



Library Collaboration and Partnership: A Panacea for Fostering Innovative Service Delivery in Public Libraries in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate library collaboration and partnership: a panacea for fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. The study adopted the use of descriptive survey design. The study was guided by three objectives and research questions. The population of the study comprised of 14 professional librarians in public libraries in Rivers State (Rivers State Library Board and Jubilee Library Port Harcourt). The study used the complete census sampling technique. Questionnaire was used for generation of primary data from respondents. Mean was used to answer the research questions. The findings amongst others revealed that the state of service delivery public libraries in Rivers State should further be enhanced to promote innovative service delivery and library collaboration and partnership enables libraries pool their resources and expertise in order to improve user experience. Based on the findings, the study recommended that, libraries are encouraged to collaborate with other libraries and organization as it enables them pool resources, potentially harness both human and material resource to foster transformative change within the landscape of library service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries play crucial role in supporting national development within the society. They serve as literacy and empowerment hubs for all members within a given society. Services of the public library are tailored towards meeting the need of a divergent group of people within a social structure. These services include: instructional services, current awareness service (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI), library networking, and electronic document delivery service (EDDS), lending service, reprographic services, bindery service, translation services, consultancy services, online instruction, technical services, computerized interactive search and alert services. According to Solomon and Nyemezu (2023), public libraries are service oriented outfits. They serve as community hubs; promote lifelong learning, support literacy programmes and civic engagement. These libraries are funded by the government through tax payers' money and open to all members of the society regardless of age, background or economic status.

Barizoge and Echedom (2023), opines that for any public library to achieve its objective, it is expected to provide effective library services to meet the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) standard. The aim of establishing public libraries in Rivers State which is in line with the UNESCO public library standard is to provide services based on the analysis of the library and information community. However, libraries and librarians are faced with challenges in discharge of their duties, extant literature reveals that public libraries seem not to provide timely, effective, efficient, relevant and current services. Study by Okonoko, Abubakar and Nwafor (2017), reveal that poor budgetary allocation, lack of infrastructural facilities, obsolete materials and poor recruitment process pose as a threat to effective service delivery in public libraries. Bridging the gap between innovative service delivery and the regular patterns associated with service delivery in libraries, drives change and innovation. This has fostered the need for the development of adaptable strategies that will transform the landscape of library service delivery. Several strategies have been developed, notable of which is the library collaboration and partnership.

Library collaboration and partnership are distinct concepts used to describe strategies and cooperative efforts between libraries and other social organization within the society to achieve the library's core objective of service delivery. Innovative service delivery is the hallmark of modern-day librarianship. Library collaboration and partnership serves as a panacea to fostering innovative service delivery. Martin, Cox and Cunningham (2020), posits that library partnership and collaboration illustrate the value of libraries and their resources through an array of alliance to improve and enhance the lives of members of their host community. This collaboration and partnership play crucial roles in fostering innovative service delivery by enabling librarians leverage collective strengths, resources and expertise to meet the evolving needs of their users. This can take various forms including:

1. Consortia: This is a form of alliance formed by multiple libraries with a shared objective or purpose. Library consortia is are collaborative

networks or alliances formed by multiple libraries, to pool their resources, share expertise and collectively address common challenges and goals. This helps to optimize library services and operations by promoting cooperation, resource sharing and cost effective strategies among participating institutions (Ashikuzzaman, 2018). Libraries can join together to form consortia, pooling their resources to achieve collective benefits such as shared purchasing power, coordinated collection development, and enhanced access to electronic resources.

2. **Interlibrary Loan Programs:** This is a cooperative arrangement among libraries that allows books and other materials from one library to be loaned out to a patron from another library (Frederiksen, 2016). This means that libraries cooperate to share materials with each other, allowing patrons to access items that are not available in their own library's collection
3. **Joint Acquisitions:** Libraries collaborate on acquiring and sharing specific collections, whether physical or digital, to broaden access to resources and reduce duplication.
4. **Cooperative Collection Development:** Libraries coordinate their collection development efforts to ensure that their collections complement each other and meet the needs of their users efficiently.
5. **Shared Services:** Libraries collaborate to provide shared services such as cataloging, digitization, preservation, or reference assistance, thereby reducing costs and improving efficiency.
6. **Partnerships with Other Institutions:** Partnership between libraries and other organizations can take many forms. Libraries may enter into formal or informal partnerships with other institutions, such as universities, museums, or community organizations, to collaborate on projects, initiatives, or services that benefit both parties and their respective communities. For instance, the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) worked together to create the Bridging Cultures Bookshelf: Muslims Journeys, which was awarded to 842 libraries across the United States of America. This collaboration enabled both institutions to reach a larger audience and enhance their online presence (Araujo, 2024).

Library collaboration and partnership foster a mutually beneficial synergy for resource sharing, and innovation, allowing libraries to maximize their impact and better serve their users' needs. It serves as a panacea to foster innovative service delivery in public libraries. Innovative service delivery entails creating new or improved ways of delivering services to library clientele. It enhances the quality, efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility or sustainability of services in the public libraries.

