AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.7 (2), September-December, 2022 https://ajemates.org

A REVIEW ON FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA BASED ON LIBRARIANS REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA STANDARDS

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ABSTRACT
The research investigated the furniture and equipment in public libraries in Nigeria based on Librarians Registration Council of Nigerian Standards. This study has the concept of public libraries, furniture and equipment in the public libraries in Nigeria based on the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) standards, and the impact of furniture and equipment in public. The review concluded that there is the need for public libraries to conform to the LRCN standards when planning and procuring furniture and equipment for the public libraries. The review recommended that the LRCN should regularly monitor and pay unscheduled visits to all public libraries to get first hand details on the extent of their compliance with the standards. The government should ensure that they liaise with the LRCN when planning to renovate or construct a new public library so as to get the actual spacing and accommodation for all furniture and equipment needed in the library which aligns with LRCN standards.

Keywords: Furniture and Equipment, Public Library, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) standard.

Introduction

Over the years, the public library has been seen as a knowledge base where indispensable resources and services are rendered for public use. Most especially, the public libraries provide information resources for its clients irrespective of their age, sex, qualification and their background. They provide unrestricted access to library resources and services free of charge to all residents of a given community, district or geographical region (Anyalebechi & Udo-Anyanwu, 2016). As part of their function, they ensure that the users are provided their information needs in a timely manner, in line with the demands or user profile. Generally, these functions are carried out within specified rules and procedures called standards. The provision of resources, services and other activities of the public libraries are expected to be done using such specified guidelines. The standards for the public libraries In Nigeria are set out by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).

Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) is a regulatory body established with the responsibility of overseeing the activities and practices of all librarians and types of libraries (LRCN, 2015). LRCN is charged with the task of ensuring best professional practices and ensuring that standards are maintained

among and within library and library professions. They set out the standards that every library is expected to take in delivery or carrying out their functions. Although, these standards are expected to be in conformity with the international bodies, they are slightly restructured to suit the local needs of the public libraries in Nigeria (LRCN 2015). It is to be noted that the standards serve as a pathway in teaching and assisting Librarians toward providing effective and efficient public library service delivery as no two communities are the same (Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria 2015).

The LRCN standard covers different sections of the library, including the area of library furniture and equipment .Library furniture and equipment are those gadgets used to furnish the library. Adequate and suitable furniture and equipment should be provided; it could be purchased through vendors or locally made but meet up with the international standard, for both print information resources and computer laboratories. There should be comfortable chairs, reading tables, book shelves, periodical racks, study carrels, newspaper racks, kardex, catalogue cabinets and so on (LRCN, 2015). There should be room furnished with couch were users can relax and read newspapers. Suitable reading chairs and tables should be in the children's section to ease their reading, story hour programs and group discussions with colleagues.

Based on the forgoing, it is evidenced that these standards and requirements that were suggested by the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) to serve as a guide for public libraries in Nigeria is supposed to be adopted in terms of her furniture and equipment. Regrettably, it is clear that some furniture and equipment in the public libraries are of poor quality and deficient in quantity. Most public libraries fall below these standards which may be due to poor funding to procure the needed furniture and equipment. There are dilapidated seats and tables in most public libraries. Lack of materials may also affect the procurement of shelves to house the materials and information resources. However, the public library has the duty or right to align with the standards put out by the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) with respect to ensuring that there is sufficient furniture and equipment for her heterogeneous users. The need to ensure that public libraries pursue the standards of the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria has given rise for a study of this nature. In this regard, this study will review the concept of public libraries, furniture and equipment in the public libraries in Nigeria based on the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) standards, and the impact of furniture and equipment in public libraries.

Concept of Public libraries

Public Libraries are seen as a layman's university. They are established to provide information resources and services to rural and urban dwellers without any discrimination. As a public institution, their services and resources are not restricted to any class of persons in the community. All its services as expected to be free except for classified services which may require a fee. In the view of Opara (2008), a public library is wholly designed for the purpose of rendering information services to the general public irrespective of status, occupation, sex, age and these

services are meant to be free or attract a little fee. Public library have been long viewed as a knowledge institution because they provide the public with spaces for information and learning and are accessible to all categories of people in the society, regardless of gender age and ethnic affiliation.

