



DOCUMENTATION AND USE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN SOUTH-EAST AND SOUTH-SOUTH GEOPOLITICAL ZONES OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Documenting indigenous knowledge is now widely discussed as a way of guaranteeing the social, cultural and economic interest of indigenous people and local communities. This paper investigated the methods through which public libraries in South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria document and use indigenous knowledge. A descriptive research design was used for the study, using questionnaire and interview as the instruments for data collection. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study using Pearson Product movement Correlation Co-efficient as data analysis tool. A sample size of 363 respondents was drawn for the study. Out of the total number of 363 copies of questionnaire distributed to the respondent, a total of 257, representing (70.8%) copies were retrieved for analysis. This study found out that the public libraries studied document different types of indigenous knowledge which includes: history, general traditional culture, traditional medicines, agricultural practices and folk tales. The recommendations were made that librarians in this field should aggressively address the issue of indigenous knowledge documentation and use.

Keywords; *Knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, documentation, use, public libraries,*

Introduction

There is growing interest in the documentation of indigenous knowledge, there are several benefits that accrue from the documentation of indigenous knowledge, for instance, it helps indigenous people and local communities prevent others from wrongly asserting intellectual property right over it. However, a poorly conceived documentation project may jeopardize the protection of indigenous knowledge or even third parties intellectual property rights in the documented indigenous knowledge (Okereke, and Ibeneme, 2025). Indigenous knowledge is culturally and environmentally oriented or based. Having established the benefits of indigenous knowledge, it is then imperative to devise means of effective identification, documentation and preservation of indigenous knowledge before they become extinct. In some societies across the globe, some cultural traditional practices like medicinal practices, festival, organic farming practices, cultural dances and songs, handicrafts, norms and values, are gradually going into extinction from our local communities. (Reyes-Garcia et. al., 2013). Indigenous knowledge documentation is primarily a process in which indigenous knowledge is identified, collected, organized, registered or recorded in some way, as a means

to dynamically maintain, protect manage, use, disseminate and /or protect indigenous knowledge according to specific goals. There is therefore, an urgent need for proper documentation of indigenous knowledge for posterity (Okereke, and Ibeneme, 2025).

Indigenous knowledge is home grown and is the cultural knowledge of a particular society. It is a way of life, skills, experiences, culture, insight and values embraced by people in a local community. These include but are not limited to health, fashion, food preparation, education, agriculture, religion, festivals, recreation, norms and values, institutions, politics and technology (Uzuegbu and Onwubiko (2021). Mahalik and Mahapr (2010), opined that the term indigenous knowledge is not confined to tribal groups or the original inhabitants of an area. Mabawonku (2002) defined indigenous knowledge as those ways of life that are often intertwined with family, religion, nature, land and the wisdom gained through generations of observing and teaching. Indigenous knowledge is seen as health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal techniques and exercises, applied singly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illness or maintain well-being. Amidst this, indigenous knowledge is a way of knowing, seeing, thinking and doing things by a community of people over time which has become a part of them, and is being orally transmitted from one generation to another.

These definitions however, emphasize the notion that indigenous knowledge is what people hold to be true. Mabawonku (2002) is also of the opinion that indigenous knowledge is a set of experiences generated by people living in those communities, and it provides problem – solving strategies for local communities, especially for the poor. Ntui and Offong (2008) opine that indigenous knowledge develops over centuries: therefore, it represents all the skills and innovations of people, and embodies the collective wisdom and resourcefulness of a community.

Indigenous knowledge is unique to a community, for instance, knowledge about preparation of some foods differ from one community to another, unless transferred to another or other communities, it remains and dies in that community because it is seldomly documented and preserved. Uzuegbu & Onwubiko (2021), is of the opinion that indigenous knowledge refers to age-long beneficial practices of native races across the globe. It is the knowledge that is developed within indigenous societies, independent of, and prior to, the dawn of modern scientific knowledge.