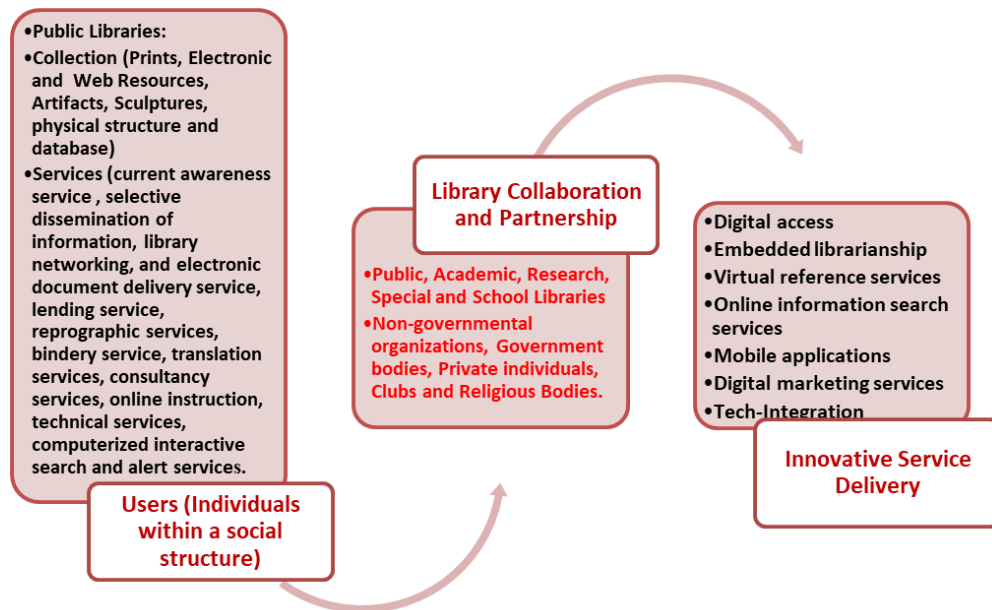


Figure 1. Panacea of Innovative Service Delivery in Public Libraries

LITERATURE REVIEW

Statement of Problem

Public libraries are dynamic by nature. They have an array of resources in various subjects and in different forms to cater for their large and heterogeneous group of users. With rapid advancement in technology, change in information seeking behaviour of users, proliferation of retrieval systems and exponential growth of information resources, public libraries are faced with the challenge of meeting up with the demand of innovative service delivery. The integration and use of collaborative strategies is an essential requirement to effectively promote innovative service delivery. However, extant literature reveals, that most public libraries in Nigeria are lagging behind in terms of innovative service delivery. Similarly, Okwu and Oporum (2022), opines public libraries in Rivers State seem not to be living up to expectation in terms service delivery, as it factual that that the society can draw from the public library in the same way an individual draws from his memory. Hence, the need for a study of this nature as it will investigate library collaboration and partnership as a panacea for fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate library collaboration and partnership: a panacea for fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the current state of service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State.
2. Ascertain the role of library collaboration and partnership in fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State.
3. Identify strategies can be adopted to promote library collaboration and partnership in public libraries in Rivers.

Research Questions

1. What is the current state of service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State?
2. What are the roles of library collaboration and partnership in fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State?
3. What strategies can be adopted to promote library collaboration and partnership in public libraries in Rivers State?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the use of a descriptive survey design, to investigate library collaboration and partnership: a panacea for fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. The descriptive research is defined as those studies which aim at collecting data and describing it in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). This design was adopted because it will provide information about the variables in the study. The study respondents used for this survey was limited to Rivers State. The population of this study is 14. It consists of all professional librarians in public libraries in Rivers State (Rivers State Library Board and Jubilee Library Port Harcourt). Census sampling technique was adopted as the instrument for data collection was distributed to the entire population of the study which is. To ensure the originality of this research outcome, data collection for the study was achieved through a questionnaire method for the generation of the primary data. Data was analysed using mean. The expected mean criterion for each item is 2.50, all items below the expected mean criterion will be disagree.

RESEARCH RESULT

Research Question 1: What is the current state of service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State?

Table 1. Current state of service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State

S/ N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	Decision
1	The library facility including buildings, furnishing and technology infrastructure support delivery of modern library services.	2	3	7	1	2.28	Disagreed
2	The quality, diversity and relevance of library collections meet the informational, educational and recreational needs of the community.	6	3	1	3	2.71	Agreed
3	The library provides access to technological resources and services such as public computers, Wi-Fi access, online database and digital literacy programmes in line with best practices.	4	1	5	3	2.46	Disagreed
4	The library undertakes community engagement and outreach to promote awareness of library services.	5	2	4	2	2.76	Agreed
5	Library personnel are courteous and equipped to provide timely service delivery.	7	6	0	0	3.69	Agreed
	Grand Mean					2.78	

Table 1 shows the mean of librarians on the current state of service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. Based on the decision rule and expected mean criterion score of 2.50, the results indicates that item 1 and 3 with

mean score of 2.28 and 2.46 respectively was disagree, while other items on the table were accepted with a grand mean of 2.78.

