

Optimizing the Usage of Public and Community Libraries in the Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Library usage is concerned with the use of the library in relation to the factors that influence using the library like age, possession of ICT skills and awareness by users as well as their visits to the library, and whether the facilities, collections and services are used or not. Library usage is defined in this paper as the frequency of use of the library, and the time spent in the library. The aim of this paper is to increase the visibility and usage of the public library by the community in Limpopo Province. This paper will use the qualitative research methodology where a case study design will be employed. A purposive sampling approach will be employed to select district librarians as well as public librarians to participate in the investigation. The researcher will use the mixed method, that is the qualitative and quantitative research approaches making use of questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions to attend to both research methods. Data will be collected by self-administered questionnaires. To establish how the available libraries 'usage can be optimized to benefit the users. The public librarians where asked questions regarding their library resources and facilities, the type of trainings they require to effectivity render their library services as the librarian, the type of intervention they would like to see, the type of user education provided to the users, as a result this paper seeks to propose possible resolutions and strategies for optimizing the public libraries. Recommendations are made based on the findings of the study that there is a need for intervention as far as public libraries usage is concerned for optimal usage by the community. The advantages of having a public library will be highlighted as well as disadvantages of not having a public library in this 4th industrial revolution era. Moreover, as public libraries provide services, it calls for awareness and awareness go hand in hand with promotion so as to make the potential customers, that is the library users aware of the products being provided which is information. Public libraries have an indispensable role in building a reading nation and also in eradicating illiteracy in the rural communities.

Introduction

A public library is a library in the community that provides all information needs of the whole community without a fee. According to Maurya (2016) "public libraries are local gateways to information for individual and social development". They provide access to all the citizen equally without grading them. Students and learners from different schools around the public library especially those from schools without libraries can use the public library for their studies; Young adult use the public library for vocational matters to be assisted with how to apply for

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jobs and other developmental issues. It is indicated that the first yatch was developed by a boy after visiting and using the library resources. UNESCO public library manifesto says that “the services of public library are provided on the basis of quality of access for all regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. All age groups must find materials relevant to their needs. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society as well as the memory of human endeavor and imagination (IFLA 2015).

According to Lor (1997), libraries are usually regarded as product of white colonizers and are not perceived as appropriate to most of the African who are the black majority, which result in the role of libraries being not valued. Moreover, the foundation on which libraries were formed that of being used to backup apartheid policies they cannot be trusted and defamed.

Public libraries are said to offer society a common stage and enable them to take crucial steps in relation to issues like the societal resources, scholastic as well as leisure development of the society. Libraries are no longer just the custodians of books but a place that provide the meeting place of the book and the library users. A place where people from all walks of life meet to share, explore, interact and imagine important things (Maurya 2016). People who use the library are well informed.

Of resent public libraries unlike in the past are becoming more and more popular to the society and as a result are faced with the multi-faceted roles to play in meeting the various needs of the community. Amongst the many roles of the public library is that of serving as a place that anchor community life and bring people together.

Research Question

What are the strategies for optimizing public library usage in the Limpopo Public libraries?

The Objectives

- To establish the public library usage in the Limpopo Province.
- To identify the factors influencing public library usage in the Limpopo Province.
- To determine the importance of public library marketing.
- To establish the viewpoints of public librarians concerning the attitude of the community towards the library.

Literature Review

Literature review will focus on what the ideal public library is. This section focuses on what the ideal public library should be. The researcher has given attention to studies conducted by other researchers. As we are living in the information age

in which information is needed to have breakthrough and succeed in life in general, as a result we all need information irrespective of age, gender, cast and belief. Therefore, we cannot speak about libraries without touching information as provided through various media as one of the public library's services. On top of the various services provided by the public libraries they also serve as repositories of unlimited books and information in various formats like for example print sources and digital sources. One of the most important features of a public library is that it is accessible free of any payment. To access the store of wealth in the public library one needs to have a membership card only. The public library provides a safe, quiet and conducive place for recreational reading, studying and also a learning place. However, the public library seems to be significant and indispensable in the community as a whole. "A reading nation is a winning nation" For a nation to grow it should be educated and public libraries play a crucial role in the nation by providing it with books and other resources (Jamadar 2022).