Obasi (2015) posited that a public library should be seen as the embodiment of the principle of the right to access and use information and to acquire knowledge. Public libraries are set up to educate, inform and entertain their users. They carter for the heterogeneous interest of their various communities, they are local gateways to knowledge providing basic conditions for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups (IFLA/UNESCO Public library Manifesto 1994). According to Anyalebechi and Udoanyanwu (2016) public libraries provides unrestricted access to library resources and services free of charge to all residents of a given community, district or geographical region. Koontz and Gubbin, 2010 describes the public library as an institution that provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services.

The LRCN (2015) opined that public library is a library that is established to support the development and sustenance of democracy and democratic structures as such will provide access to information through various means and also meant to support formal and informal education. Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012) further stated that the public library is a local centre of information that makes all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. They are expected to provide people oriented services ,aiming at satisfying the general public through the provision of appropriate information resources and services, such as advisory, strategic leadership and information on local content that corporate indigenous knowledge into it.

Based on the foregoing, the researcher sees a public library as a library established to serve an undefined population within its locality and service area towards supporting their information, educational, cultural, leisure, occupational needs.

Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria

Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) is a regulatory body for library and information science professionals. It was established by Act 12 of 1995. It is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education saddled with the responsibility of ensuring best professional practices, standardization and regulation of the library and information profession. They perform among other functions the publication of standards and guidelines required for all types of libraries.

In 2015, the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education published the standard and guidelines for public libraries in Nigeria. These standards and guidelines contain the minimum, intermediate and excellent requirements that every public library in Nigeria should use in acquiring and assessing resources both human and material resources so as to meet the needs of the users (LRCN, 2015). The LRCN standards stated the minimum standards and guidelines acceptable for

every public library system which among others include furniture and equipment.

Furniture and Equipment in Libraries

Furniture and equipment in any setting is a panacea to efficiency and productivity. Library system is not an exception to this rule as there are several furniture and equipment which enhance service delivery. Maidabino (2010) stated that the library is the only centralized location where new and emerging information technologies can be combined with knowledge resources in users-focused, services-rich environment that supports today's social and educational patterns of learning, teaching and research. Library services can only be achieved through the availability of adequate library furniture and equipment which facilitate collections, acquisitions and processing. Anunobi and Okoye (2008) stated that libraries are faced with hybrid challenges of managing resources and are challenged to acquiring the necessary skills. One challenge is the issue of inadequacy of furniture and equipment and tools with which the library personnel work.

According to Oni cited in Eguavoen (2012), furniture and equipment constitute a strategic factor in organizational functioning. This is so because they determine to a very large extent the smooth functioning of any social organization or system including library. Oni further stated that their availability, adequacy and relevance influence efficiency and high productivity. Library furniture and equipment play pivotal role in the actualization of the aims and objectives of libraries by satisfying the physical and emotional needs of the staff and other category of library users. Knezevich cited in Eguavoen (2012) emphasized that the physical needs are met through provision of safe structure, adequate furniture and equipment facilities, and sufficient shelter space for his work and play.

Relatedly, library furniture consists of many types of racks to display all kinds of fiction and nonfiction books that users could themselves pick and read (Iwhiwhu & Okorodudu, 2012). These furniture and equipment can stack books for libraries. These are essential for the public library because these facilitate systematic storage and easy retrieval of any kind of books. These furniture (book stacks) are designed in a way to ensure minimum space usage through which books could be stored and picked up easily (Eguavoen, 2012). These library racks are available either as a main unit or as an add-on section. Depending on the space allocated in the library, one can choose between a continuous shelf and an add-on section that can be customized to a desired length. Also, one can choose between single-face or double-face shelf that could be operated from one side or both sides, respectively.

The purpose of the Library furniture can be derived from its name – a shelving system that allows for a unique image and a flexible learning environment. The Library furniture makes use of beautiful wood, sleek glass, and perforated sheet metal that work together to create a unique image fit for any library. Library furniture puts a contemporary twist on a classical look with special sound-absorbing surfaces that help influence room acoustics. According to Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012), not only is the Library furniture pleasing to the eye, but it is effective and practical as well. For those seeking a timeless library feel, Library Furniture provides a special look

perfect for any modern academic environment. Library furniture and other equipment are one of the most functional and flexible designs for books in the public library (Eguavoen, 2012). Shelving bays can be configured with several different types of components, and assembly is quick and easy, with no expert assistance required. Library furniture offers various possibilities for creating environmental spaces. The shelving can be adapted in order to fully utilize the characteristics of the premises (Oni, 2013).

