



Community perceptions of public library services in rural communities in Edo State

Nehikhare Osagie Uwenbor ^{1*}, Alexander Osayimwense Osadolor ²

¹ Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Nigeria

² Centre for Sustainable Engineering, School of Computing, Engineering and Digital Technologies, Teesside University, United Kingdom

* Corresponding Author: Nehikhare Osagie Uwenbor

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of public library services in promoting community development in Edo State, Nigeria. Utilizing a quantitative survey approach, the research assesses key areas including resource utilization, facility adequacy, staffing levels, infrastructure, and the availability of materials for personal and community development. Analysis of the data collected from the Ulemon community members across different age groups highlight significant challenges such as inadequate resources, insufficient staffing, and gaps in the provision of essential information for community development, while the facilities and infrastructure were found to be in a good state that is well above average, but not in an excellent state. The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive strategy to enhance library services, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.6. This study recommends adopting sustainable community engagement with Strategic actions. By implementing the recommendations, public libraries in Edo State can significantly improve their role in fostering lifelong learning and community development, and this transformation will contribute to broader social, economic, and environmental benefits, positioning libraries as vital components of sustainable community development in the region.

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1. Introduction

Libraries play a crucial role in supporting adult literacy programs and providing materials that help improve literacy and numeracy skills. They offer resources, such as books, educational materials, and digital resources, that can be used to enhance literacy and numeracy skills among both youth and adults. Libraries also provide a supportive learning environment and may offer literacy programs and workshops to promote lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2018) ^[17]. Libraries often offer adult literacy programs that provide direct literacy instruction to individuals, and these programs may include one-on-one tutoring, group classes, or workshops aimed at improving reading, writing, and math skills for adults (American Library Association, 2012) ^[1]. Libraries provide a wide range of resources, including books, educational materials, and digital resources, that support adult literacy, and these resources are designed to cater to different reading levels and interests, thereby providing an ease of find for adults to materials that suit their needs. They provide spaces where individuals can study, access resources, and receive support from library staff or volunteers. This supportive atmosphere encourages adults to engage in learning and improve their literacy skills (Toronto Public Library, 2024) ^[16]. Libraries do have a role to play in the provision of access to information and resources for individuals in the community, as they serve as a hub for knowledge, offering books, educational materials, and digital resources that can enhance literacy, numeracy, and overall learning (Cabello and Butler, 2017) ^[3].

Libraries have been known to play a role in raising awareness about adult literacy issues and advocating for the importance of literacy programs, as they may organize events, campaigns, or workshops to highlight the significance of adult literacy and the

resources available to support learners. Librarians in Edo State utilize social media platforms to promote effective library service delivery, and this includes using platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn to maintain a social media presence and engage with library users (Ogunbodede and IVWIGHREGHWETA, 2020) ^[11]. Libraries often serve as community centers, providing a space for people to gather, connect, and engage with one another, as Librarians may also take on roles as social workers or navigators, helping individuals navigate complex systems and providing guidance on various topics such as health, housing, and literacy (Cabello and Butler, 2017) ^[3].

Libraries can act as patrons of local small businesses by hiring local artists and educators for workshops, investing in locally sourced resources, and partnering with small- and medium-sized companies, and this support can have a positive economic impact on the local community (Banks, 2021) ^[12]. Libraries do play a role in community development by providing resources and services that support education, lifelong learning, and information access, and these factors contribute to the overall development and well-being of individuals and communities, which can have economic implications in terms of human capital development and productivity (California State Library, 2023) ^[4].

Public libraries play a crucial role in supporting the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aspires to assure that all youth and a goodly amount of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030, this target emphasizes the importance of functional literacy and numeracy skills, which are essential for individuals to further their learning and develop throughout their lives independently (United Nations, 2023) ^[19] (UNESCO Bangkok, 2019) ^[18]. Fairbotham (2021) ^[6] highlights how libraries actively work towards SDG 4 by providing accessible sources of knowledge and information to educate and enable their communities, the study also mentions that libraries offer access to technology, Wi-Fi, and media literacy training, which help bridge the digital divide and reduce inequalities.