According to Bopape et al. (2021, p. 16) "one of the limitations of the physical spaces of public and community libraries visited is that they are still designed for the traditional role and capability of public and community libraries in South Africa. There is a need to concentrate more on developing concepts beyond this traditional role".

The Concept of Public Library

The public libraries are usually centrally situated within the neighborhood where it can be accessed by people from the nearby community with ease. Infrastructures like public library are to be situated within reach of people, that is there should be accessibility to libraries without a need to travel. They are an ideal place for providing various services to the community ranging from toddlers to old, aged people can be catered for by the public library. Public libraries serve as a place for attracting tourist with the aim of improving economy in the community. An ideal public library skyrockets the arts that is within the community like for example recording dances and other traditional activities and making them available on virtual and audio-virtual resources. According to IFLA (1994), books are no longer regarded as the primary resource of the public library. Recently public libraries are embracing the deferent types of source formats. Collection and information provided by the public library should be of good quality and standard taking into consideration the local demands. "To the developing as well as to the developed world this was an extremely important step. To the so-called developed world but also to other regions of the world this decision is highly relevant in order to catch up with demands from the users, asking for other media than books as more and more information and cultural products are found in form of audio-visuals, online-databases, CD-ROMs, multimedia and other computerized products. To the developing world it was an equally important decision in order to stress the fact, that communicating knowledge, information and culture in some regions takes place in the form of oral and aural transfer" (IFLA 1994). Moreover, UNESCO has been playing

a crucial role that of promoting the public libraries by utilizing its various programmes. In developing countries where there is still lack of public, community and school libraries to use, the available public libraries complement the provision of resources to all the people. Moreover, the public library provides the society with an environment in which every person get what they need. Public libraries bridge the gap of poverty that it there in rural areas so as even children from poor background can have access to learning resources. They also strive in providing learners with learning resources so that learners from different nearby communities can share resources that they do not have in their schools. There are several roles played by the public library. Public libraries play a crucial role in as far as the development of economic advancement in the community is concerned by means of their extended services and activities that are associated with the local businesses and economic activities (Biswas and Mahato 2020).

“It concluded that public libraries should identify themselves with the aspiration of economic development of the country. It proposes a re-focusing of public libraries towards the idea of an information Centre, to contribute towards local economic development by satisfying the information needs of citizens, small businesses, new entrepreneurs and community institutions. This new vision of the public library as an information Centre creates greater links and integration between the public library and its local community” (Soroya et al. 2014).

Public Libraries Promote Local Culture and History

Public libraries are indispensable in as far as being guardians of local history and folklore, they are also regarded as repositories of a community's collective memory. Moreover, they play the crucial role of “housing genealogical centers, settlement records, archives and map collections, library innovators are captivating patrons through storytelling, traditional festivities, and exhibits celebrating culture and myth. Libraries can also connect people to their communities by serving as civic information centres. They are ideal forums for public discourse about timely local topics such as zoning changes, new developments, and government initiatives. Furthermore, with information on community events, entertainment, and noteworthy destinations, libraries can welcome visitors and help understand and better appreciate the community” (Project for Public Space 2009).

According to UNESCO, cultural heritage is defined as “the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations”. UNESCO divides cultural heritage into tangible and intangible. Tangible cultural heritage is classified into these objects including buildings, historic sites, monuments, artifacts, and others. While the intangible cultural heritage cultural output is not in the form of monuments or objects, but a tradition inherited from ancestors which are hereditary, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and

the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (IFLA 2021). Cultural heritage preservation is one of the priorities /functions of a public library where public libraries collect and build a special collection like for example local content indigenous knowledge collection such as the Africana (Nove 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish ways of optimizing the usage of public and community libraries in the Limpopo Province.