Research Question 2: What are the roles of library collaboration and partnership in fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State?

Table 2. Roles of library collaboration and partnership in fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	Decision
1	It allows libraries pool their resources and expertise in order to improve user experience	6	7	0	0	3.46	Agreed
2	It fosters a culture of innovation within libraries, which helps develop innovative solutions	7	4	2	0	3.38	Agreed
3	It facilitates resources and knowledge sharing, allowing member libraries to benefit from each other's strength thereby promoting innovative service delivery	7	6	0	0	3.53	Agreed
4	It helps reduce financial constraints, as member libraries can achieve economies of scale and cost savings	10	3	0	0	3.76	Agreed
5	It provides opportunities for professional development and skill building among library staff in order to lead a transformative change in the library work force	5	4	4	0	2.76	Agreed
6	It helps library's forge connections/partnership with other organizations to access additional funds and opportunities that drive innovative service delivery	11	2	0	0	3.84	Agreed
	Grand Mean					3.45	

Table 2 shows the mean response of librarians on the role of library collaboration and partnership in fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. Based on the decision rule and expected mean criterion score of 2.50, the results indicate that all items on the table were accepted with a grand mean of 3.45.

Research Question 3: What strategies can be adopted to promote library collaboration and partnership?

Table 3. Strategies that promote library collaboration and partnership

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	Decision
1	Development of collaborative culture in libraries	10	3	0	0	3.76	Agreed
2	Building relationships and trust amongst libraries and other organizations	13	0	0	0	4.00	Agreed
3	Provide platforms for libraries and stakeholders to network, share ideas and build connections by organizing meetings, workshops or collaborative projects	7	6	0	0	3.53	Agreed
4	Adoption of technology and communication tools to facilitate collaboration and information sharing among libraries and stakeholders.	5	6	2	0	3.23	Agreed
5	Ensuring that collaboration and partnership efforts are inclusive and participatory.	2	11	1	0	3.30	Agreed
	Grand Mean					3.56	

Table 3 shows the mean response of librarians on strategies that can be adopted to promote library collaboration and partnership in public libraries in Rivers State. Based

on the decision rule and expected mean criterion score of 2.50, the results indicates that all items on the table were accepted with a grand mean of 3.56.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study reveal the current state of service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. Findings of the study reveals that the state of service delivery public libraries in Rivers State should further be enhanced to promote innovative service delivery. In a related study, Okwu and Oporum (2022), also highlighted the need to adopt strategies that will improve the state of public libraries in Rivers State. The findings of the above authors corroborate the findings of this study.

According to the findings of this study, library collaboration and partnership serve as a panacea for fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries in Rivers State. Library collaboration and partnership amongst others (as revealed by the study) enables libraries pool their resources and expertise in order to improve user experience, foster innovation and reduce financial constraints (see table 2). The findings of this study aligns with the findings of Araujo (2024), who opines that libraries and other organizations can harness the strengths and expertise through collaborative and partnership projects to drive innovation.

The findings of the study identified strategies that promote library collaboration and partnership amongst others as; building relationships and trust amongst libraries and other organizations, providing platforms for libraries and stakeholders to network, share ideas and build connections by organizing meetings, workshops or collaborative projects and ensuring that collaboration and partnership efforts are inclusive and participatory (see table 3). The finding of this study is in tandem with the submission of Araujo (2024), who opines that providing platforms that enhances networking between libraries and other organizations, strategically promotes collaboration and partnership.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt that library collaboration and partnership is a panacea for fostering innovative service delivery in public libraries. The adoption of collaborative and partnership tools such as library consortia, inter-library loans, collective collection development and more is paramount to the actualization innovative service delivery and smart libraries initiative. Based on the findings, the study concluded that library collaboration and partnership is key to unlocking a pyramid of potentials in public library service delivery.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Government and other stakeholders should ensure that public libraries are adequately equipped with both human and material resource to enable them effectively and efficiently render services.
2. Libraries are encouraged to collaborate with other libraries and organization as it enables them pool resources, potentially harness both

human and material resource to foster transformative change within the landscape of library service delivery.

3. Strategies that promote library collaboration and partnership should be adopted and applied.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

For further research, it is essential to explore the specific mechanisms and frameworks that can effectively support and enhance collaboration among public libraries. Investigating the impact of various partnership models – such as library consortia, inter-library loan systems, and collective collection development – on service innovation will provide deeper insights into their long-term benefits. Additionally, future studies could focus on identifying the challenges and barriers libraries face in establishing and maintaining such collaborations, particularly in regions where resources are limited. Comparative analyses of successful collaborative initiatives across different countries or regions could also offer valuable lessons for fostering more efficient library service delivery globally. Further research might also examine the role of emerging technologies, such as digital platforms and smart library initiatives, in facilitating seamless library partnerships. Finally, exploring the role of government and stakeholders in providing adequate support and resources is crucial for the sustainability of innovative library services.

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