Documentation of indigenous knowledge is very essential. because documentation sees to preservation of such knowledge in its complete raw form for posterity, while dissemination/use focuses on encouraging access to the documented knowledge for planning and decision making, in all aspects of life practices such as agriculture, healthcare, food production and preparation, skill development, social relationship, natural resources management, leadership, medicine, healing rituals, indigenous library system where knowledge relating to sacred objects and materials of historic significance are kept in memory of the traditions and custodians includes, architecture, clothing, weaving, soap making blacksmithing, divination, and carving. It has emerged as a tool that can help impede further loss of indigenous knowledge, maintain it over time, support benefit sharing between holders of indigenous knowledge and those that use it, and ultimately protect it from unwanted uses. This study is therefore, set out to ascertain whether public libraries in South-East and South-South zones of Nigeria, document and use indigenous knowledge in their public libraries (Okereke, and Ibeneme, 2025).



Statement of the Problem

Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem solving among the local communities and especially for the indigenous people. It represents vital components of global knowledge on developmental issues. Despite the strategic role that indigenous knowledge plays in scientific and technological transformation of the society, it was observed that not much seriousness is attached to documentation and use of indigenous knowledge by public libraries in South-East and South-South zones. Moreover, reports of documented indigenous knowledge are rarely disseminated by these libraries. Studies have also shown that some indigenous knowledge of our fore fathers cutting across traditional medicinal practices, organic farming methods, informative festivals, cultural dances and songs, ancient handcrafts and lots more are fast disappearing from native communities (Reyes-Garcia, Gueze, et al., 2013). Then, in situation whereby most of the custodians of indigenous knowledge exist on the planet earth without passing down the knowledge they held, or are abandoned in the buzz of today's modernization, amidst the obvious observable disinterest of the present-day generation of native people in indigenous knowledge transmission, how then can indigenous knowledge be collected and preserved for the future? (Uzuegbu 2023). In view of this, this research sets out to examine the documentation, and use of indigenous knowledge by public libraries in South- East and South-South zones of Nigeria.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to find out whether public libraries in South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria, document, and use indigenous knowledge in their public libraries. The specific objectives are to:

- i. find out the types of indigenous knowledge that are being documented by public libraries in South-East and South-South zones of Nigeria.
- ii. find out the instruments used by the public libraries in documenting indigenous knowledge.
- iii. examine the reasons for utilization of indigenous knowledge in the public libraries studied.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions formed the major basis upon which this Study was carried out.

- i. What types of indigenous knowledge are documented and used by the public library?
- ii. What types of instruments do the public libraries use in documenting, indigenous knowledge?
- iii. What are the reasons for utilizing the indigenous knowledge in the public libraries?

Literature Review

Knowledge can be considered as an important economic and primary factor that helps in the advancement of the state economy. Gobet (2018), sees knowledge as a contextual information that can be used and applied as facts, concepts, rules, principles, thoughts, judgments, intuition and feelings. With the development of technology and communication networks and their facilitation, to exchange knowledge has become the most previous property of company and it is a critical organizational resource that provides a sustainable competitive advantage in a dynamic and competitive economy to achieve a competitive advantage.

Knowledge is a social phenomenon and hence it involves people. Knowledge consists of experience, values, contextual information, and insights acquired through experience. Knowledge is being considered one of the most critical drives of the economy. It is continuously generated throughout an organization (Bamidele, 2023).

Gurteen (2020) is of the opinion that knowledge is more of fluid laced with values, contextual information, experience and expert insight that is capable of providing a framework for assessing new ideas and information. To Bamidele (2023), the concept of knowledge is an exchangeable resource; this makes it an integral part of the social intellectual heritage. These characteristics include the fact that knowledge can be purposeful and useful, flexible, transferable, invisible, yet portable and have economic value.

This knowledge can be Implicit or explicit. Implicit knowledge is the type of knowledge gained from applying other learned information, such as how to guides, tutorials, or manuals. It isn't easy to articulate, document or share as explicit knowledge, but it's essential to capture, preserve, and share it across your organization so that everyone can benefit from it. Whereas, explicit knowledge is knowledge that is straightforwardly expressed and shared between people. It has been clearly documented in a tangible form such as standard operating procedure or a marketing report (Betsy, Jan. 7th 2025).