Methodology

The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative methods. Open ended questions in the questionnaire were used which also invited some qualitative interpretation. According to Tenny et al. (2022) qualitative research “explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems”. Moreover, according to Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) qualitative approaches are intended to yield non-numerical statistically trustworthy data that informs us the number of people who do or think something. On the other hand, quantitative data is characteristically in numerical form, that is data that can be counted or measured in numerical values. The copies of 60 questionnaires were sent to public and community librarians. Out of 60 copies of questions sent to librarians 36 questionnaires were returned and the response rate was 60%.

Table 1. Number of Public Libraries in Each District in the Limpopo Province

District	Number of public libraries
Capricorn District	18
Mopane District	12
Sekhukhune District	13
Tzaneen District	20
Vhembe District	21
Waterberg District	23

Population and Sampling

As can be seen in Table 1, the Limpopo Districts are Capricorn, Mopani, Sekhukhune, Tzaneen, Vhembe and Waterberg. All these circuits form part of the sampling frame.

The research population for this study were public and community librarians in all six districts in the Limpopo Province. A convenience sampling was conducted to solicit information from public and community librarians working in public and community libraries in Limpopo Province. 10 questionnaires per district were sent

to the public and community librarians and 36 questionnaires were returned and participated in the study because they are the ones who provide library services to users and as a result all the six districts were covered.

Data Collection

Data was collected from public librarians by means of questionnaires and questions were based on library usage by the community, types of services provided, user's attitudes towards the library, and how they promote library usage of available resources in their libraries as well as the problems they encounter when serving the library community that hamper them to provide optimal library service. As well as the types of cooperation their libraries are in.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the questionnaire. All respondents answered all the questions that were asked. As a result, 36 public librarians provided their answers on library usage, type of promotions to promote library usage, the attitude of the community towards the library, the library cooperation that their libraries are in, the problems encountered when serving the library users and their views on what should be introduced to optimize library usage. The findings show the various types of library training as well as the various strategies used for promoting public library usage by the community. The findings also indicated the types of attitudes of the community towards the library as well as the types of library cooperation affiliated with it.

Table 2. Types of Trainings and Workshops Received

Types of trainings and workshops	N	%
Information literacy training	27	75
Basic computer skills	11	30.6
Digital literacy	6	16.7
Information searching skills	11	30.6
Customer service orientation	30	83.3
To write articles for local newspapers and for publishing	0	0

In Table 2, the result on types of trainings and workshops received indicated that most respondents 30 (83.3) received customer service orientation training. This could be due to the fact that new librarians should be trained so as to know how to provide services to users. More than half of 27 (75%) respondents indicated having received Information literacy training, a small percentage 11 (30.6%) or respondents received Information searching skills training as well as Basic computer skills training

and 6 (16.7) received Digital literacy training. No librarian indicated receiving training to write articles for local newspapers and for publishing.

Strand and Britz (2018, p. 373) stressed that “finally, assessment of library services has always been challenging. In South Africa, this task is exacerbated by lack of uniformity in data collection, lack of centralized direction of assessment planning, and lack of training of library staff in LIS assessment best practices. These challenges still exist in South African libraries today and contribute to information inequality and poverty of many of its people”.

The respondents were also requested to indicate the type of trainings apart from the ones indicated on the questionnaire, they feel they require to be offered in order to render their library services effectively. The respondents were requested to give multiple responses. The following trainings were indicated for the question “other trainings” that the public and community librarian need to receive: Generally training on promotion of library and information services was considered the topmost training required by the librarians, followed by the 10 (27.8%) book club establishment, 8 (22.2%) project management, 5 (13.9%) digital management, 3 (8.3%) records management, 3 (8.3%) cataloguing and indexing records management, 3 (8.3%) digital marketing, 3 (8.3%) best practice in managing the library, 2 (5.6%) ethics in workplace, 2 (5.6%) advanced computer skills, 1 (2.8%) respondent responded indicating information searching skills, writing minutes and reports skills, monitoring products skills, management skills, Microsoft team training, gender-based violence workshop.

