since early 1970s, most public libraries have implemented at least some public relations as catalyst to interact better with their many constituencies including patrons, community members, and governing bodies (UNESCO, 2014).

It is used to build relationships with employees, customers, stockholders, voters, or the general public (Al Neaimi, AlRamsi, Al Shamsi, & Saeed, 2016). The key goal of a public relations programme is to enrich a company's reputation. Staff that work in public relations (PR) units, as it is commonly known, are skilled publicists. They are capable of presenting an organization or individual to the world in the best light. The role of a public relations department can be seen as a reputation protector (Mac-Anthony & Thomas, (2016).

From library and information perspective, public relations programmes in many libraries are usually categorized into two namely, internal and external activities. The internal activities deal mainly with those activities that the library organizes for the public, while the external deal with the various avenues through which the library gains from the public relations. Public relation in the library parlance is thus the "overall relationship between the library and its current and potential customers. PR reflects the mutual perception and attitudes held by both library staff and library customers while publicity is the news coverage of the library's affairs secured at little or no cost.

Mac-Anthony & Thomas, (2016) citing De Saez shed light on the plight of the librarians regarding low library patronage due to users' indifference. They suggested remedy through public relation practices. However, not many studies in the recent time discuss the role of public relation and publicity by the public libraries. One of the few and current study in the recent past is that of Kanwal (2015) in Lahore, Pakistan. The study employed content analysis to explore the use of public relations and publicity by public libraries. It also sought to create awareness among practitioners in the field regarding public relation and publicity in public libraries (Bala & Asabe, 2018). Proper planning is necessary to create favorable publicity for specific services, using well-designed publications such as press releases, brochures, newsletters, annual reports, and other tools and techniques. Like all other organisations, libraries need to establish regular communication channels with their patrons to promote an understanding of their roles. Properly organized public relations can help establish the

library's image and position within the community (Alansari, 2013). Furthermore, the activities of public relation and publicity in libraries aim to effectively promote and educate the community about the goals and mission of the library. Similarly, carefully planned public relations programs can help guarantee long-term survival and success for libraries. (Alansari, 2013), opine that effective public relation activities are particularly important in building libraries'. However, an increase in the activities of public relation and publicity in non-profit organisations like libraries will enhance the number of users and may be used to justify the accountability and budget to the parent organisations (Kiran&Diljit 2011, Alansari, 2013).

III. Methodology

This study sought to examine the impact of public relations in public library users in Nnewi urban, Onitsha urban and Awka urban areas of Anambra State. Survey research was deployed for the study. The selected libraries were from Anambra State Library Board in Nnewi, Awka and Onitsha. The population of users in these libraries adults thus children were excluded. Random sampling was used to draw the sample. Three public libraries were randomly selected from a total of fifteen libraries in Anambra State Library Board. This represents 30% of the total of the population. The method of data collection adopted for this research consisted of three major steps as shown (Fig. 1). The second and third steps were intended partly to compensate for any inadequacies in the documentary study which was mainly through books, unpublished materials, journals and so on.

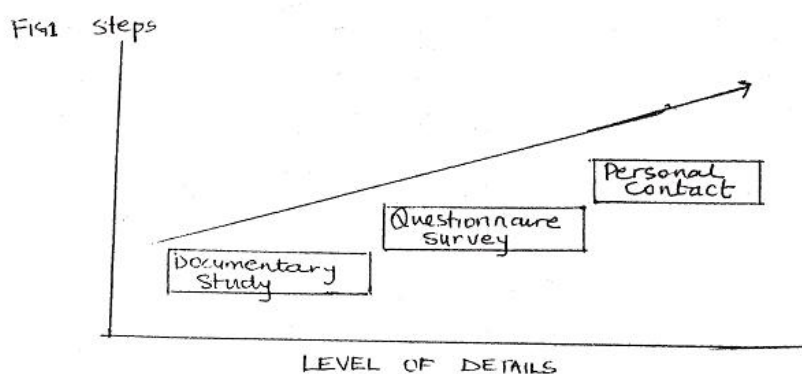
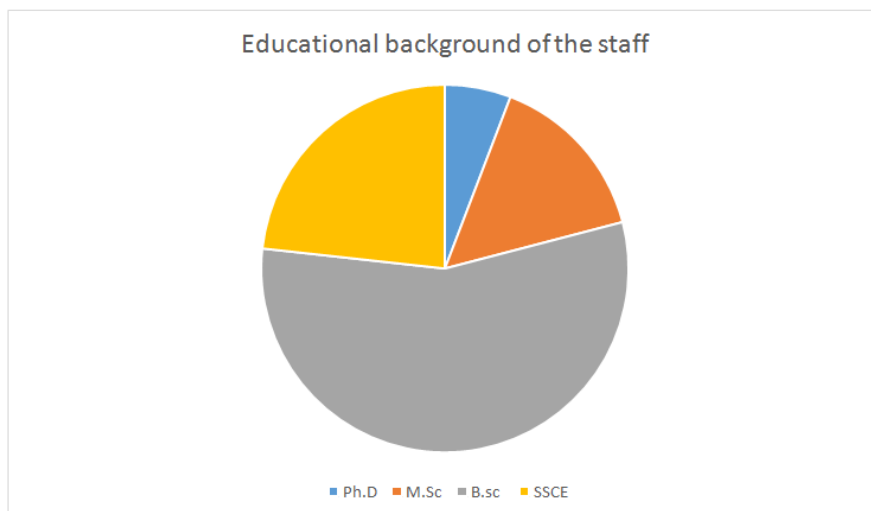