Edo State recognizes the importance of qualified teachers for the provision of quality education. As part of SDG 4, there is a focus on increasing the supply of qualified teachers through international cooperation and teacher training programs. Like many developing countries, Edo State faces challenges in achieving SDG 4, and these challenges include inadequate funding, a high number of out-of-school children, and inadequate infrastructure (SDG compass, 2015) ^[15]. Libraries can contribute to raising awareness and promoting the achievement of the SDGs. According to the research (Oyovwe Tinuoye, Omeluzor and Akpojotor, 2016) ^[13] conducted in Edo State, it indicates that library personnel have a high awareness of the SDGs. Edo State has implemented the Edo Basic Education Sector Transformation (EDOBEST) program, which focuses on improving the quality of education in the state, and the program aims to provide access to quality education for every child in Edo State by 2030 (IISD, 2019) ^[9]. The EDOBEST program emphasizes the use of digital tools in teaching and learning, it has engaged EdoSTAR teachers who use digital tools to bridge gaps in teaching and improve the quality of education in the state (IISD, 2019) ^[9].

Data science has the potential to contribute significantly to sustainable development by leveraging data-driven techniques to address environmental, social, and economic challenges. By integrating data analytics into sustainability efforts, organizations and individuals can make a positive impact on the world. Data science is increasingly being integrated into positions aligned with the environmental sustainability movement. This integration emphasizes the heavy focus on quantitative data and the need for strong mathematical and statistical aptitude (Priestley and Hayes, 2024) ^[14]. Filho *et al.* (2023) ^[7] focuses on the application of data science in the context of sustainable development in higher education institutions (HEIs). It explores the abundance of studies that have been conducted on how HEIs are implementing sustainable development practices and the potential of data science to enhance these efforts

1.1. Similar Work

Idiegbeyan-ose *et al.* (2015) ^[8] in the research, examines the availability of library and information services in a rural community in Edo State, Nigeria, and also explores the information needs of rural dwellers and the role of libraries in meeting those needs. Onyenachi *et al.* (2015) ^[12] in the research, discusses the importance of establishing effective linkages between libraries and agricultural research institutions to acquire, preserve, and disseminate authentic information, and they also emphasizes the need for adequate funding and proper infrastructure for libraries in rural communities. Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012) ^[10] in the research, examines user satisfaction with the information resources, facilities, and services provided by the Edo State Central Library, while their study focuses on a specific library in Benin-City, it provides insights into user perceptions and satisfaction with library services in Nigeria.

1.2. Problem Statement

Public libraries play a crucial role in fostering community development by providing access to educational resources, information, and a space for personal and professional growth. However, in Edo State, the effectiveness of public libraries in fulfilling this role is under question, as there are concerns about the adequacy of library facilities, the availability and utilization of resources, staffing levels, and the overall infrastructure. These issues potentially hinder the libraries' ability to support community development and lifelong learning effectively. A comprehensive understanding of these challenges from the perspective of community members is essential to inform improvements and strategic planning for public library services in Edo State.

1.3. Aim

The aim of this study is to evaluate the current state of public library services in Edo State, focusing on resource utilization, facility adequacy, staffing levels, infrastructure, and the availability of materials supporting personal development and community development from the perspective of rural Edo state. By conducting a quantitative survey of community members across different age groups, this study seeks to identify key challenges and opportunities for enhancing the role of public libraries in promoting community development and achieving the SDG 4, target 4.6. The findings will provide actionable insights for policymakers, library administrators, and stakeholders to implement targeted improvements in public library services in Edo State.

2. Methods

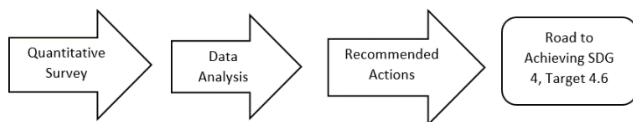


Fig 1: Chart showing the process flow to achieve SDG 4, target 4.6

A comprehensive quantitative survey was designed to assess various aspects of public library services, including resource maintenance, facilities, staffing, material availability, infrastructure, and information provision for community development. The survey included closed-ended questions (e.g., yes/no responses) in Ulemon community in Edo state, Nigeria, across different age groups (15-19, 20-29, and 30-49) as shown in figure 1 and table 1.