In relation to the standards set out for Library furniture and equipments in public libraries by the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015), it is important that all public library furniture should be durable, comfortable, sturdy, attractive, appropriate in size, functional, easy to maintain and conformable to international standards. In acquiring public library furniture, caution should be exercised in ensuring that only recognized and competent vendors and manufacturers who are familiar with globally acceptable standards are patronized. Catalogues of various library furniture should be considered along with visits to libraries for samples, guidance toward procuring good, appropriate and functional ones.

Accordingly, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) gave a list of Public Library Furniture and Equipment that are expected to be procured and acquired in the public library. They are as follows:

- Book shelves (the size of the shelves should be according to the designated space for Sections in the library and at a height that is accessible to users more so the children. The shelves could be movable, double or single-sided).
- Periodical racks, Newspaper racks, Study carrels (children's table should be 33cm-36cm high, rotunda or rectangular while that of the older children is between 40cm-70cm high), Reading chairs, Circulation desks, Computer desks and chairs, Catalogue cabinets, Power generating set, Inverters, Pick up van/truck, Trolley, Book-ends/support, Atlas stand, Movable display board, Storage cabinets,
- Information board, Lounge chairs/ sofa for Serials Section, Dictionary stand, Staff tables and chairs, ICT equipment (see IT section), Appropriate sizes of furniture should be designed for children, older children, adults and the persons with special ability (users with special needs).

Also, the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) gave recommended standards for library furniture (shelve) to include a minimum of 15 units, 20 units, 25 units and 35 units for a population by area of service of less than 10,000, 10,000 to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively. In all, there should be an average unit size - 200cm width 190cm height (dimensions are not sacrosanct as they could be varied and adjusted to spaces that are available)

Relatedly, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) gave recommended standards for number of study carrels (Adults) 4 seater carrels. At a minimum level, there should be 10, 15, 20, and 25 number of study carrels (Adults) 4 seater carrels for a populated service area

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less than 10,000, to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively.

For number of chairs (Adults), at a minimum level, there should be 40, 60, 80, and 100 number of chairs for a populated service area less than 10,000, 10,000 to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively.

According to Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) based on the number of children's tables (4-seater), there should be 10, 15, 20, and 25 number of children's tables (4-seater) for a populated service area less than 10,000, 10,000 to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively at a minimum level. With respect to number of children's chairs, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) stated that there should be 40, 60, 80, and 100 number of children's chairs for a populated service area less than 10,000, 10,000 to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively at a minimum level.

The recommended number of computer tables (Adults) 4-seater as stipulated by Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015), there should be 4, 7, 9, and 10 number of computer tables (Adults) 4-seater for a populated service area less than 10,000, 10,000 to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively at a minimum level.

Relatedly, at a minimum level, there should be 16, 28, 36, and 40 number of chairs for computer users for a populated service area less than 10,000, 10,000 to 24, 999, 25,000 to 34, 999, and 35,000 and above respectively. (Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria, 2015)

In view of the established standards and guidelines by the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (2015) on Library furniture, fixtures and equipment, it is given that in assuring quality in the libraries, the libraries need to adhere to the standards prescribed; formulate and inaugurate Quality Assurance Policy (QAP) mostly when planning for Library furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E). It is important that public library leadership and planners consider the following factors:

- Extensive consultation with all library staff
- Input from constituents/users, i.e. focus groups, or other patron input
- Consideration given to bringing in a professional interior designer/architect
- Conformance with the library program and goals
- Conformance with User needs and characteristics: Is the space designed to encourage extended usage, or transitory for in-and-out?
- Efficacy of design: Will the actual use reflect the intended use? Example: A small 4-person table may realistically only be used by two.
- Sustainability considerations – energy efficiency; Meeting "Design for Environment" guidelines.
- Flexibility (balance between order and chaos), mobility (user control) and adaptability (recognition of constant change in the 21st century library)
- Reusability (value consideration), consideration of incorporating existing FF&E.
- Potential for refurbishment
- Understand the investment timeframe for the furnishings, 10-15 years on institutional quality furniture, need to think about trendy

colors and durability, and consideration of replacement and repair budget
- Durability for 24/7 use in public library.
- Low tech solutions, i.e. white boards