Fig 1 METHODOLOGY OF INVESTMENT OVERLEAF

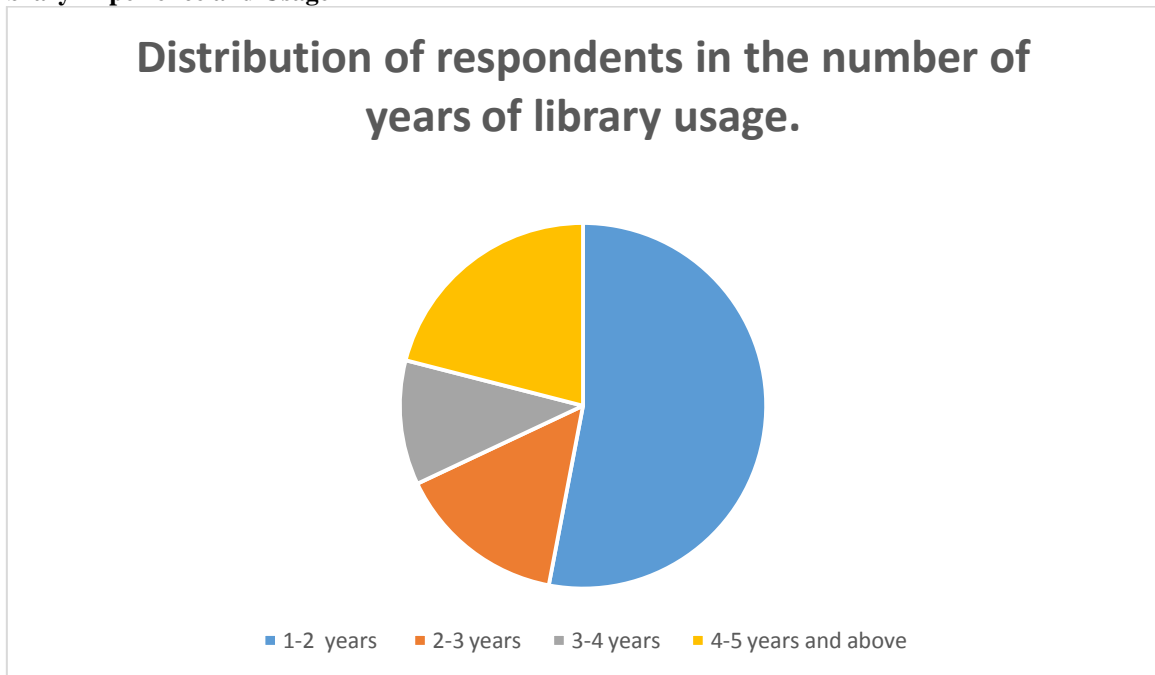
The method was adopted as it seems the most appropriate technique. It is used to know the recent state of the user satisfaction and to draw solid conclusion from the collected data. The questionnaire which was used gives the respondents room for sincere / frank but anonymous answers. The questionnaires were distributed to both librarians and library users found in the libraries of Nnewi, Awka and Onitsha respectively. Data analysis technique adopted was simple calculation of percentages. 100 questionnaires were distributed and 93 were duly completed and returned.