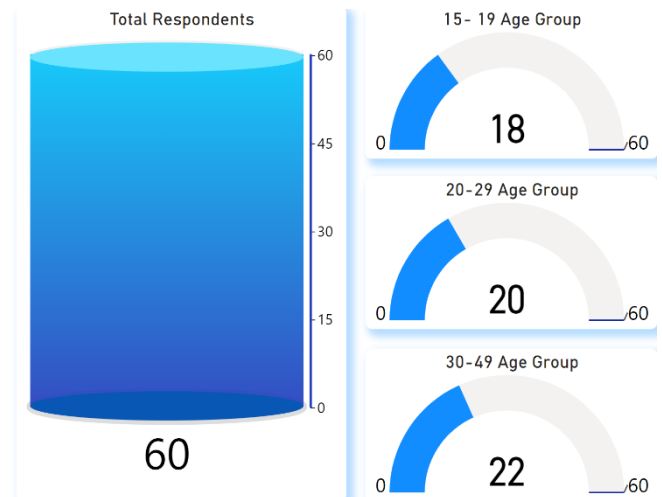


Fig 2: Chart showing total respondent and across the age groups

Table 1: Quantitative data of public library resources and use among age demographics

Age group	15-19	20-29	30-49
Count of age	18	20	22
Do public libraries in Edo State maintain and utilize resources necessary for promoting community development (no)	13	10	18
Do public libraries in Edo State maintain and utilize resources necessary for promoting community development (yes)	5	10	4
Inadequate facilities (no)	14	8	17
Inadequate facilities (yes)	4	12	5
Inadequate staff (no)	13	8	15
Inadequate staff (yes)	5	12	7
Libraries provide material to support users in their personal development (no)	11	7	14
Libraries provide material to support users in their personal development (yes)	7	13	8
Poor infrastructure (no)	13	8	15
Poor infrastructure (yes)	5	12	7
The libraries have all information necessary for community development (no)	16	11	16
The libraries have all information necessary for community development (yes)	2	9	6

2.1. Data Preparation

Questionnaires were distributed through multiple channels, including: in-person distribution at local community centers, markets, and public gathering places, to reach a wider audience. The completed data from the paper surveys were entered into an excel spreadsheet, where each row represented a different age group, and columns captured the various attributes such as age count, public library services, including resource maintenance, facilities, staffing, material availability, infrastructure, and information provision for community development. The data was then loaded onto Power BI (Business Intelligence) in preparation for onward transformation. The data was cleaned to ensure removal of any duplicates, or incomplete responses.

Various visualizations were created to represent the survey data effectively, which were charts showing the count of responses for each question, segmented by age group, so as to identify patterns, trends, key insights and summaries to

facilitate easy interpretation of the data and run comparative analysis to highlight differences in responses across different age groups.

3. Result and Analysis

Maintenance and utilization of resources: the survey results shown in figure 3 reveal that a significant majority of respondents (68.33%) believe that public libraries in Edo State do not maintain and utilize resources necessary for promoting community development. This finding indicates a perception of inadequate resource management within these libraries. The 30-49 age group has the highest dissatisfaction (82%), suggesting that adults, who likely have more experience and expectations regarding library services, are more critical of resource utilization. The 20-29 age group is relatively balanced, with the younger 15-19 group being expressing a high dissatisfaction at 72%, indicating differing expectations or experiences with library resources.

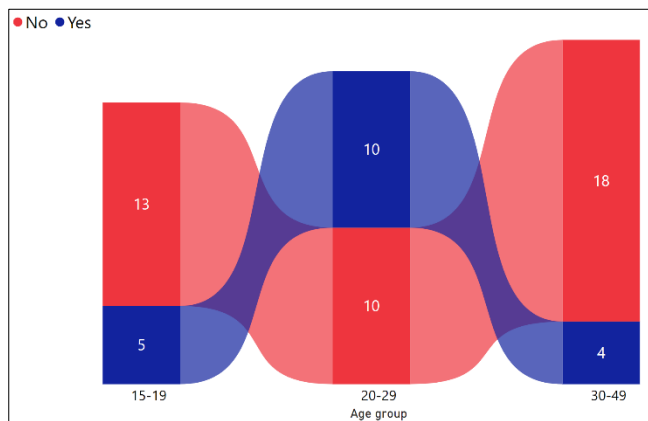


Fig 3: Ribbon chart showing maintenance and utilization of resources

Facilities: figure 4 shows that inadequate facilities are not highlighted as a major concern, with 65% of the respondents indicating adequacy compared to 35% who believe the facilities are inadequate. 22% of the 15-19 and 23% of the 30-49 respondents lean towards seeing facilities as inadequate, which may be linked to their likely more frequent and varied use of library facilities. 60% of the 20-29 age group reports the highest dissatisfaction, which may reflect a combination of fewer facilities available and potentially lower standards of current facilities.