From the foregoing, it can be asserted that regulated procurement of library furniture, fixtures and equipment is a means of ensuring that best practices are encouraged in the libraries giving credence to fitness for purpose, conforming to required standards and pursuit of excellence (Eguavoen, 2012). For public libraries to assure quality in Library furniture, fixtures and equipment, they need to first and foremost, adhere to prescribed standards from the American Library Association (ALA), and the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) etc, which have variously prescribed minimum standards to be met by public libraries.

Studies on Furniture and equipment in the public libraries

Eguavoen (2012) did a survey of library equipment in Academic libraries in Ibadan Oyo state. The objectives of the study were to ascertain the availability of library and equipment tools used in selected academic libraries in Ibadan, Nigeria. The design of the study was a descriptive survey on library equipment available for use in selected academic libraries. The instrument used for this study was developed as Library Equipment Survey Questionnaires (LESQ) which was used to elicit information from the respondents on the equipment and tools available in their respective libraries. The instrument was divided into three sections. The Friedman test was used to analyze the data collated in section A and the Pearson correlation matrix where (DF=39, r.obs=5, at P<0.05) was used in analyzing the data in section B. The results of the study revealed that equipment in academic libraries in Ibadan were grossly inadequate for processing and information services that, the relationship between libraries size and equipment available in academic libraries is not statistically significant and that staff output is affected by equipment availability. This was found to be as a result of inadequate funding, poor infrastructural facilities and more attention given to ICT facilities by most of the libraries. Based on the outcome of the study, it was recommended that adequate funds be made available to the libraries to procure library equipment on regular basis and that staff productivity be enhanced by adequate provisions of tools and equipment.

Okpokwasili and Blakes (2019) examined the availability of Library Equipment and Facilities and Students' Academic Performance in South-South, Nigeria. Two research questions were raised and answered while, two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised of 160 library and information science lecturers. The entire population was used. A structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Kuder & Richardson statistics was used to establish the reliability and reliability co-efficient of 0.73 was obtained. 140 copies of the questionnaire were successfully retrieved representing 88%. Data collected were analyzed using means and standard deviations to answer the research questions,

and the null hypotheses were tested using t-test statistics. The findings showed that library and information science equipment/facilities are highly available. The findings also showed that respondents assessed equipment and facilities as highly required to enhance students' academic performance. Conclusion were drawn and relevant recommendations were made among others that government and relevant stake-holders should provide adequate and relevant equipment and facilities for the teaching of library and information science courses in Universities in South-South zone, Nigeria.

Singh and Roy (2020) did an evaluative Study of Public Library Infrastructure for Adult Literacy initiative in Delhi. The study used a descriptive design. Questionnaires were used to collect data on different tools and facilities that were available for the adult literacy program. Randomly selected 225 end users from all libraries in Delhi were used. Data were analyzed using tables and graphic designs. The study found that infrastructure availability was high in the Public libraries in Delhi like seats and tables for reading. The maximum users are happy with furniture and equipment provided by the libraries. The study concluded that public library infrastructure for adult literacy initiative in Delhi should be improved on.

Suhaila, Anuar and Haris (2012) carried out a study titled "Towards a better Design: Physical Interior Environments of Public Libraries in Peninsular Malaysia". The study focused on how to create a better design of physical interior environments in public libraries in Malaysia. The research consolidated on the interior ambiences caused by selection of lightings, furniture, materials and finishes of public libraries. It discussed the previous studies and literature reviews which aimed to evaluate and review their opinions on the influence of physical interior environments on users ' expectations, needs and behaviors on the interior settings. This study recommended for researcher in future study to investigate on the interplay between library users and physical environment, particularly on spatial ambience and the users' behaviors.