“Library staff training and development is a crucial element in ensuring positive user experiences within libraries. A staff component consistently exposed to relevant training and development interventions should not be underestimated” (Lockhart and Majal 2012).

Table 3. Types of Strategies used to Promote Public Library Usage

Types of strategies to promote public library usage	N	%
To write articles for local newspapers and for publishing	8	22.2
I attend community meetings and speak about the library services	19	52.8
I visit nearby schools	36	100
When there is a meeting held by nurses, I request a slot and speak about the library services	5	13.9
When there is a meeting held by social workers, I request a slot and speak about the library services	1	2.8
When there is a meeting held by politicians, I request a slot and speak about the library services	5	13.9
When there are funerals, I request a slot and speak about the library services	1	2.8
By staging reading competitions for learners	29	80.6
By inviting speakers to address important issues identified.	6	16.7
By celebrating the special celebrations of library calendar events, National Library Week, World Book Day, Open Access Week, Librarians 'Day.	36	100%

Types of Strategies Used to Promote Public Library Usage

Table 3 shows the responses given by the respondents and indicated the types of strategies they used to promote public and community library usage. Generally, all 36 (100%) respondents indicated promoting the library by celebrating the special celebrations of library calendar events, National Library Week, World Book Day, Open Access Week, Librarians' Day. This could be due to the fact that national library events are being promoted annually national wide. Visiting nearby schools was also indicated by all respondents 36 (100%). More than three quarters 29 (80.6%) respondents indicated that they stage reading competitions for learners. 19 (52.8%) respondents indicated that they attend community meetings and speak about the library services. Only 6 (16.7%) of the respondents indicated that they by inviting speakers to address important issues identified. Very low 5 (13.9%) respondents indicated that When there is a meeting held by nurses, I request a slot and speak about the library services; When there is a meeting held by politicians, I request a slot and speak about the library services respectively and only 1 (2.8%) of respondents indicated that When there is a meeting held by social workers, I request a slot and speak about the library services; When there are funerals, I request a slot and speak about the library services respectively. This was consolidated by Komariah et al. (2017) who indicated that "Recommendation in a marketing context is the strategy of word-of-mouth marketing; it is generally much more effective in influencing others than other promotional efforts such as advertisements in the mass media, brochures, etc". Therefore, libraries should always strive to meet the information needs of actual users, so that they will become loyal supporters of the library. According to Kumah et al. (2018) promotion has everything to do with activities, materials and media which are utilized by the person who is marketing a specific product to make their potential clients aware of the products being offered.

Table 4. Causes of the Attitudes of the Community Towards Public Library Use

The attitudes of the community	N	%
Lack of interest	15	41.7
Lack of staff support	1	2.8
Lack of space for reading	15	41.7
Lack of relevant materials	28	77.8
Ignorance	24	66.7
Lack of motivation	25	69.4
Laziness	5	13.8
Lack of knowledge	28	77.8
Lack of user education	25	69.4
Lack of library awareness	28	77.8

The respondents were asked to indicate the attitudes of the community towards the public and community library whether positive or negative and if negative which negative attitude do they have. In Table 4, 9 (25%) of respondents indicated that the attitude of the community is positive. While on the other hand 27 (75%) respondents indicated that the attitude of the community is negative. If they ticked negative, they had to tick as many as possible of the causes of their attitudes on the questionnaires applicable to their libraries. All respondents who indicated yes to the question, what on their opinion the attitude of the community towards the public and community library services are? Tick "Yes" or "No", 28 (77.8%) respondents indicated Lack of relevant materials, and lack of library awareness respectively and lack of knowledge. Followed by 25 (69.4%) respondents who indicated the cause of negative attitudes being lack of motivation, and lack of user education respectively. 15 (41.7%) respondents indicated lack of space for reading. 15 (41.7 %) respondents indicated ignorance; this could be due to the fact that there is lack of user education. Perception is closely related to attitude, as perception is "a process by which organisms interpret and organize sensations to produce a meaningful experience of the world" (Gross 2004, p. 209). Petr and Aparac-Jelusic (2002, p. 25) noted that "some of the public have a negative perception of public libraries". As a results of what the users experienced in the libraries, they end up developing negative attitudes towards the library. This finding is confirmed by Eruvwe et al. (2015), who indicated that developing a high-quality library policy addresses specific irregular attitudes among students/users to meet up with set goals of the library.