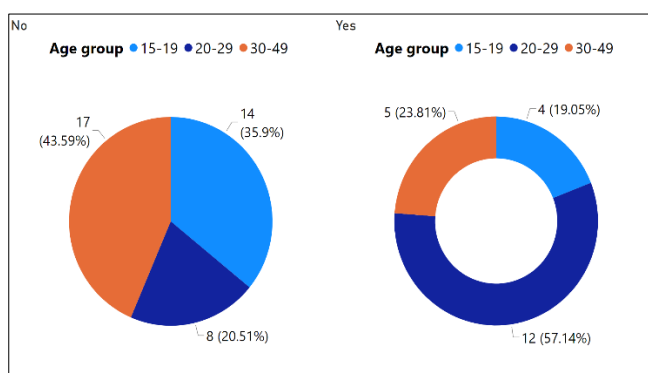


Fig 4: Pie and donut charts showing facility adequacy

Staff: from figure 5, a majority of respondents (67%) believe that the staffing levels in public libraries are inadequate. 60% of the 20-29 age group reports a view of inadequacy with staff, possibly reflecting a mix of experiences or expectations. But 72% of the youngest (15-19) and 68% of the oldest (30-49) groups tend to view staffing as more adequate, this overall suggests a need for better-trained or more staff to meet diverse needs.

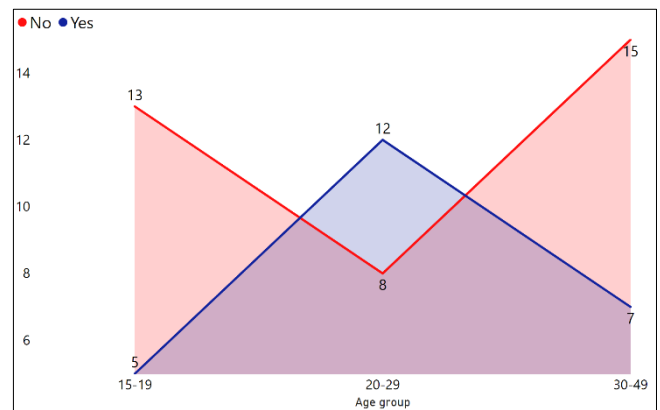


Fig 5: Area chart showing staff adequacy

Libraries provision of materials for personal development: from figure 6, the availability of materials to support personal development is nearly balanced, with 53% respondents indicating inadequacy. 61% of the 15-19 age group is more negative about the availability of materials, which could reflect their primary use of libraries for educational purposes, where some materials may have not been made available. 64% of the 30-49 age group is less satisfied with material availability, potentially due to a broader range of personal development needs that are not being met. And the 20-29 age group records a 65% positivity in availability of materials.

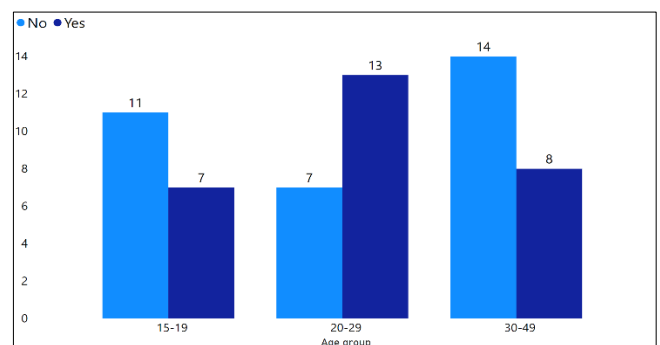


Fig 6: Clustered column chart showing library's provision for materials

Infrastructure: figure 7 shows that the infrastructure is not much of a significant issue, with 40% respondents identifying it as a problem. 68% of the 30-49 age group reports the highest satisfaction, likely due to their expectations and broader usage patterns. 72% of the youngest group (15-19) also indicates significant satisfaction, which could impact their study environments and overall library experience, while 60% of the 20-29 age group indicate dissatisfaction