Suchi (2002) study examined the Physical Comfort in Library Study Environments: Observations in Three Undergraduate Settings. This study uses a case study approach. The paper discusses the elements that contribute to student comfort in library study areas. These factors, which include lighting, color, acoustics, and furniture, were generated from a search of library and architectural literature. The criteria were then applied to three undergraduate libraries, Clemons Library at University of Virginia, Johnson Center Library at George Mason University, and Lilly Library at Duke Library. The case studies include descriptions of the physical appearance of the spaces based on the generated criteria, as well as suggestions for improvements that may be made. Photographs and floor plans are included to illustrate visual elements of the spaces. The study found that the chairs, individual carrels, open tables, and upholstered furniture, couches, lounge chairs were not sufficient to provide the need comfort for the users in most libraries. The study recommended that these furniture and equipment should be sufficient and of quality.

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Impacts of Furniture and Equipment in Public Libraries

It appears that the furniture and equipment in the public libraries go a long way to motivate users to patronize and effectively use the library for their various purposes. furniture and equipment in any public libraries range from the seats, tables, shelves, racks, cabinets, fans, air-conditions, printers, cables, ICT gadgets, laboratory apparatuses, reading and learning materials as well as other infrastructures that would likely motivate users towards using the library. Experience has shown that most of the furniture and equipment that are germane to effective use of the public libraries appears not to be sufficient. Those furniture and equipment that are available seem not to be of standard quality, some seem to lack maintenance culture, while some are in dilapidated conditions. The status of furniture and equipment as well as other physical facilities especially in public libraries today appears to be of great concern to librarians and other stakeholders. It seems that the provision of these furniture and equipment has dwindled over the years, perhaps due to poor budgetary allocation to the public libraries. Also, increase in user enrolment rate which had led to population explosion in public libraries affects the available furniture and equipment in the library

Sufficient furniture and equipment in public libraries are very important hence the LRCN recommendation that there should be durable and adequate book shelves for stacking of library print resources, journal display racks in the serial section, which will be used for storing serials publications in the library (LRCN, 2015). The circulation unit of the public libraries needs to have good furniture and equipment. This was the reason why the Bureau of India Standards (2012) stated that the circulation desk which is the first point of call of the library user and the first meeting point between the users and the librarians and also where charging and discharging takes place should be properly fixed with a good furniture and fittings. Reading tables and carrels that must be made comfortable for the library users and adequate to enhance the users' relaxation and comfort while using the library, reading chairs should be high and comfortable for the library users (Obiamalu & Echedom, 2021).

When the library and book catalogues cabinets are provided at the entrance of the circulation section, it will aid users in retrieving the needed information in the library as fast as possible (Singh, n.d). Other furniture and equipment such as trolleys that are used to convey library materials to the various reading rooms should be adequately provided as this will protect the materials from been damaged using hands to carry them to their various shelves. According to Maidabino (2010) who opined that the library is the only place that can combine the new trend with the traditional library resources, there is need for these various resources to be stored, protected and preserved in durable and quality shelves and racks. This will ensure the longetivity of the library materials

Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally, the furniture and equipment for the library should be durable, attractive and appropriate in size and should conform to the international standard. When acquiring these furniture, only recognized and competent vendors should be patronized,

but then these furniture and equipment sizes depends on the age and number of users. There is the need to conform to the LRCN standards when planning and procuring furniture and equipment for the public libraries. The need for the public libraries in Nigeria to adopt the LRCN's standards in planning and procuring furniture and equipment for their libraries cannot be over emphasized. This is because when the furniture and equipment are adequate and sufficient in the library, it improves patronage and effective use of the library resources and services. it is expected that public libraries must do all in her capacity to ensure that the quality of the furniture and equipment, most especially reading chairs and tables as well as shelves, racks and trolleys are not compromised during their procurement. However, to ensure that the public libraries in Nigeria align with the standards of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) with respect to their procuring furniture and equipment, the LRCN should regularly monitor and pay unscheduled visits to all public libraries to get first hand details on the extent of their compliance with the standards. The government should ensure that they liaise with the LRCN when planning to renovate or construct a new public library so as to get the actual spacing and accommodation for all furniture and equipment needed in the library which aligns with LRCN standards. Good funding should be provided to the public libraries to enable them repair and procure new furniture and equipment that are dilapidated

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