Table 5. Types of Library Cooperation Affiliated to the Public Library

Types of library cooperation	N	%
Between the public library and the school library	10	27.8
Between the public library and the university library	1	2.8
Between the public library and the special library	2	5.6
Between the public library and the community library	15	41.7

In Table 5, respondents were asked to indicate the types of library cooperation they are affiliated to. 15 (41.7%) respondents indicated that they are in a cooperation which is between the public library and the community library. 10 (27.8%) respondents indicated being in the cooperation which is between the public library and the school. No respondent indicated the cooperation between the public library and the university library, and between the public library and the special library respectively. Grossland et al. (1993, p. 7) believe that "cooperation could include developing the library collection jointly, and all should work towards its success. Library cooperation can be regarded as a relationship in which each library contributes equally whatever it has in its stock, for example materials, personnel, programmes, grant writing and networking ideas, into a partnership. It is a joint effort, which is also referred to as joint-use, collaboration, consortium and networking or partnership. Its purpose is to provide wider access of available material to

users." "Where cooperation is running smoothly, a joint proposal can be undertaken for funding. There should be a teacher-librarian who also acts as a liaison to facilitate this partnership between the school, college, university and public library" (Woolfs 2001, p. 10).

The Problems the Librarians Encounter when they Serve the Library Users/Community

The respondents were asked to indicate if there are problems encountered when they are serving the library users/community, and they should indicate by ticking "yes" or "no". For those who ticked "yes" they were requested to indicate the type of problems they are encountering when serving the library users/community, as a result the open-ended question in the questionnaire invited for some qualitative interpretation and the responses were categorized according to the themes and the following themes were identified.

Outdated and Insufficient Library Books

Nearly all the respondents indicated that their libraries contain insufficient library resources which are outdated. The respondents also pointed out that there is high demand of books with low supply from the department and that there is an unavailability of library materials requested by the users. "A well-adjusted compilation of up-to-date and appropriate articles is needed to guarantee the retrieval of materials for users of different ages" (Dewe 2007). In essence, for the library collection to be effective, the collections need to be updated with current and relevant resources. Resources are bought to make available the most up-to-date, efficient and cost-effective access to all (College Centre for Library Automation 2007).

Difficult Library Users

Nearly all the respondents indicated that they encounter problems with users who are difficult to work with. Some respondents indicated that some users would make noise in the library and would not put their phones in silents. While other users don't want to cooperate or work with library staff members which makes it difficult to work in the library. Difficult users disturb other users by breaking the rules and regulation that need to be followed in the library which end up developing a negative impression of the public library because of those bad experiences like for example, difficulties with the library space, noise by other users and untidiness of the library (Coker 1993).

Technological Barriers

Most respondents indicated encountering problems with technology. They indicated lack of and insufficient computer in their libraries which create a resource sharing problem. They further indicated unstable internet as one of the major problems in providing the library services optimally. Some users steal the library materials especially when there is load shading. According to Okogwu (2019, p. 12), “the library should provide an alternative supply of power to support the library in the provision of energy needed for building electronic resources. Libraries should indulge in subscription of electronic resources that are relevant to the needs of the library users.” Despite the services offered by the public library, Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012, p. 3) observed that several factors, such as lack of infrastructure and bad networks, pose challenges for public library users. So much information is now made available on the internet and people prefer their own technological equipment (Sin and Kim 2008, p. 208).