Analysis of Personal Data

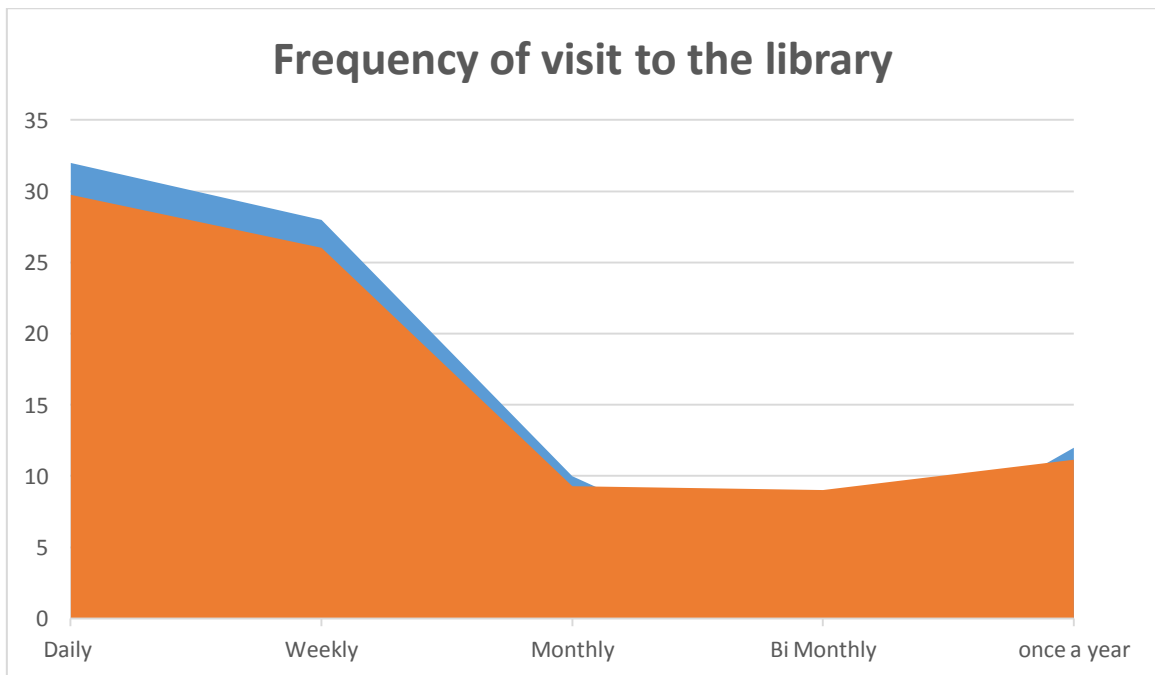


From the collected data it was discovered that 50% (50) of the respondents were male while 43% (43) were female. Mainly, most of the respondents were undergraduates as shown in the table above.