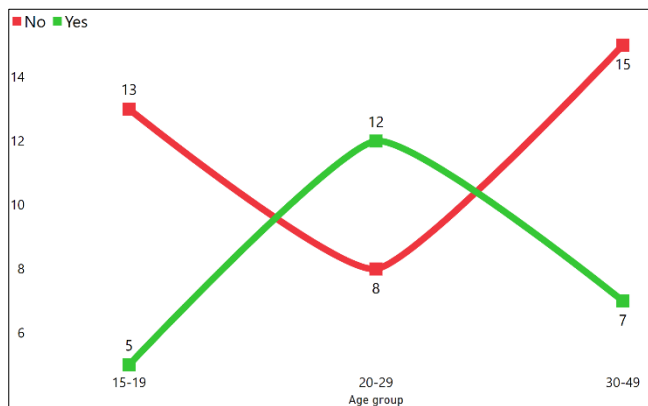


Fig 7: Line chart showing infrastructure status

The libraries have all information for community development: from figure 8, a substantial majority (72%) believe that libraries do not have all the information necessary for community development. This view is most strongly held by the 88% of the 15-19 and 72% of the 30-49 age group, suggesting that this group may have a broader understanding of the types of information required for effective community development. While 55% of the 20-29 age group indicate that libraries do not have all the information necessary for community development, which could reflect a general shortfall in the breadth and depth of information available.

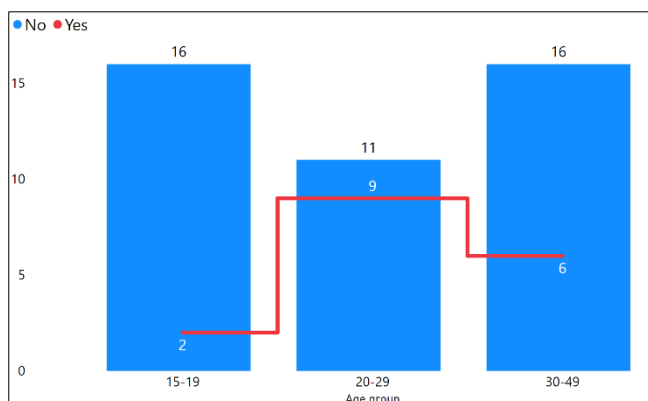


Fig 8: Line and column chart showing library's information on community development

3.1. Key Findings

Resource Utilization: There is a clear need for improvement in how Edo state library maintain and utilize resources, and this could involve better management practices, increased funding, or more community-specific resources.

Facilities and Infrastructure: The adequacy of facilities and infrastructure is still a concern across all age groups, and this suggests that physical improvements are essential, such as modernizing the library buildings, expanding spaces, and upgrading technology.

Staffing: The perception of inadequate staffing highlights the need for more staff and potentially better training programs to enhance service delivery and meet user needs effectively at the Edo state library.

Materials for Personal Development: Edo state library needs to expand and diversify their collections to better support personal development across different demographics.

Community Development: There is a significant gap in the

information provided by Edo state library for community development. The library should work on curating comprehensive collections that address local needs and support broader community development goals.

3.2. Recommended sustainable actions

- Edo state library should provide continuous training for library staff to equip them with the skills needed to meet diverse user needs, and look towards an increase in the number of staff based on necessity to improve service delivery.
- Edo state library should expand the library's collection to include a wider range of materials that support personal and professional development, and regularly review and update the collection based on user feedback and emerging trends, while also developing programs and services that specifically address community development needs and foster partnerships with local organizations to enhance the library's role in community development.
- Edo state library should secure funding for upgrading library facilities to implement better resource management practices and ensure regular updates to the library's collection, including expanding physical spaces and improving accessibility to include those with disabilities, to promote inclusive access to educational resources.
- Edo state library should invest in technology to support modern library services, such as high-speed internet, interactive learning tools and digital resources that run on solar powered energy, as it receives over 2600 hours of sunlight yearly due to its location near the equator (Casey, 2020) [5].

4. Conclusion

This study has provided an evaluation of the current state of public library services in Edo State from the perspective of rural Edo state, focusing on key areas such as resource utilization, facility adequacy, staffing levels, infrastructure, and the availability of materials supporting personal and community development. The findings from the quantitative survey highlight several significant challenges, including inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, insufficient staffing, and gaps in the provision of necessary information for community development. The combined approach of comprehensive survey data collection in the rural community and robust data analysis using Power BI provided valuable insights into the state of public library services. This process facilitated data-driven decision-making to enhance library resources, facilities, staffing, and overall community development support.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the role of public libraries in promoting lifelong learning and community development, aligning with SDG 4. To achieve this, a multi-faceted approach was required, integrating sustainable engineering concepts and strategic actions that focus on improving resource efficiency, upgrading facilities, enhancing staff capacity, and ensuring the availability of comprehensive and relevant materials. By adopting these sustainable strategies, public libraries in Edo State can become more resilient and better equipped to support the educational and developmental needs of their communities. This transformation will not only improve the quality of library services but also contribute to broader social,

economic, and environmental benefits, thereby playing a pivotal role in the sustainable development of Edo State.

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