Shortage of Study Space

Most respondents indicated that their library study space is quite small to accommodate all users at the same time. Some respondents indicated that the library is very small and need to be relocated to a bigger building. On the other hand, a mainstream library must make available sitting amenities for at least a quarter of the people of the society in which the library is situated (Ayorinde 2005). The library space should be extended so that it can house all users in the library at the same time. Libraries are said to be “a growing organism” and it should be kept in mind when planning and erecting a building for the library and provision should be made for an area for extension in time to come (Mahwasane 2017). Users who need to hang around outside for a space become yet more discouraged, since occasionally they will have to go back without having accessed the library (Shandu 2014).

Library Being Used for Something Else Other than for Library Purposes

Only some respondents indicated that the library reading space is being used by the municipality officials to hold meetings and events. Respondents also indicated the following comments that users are moved out of the study area while busy studying for the municipal officials to hold meetings or events in the study area. They even want to use the reading room to eat inside during their events, a person who have interest in libraries clearly know that books and food do not mix. Mahwasane (2017) indicated that library authority should avoid transforming and using the library for other purposes other than serving the library purposes to the community. It is not surprising that Mahwasane (2017) continues to indicate that “the value of the library has deteriorated in the last few years especially the libraries in the rural areas. The library should be valued as a place where learners should be

allowed access and be provided the opportunity to come into contact and be immersed with the books without any disturbance”.

Lack of User Education

Most of the respondents indicated user education as one of their main problems and stated that library users do not obey library rules. Other respondents indicated that the library users also steal library materials, and that the municipality should part of the library outreach programmes According to Mahwasane (2008, p. 33), “user education is concerned with the instruction and training that are given to the user by the librarian so that he/she will be able to make maximum use of the library and information sources. User education has to do with orientating, informing and instructing the user on how better to use both the library and information. It is concerned with both library training and information skills training. User education can take different forms”.

Lack of Library Awareness

The majority of respondents indicated that the other problem they encounter when serving the library users is lack of library awareness by library users. It is not surprising that the attitude of the communities towards the library is negative, this is because of lack of library awareness. Few respondents indicated that the low awareness services are their problem. According to Kumah et al. (2018, p. 40) “awareness is a crucial factor in the utilization of any information product”. “The services should be adapted to the needs of a particular community. Also, for the community libraries to be successful, they need to be established with the assistance of the community” (Mostert and Vermeulen 1998, pp. 12–14).

Conclusion

The findings of this study, optimizing the usage of public and community libraries in Limpopo Province shed light on the attitude of the community members towards the public library which was found to be negative with lack of knowledge, motivation, library education and interest being the most prominent responses which will negatively affect the public and community libraries. This will slow down the development of the communities in Limpopo if their attitude continues to be negative. Moreover, Various strategies that can be used to promote the library to optimize the usage of the public and community libraries included staging reading competition and by celebrating the special celebrations of library calendar events. To optimize public library usage, the librarians indicated that they need training like

copyright workshop, project management. Attending to these training needs will make librarians provide good library service rendering to the communities they serve.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study: Public and community library usage can be improved by effectively employing effective strategies for promoting library usage by the whole community from young to old with the aim of familiarizing the public and community library as a useful and indispensable resource in the community. The Africana for Limpopo which denotes that which belongs to Limpopo should be developed by starting something like the "*Limpopiana*" to promote and preserve that which belong to Limpopo. The public and community libraries should not be situated next to the tavern and the community hall because of the noise experienced when there are events. Library awareness to the community especially to the municipal authorities, should be conducted so that they will be able to understand the importance of libraries in the community and be able to take it seriously. Public and community library promotion activities to enhance library usage should be conducted on a regular basis with the municipality as part of the outreach program. The use of public and community libraries may also be increased by introducing awards for library users based on the user who borrows library materials more often than others. The Library and Information Board should request donations from companies like VODACOM, MTN, on behalf of Public and community librarians to meet their need for being trained on technology based- service.

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