Library Experience and Usage

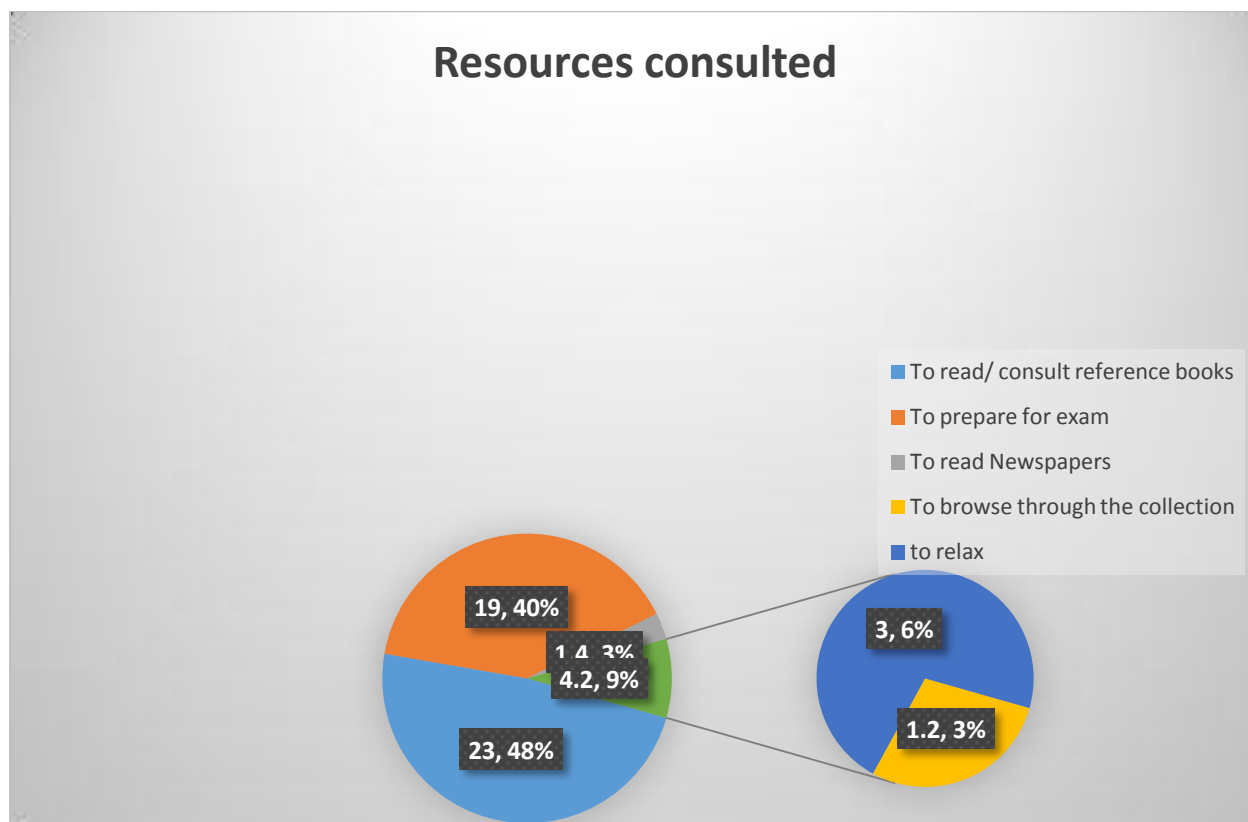


The respondents were asked to indicate how long they have made use of the library. The number of years varied from one year to five years and above. The assumption here is that the length of time a respondent had been using the library will enhance the capability of evaluation of resources and services of the library. The longer a respondent had used the library, the more it is assumed that he or she knows more and how the library can serve him using public relations parameter. It will also help the respondent to make an informed decision about the adequacy or otherwise of the services of the public library.



The respondents were asked to state their reasons for visiting the library.

From the chart above shows that users visited the library daily, weekly and monthly for the purpose of examination and reading for pressure. This shows that public library in Anambra State are fully utilized by readers

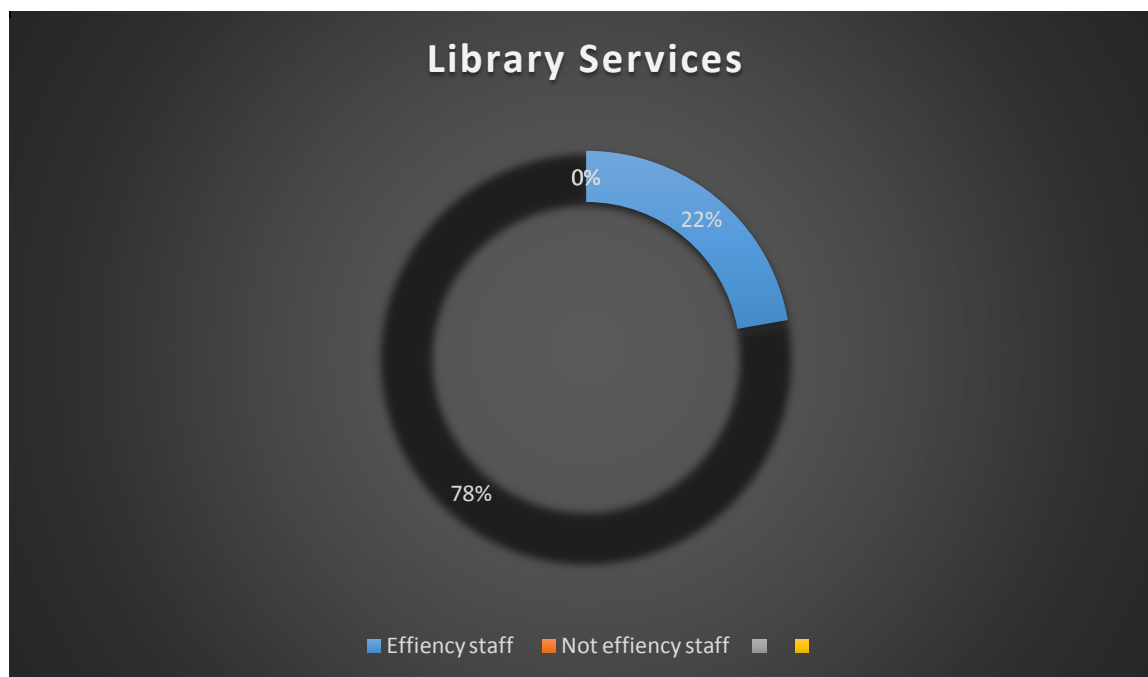


From the above analysis, it can be seen that most of the respondents went to the library to read and consult reference books.

This is because users need always to check and know what is happening around them from materials made available in dictionaries, encyclopedia and other references. The respondents hardly went to the library to relax or meet and browse through collections.

LIBRARY SERVICES

In evaluating the library services to find out the relationship of services and public relation in rendering services; and whether they formed solutions to their problems whenever they visited the library. 78 (84%) of the respondents answered in the affirmative while 15 (16%). Evaluation of library services also included sampling the opinion on the efficiency of library staff. The responses on whether public library staff were efficient or not was shown in the chart below:



3% (3) of the total population of the respondents did not consider the library staff helpful. According to users, staff were usually not helpful in locating particular sources that contain the information sought. 11% (10) stated that the staff were busy therefore they hardly render services, while the majority of 86% (80) stated that some staff are uncooperative and harsh to information seekers.

Users were then asked to indicate if they were aware of public relations. With the responses it will pave way to ascertain issues that are needed for the research topic. It is interesting to note that most of the users are aware of public relation. 82 representing 88% answered in the affirmative of being acquainted with public relation. Only about 11 representing 12% shows ignorant of public relations.

Respondent awareness of public relation to service and staff usage

Response	No of staff usage	Percentage (%)
Yes	65	60
No	17	15
Not indicated	11	10
Total	93	100%

It shows that 65 (70%) acknowledges the use of public relation in rendering of services. While 17 (18%) testifies that staff do not make use of public relation to render services. 11 (12%) did not indicate awareness of the use of public relation in rendering services. The users were asked to grade the adequacy of the services offered by the public library in Anambra State.

The answers are represented in table 8 below.

Adequacy of library service

Grading	No of respondents	%
Adequate	34	31.6
Inadequate	34	31.6
Poor	16	14.9
Not indicated	9	8.4
Total	93	100

IV. Findings

This study evaluated the library resources, services and how public relation can effectively be deployed to improve public library services to users in Anambra State. The study was limited to public libraries in Nnewi, Awka and Onitsha in Anambra State Library Board. At the beginning of the study, it was assumed that resources and services at the public libraries were used by people from all walks of life. These assertions were proved true and it was found that the public library was highly utilized by adults in these communities.

One of the objectives of the study was to find out the resources and services available and how effective it has been used. It suggests also from the finding that these can be achieved through the knowledge of marketing which invariably is the use of public relation. Public relation makes information accessible, available and closer to the clientele. It was also discovered that the degree of use in the library was very high especially when users are faced with research or examinations. Most of the users spend about one - two hours plus which is 80% when they visit the library daily. This figure is the highest among questions discovered at the time of finding.

Through the analysis of the data collected, it was obvious that most users indicated the unparalleled benefits of public relations in public library service delivery. The responses show that 85% of the respondents preferred that with the enhancement of public relation there would be better services and enlightenment to information acquisition. Their responses also show that public library staff have a very important role to play in this aspect. The staff provided services such as loans, current awareness, quick reference and delivery services regularly.

From the data collected and analyzed, it was discovered that the inadequacy of the collection and services also hinder the utilization of the library. From the responses, readers however acknowledged the nonexistence of public relations in public library services in Anambra State.

They suggested that when fully applied to all facets of public library services in Anambra State, it will enhance user satisfaction. Resources and services of the public library were inadequate according to the finding. The inadequacy of the resources, affected their patronage. It thus shows that available library resources and services were not meeting the information needs of the users. It also affected the library's inability to fully exploit the use of public relations to convey information to their users.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The challenge for education in the 21st century will be to move ahead to a period of study, growth and development in which excellence is the goal and innovation the means to achieve the goal. Public relation is one of the innovations the public libraries can use to achieve the goal of excellence. Public relation though a recent but salient innovation has been proved to be of immense need to users and librarians as well. To the users they benefit through selective dissemination of information whereas the librarian is better informed about how best to satisfy their user population through improved library services.

To fully exploit the potentials inherent in public relations, librarians in public libraries ought to acquire the necessary skills needed in modern day librarianship. Part of this skill is ICT skills needed for modern day advocacy. Such skills include knowing how to reach the user population via the social media handles. The modern library is service oriented through libraries without walls. Similarly, information resources in public libraries should be transformed from print to electronic media whereby the user can access the library resources from remote places. This is the current practice the world over.

No public institution in Nigeria can fully meet the needs of its patrons standing alone. Most public institutions in Nigeria are poorly funded. As such resource sharing through consortia building is fully advocated. Through this arrangement, the resources of other libraries can be accessed to meet the varying needs of users of the public libraries. Furthermore, human wants are insatiable and changes from time to time. Public libraries in Anambra State should therefore evaluate their services from time to time to ensure that their services and resources meet the needs of the time.

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