Indigenous knowledge is home grown and cultural knowledge of a specific society. It is a way of life, skills, experiences, culture, insight and values embraced by people in a local community. Every society or community has her local knowledge which cuts across all aspects of human living on which livelihood and survival depend. These include but are not limited to health, fashion, food preparation, education, agriculture, religion, festivals, recreation, norms and values, institutions, politics and technology.

The immense application of Indigenous knowledge was framed in Tella (2007) which stated that indigenous knowledge encompasses all human interactions that can be captured, shared and used for developmental purposes. Indigenous knowledge means knowledge that is quite unique to a given community, or society. Uzuegbu, (2023), sees indigenous knowledge as part of librarianship known as traditional knowledge. He opined that it can equally be seen as “local traditional practices of native or local people around the world”.

The problem is not whether the indigenous knowledge is beneficial to mankind or not, but is basically how to effectively collect and preserve indigenous knowledge across native communities before they disappear. Studies have reported that some indigenous knowledge of most native societies, especially in Sub-saharan Africa, cutting across traditional medicinal practices of the fore fathers, organic farming methods, informative festivals, cultural dances and songs, ancient handicrafts and lots more are fast disappearing from native communities (Uzuegbu, 2023).

The word documentation in librarianship literature simply means the quality of information materials gathered together in a library environment, or library collection. Documentation can equally be seen as a process in which the indigenous knowledge is being identified, collected and organized in a recorded manner for proper use or dissemination, to prevent it from permanent loss. We document indigenous knowledge for the following reasons:

To preserve it for posterity (future use), for economic benefits, For protection against an unauthorized use, to protect the intellectual property rights of the community, for proper collaboration among other actors, for social recognition, for educational purposes, for indigenous people to have full control over their indigenous knowledge, to modernize our agricultural activities (Amankwa, Bilson, and Atisoe 2022).



Dike, (2007) defined use as the capability to make use of suitable instructional resources and at the correct time in order to get an instructional purpose.

The overall development and progress of any society lie on the appreciation and utilization of their indigenous knowledge. The effect of indigenous knowledge on modern science and technology is quite notable. For instance, in India, their advancement in medicine is notably connected to the richness of her local habitant. India is bequeathed with wide arrays of vegetation which the indigenous people of India exploited for several purposes. The huge progress in India's medical profession is largely attributed to her incorporation of indigenous knowledge. Traditional medicinal herbs are researched upon and modified into conventional medicines. Native herbs, shrubs, seeds, roots, etc are significant constituents of India's pharmaceuticals. Amazingly, costly organic pesticides and insecticides in Nigeria's agricultural market which, in reality, are made of common substances available in our environment, such as neem oil (from neem seed or leaf), overgrown garlic bulbs, pepper seeds, ginger and onions peels, and ash liquids. Indigenous knowledge also cut across agriculture, nutrition, medicine, ecology, economic issues, and sustainability readily lend itself to traditional knowledge practices. (Bode, 2006). Indigenous knowledge is no doubt useful in so many respects. They can equally be used in the following areas of needs:

1. Health information to be presented with the interests of particular racial and ethnic group in mind and with local connections.
2. Online translation tools since so much of web-content is currently in English. Also an interactive web-site can be created to provide grammar practice.
3. Business development, like in the provision of information on agriculture and product/market prices, stocks, shares and etc.
4. Entertainment, for instance in the provision of information on neighbor-hood events and yearly destinations for family outings.
5. Estate and accommodation, for instance, in listings of local housing opportunities for investment purposes and for people looking for accommodation.
6. Cultural exploration development and oral history, reflecting unique cultural characteristics, attributes and beliefs. (*Aina, et. al., 2008*).

Public library

Public libraries are democratic institutions that are critical to the development of the socio-economic well-being of any nation. They acquire information resources that are processed and disseminated in a variety of formats to citizens in the community where they are located, regardless of race, gender and age (John-Okeke&Owoeye, 2011).

Public libraries are established and operated by state governments. They are usually open to members of the communities within which they are located, irrespective of status, gender or any type of discrimination. Their establishment, functions and services are backed by state legislation, and controlled by the relevant government agencies. The uniqueness of public library is its clientele, which is highly heterogeneous and all inclusive. It is the people's university and custodian of the intellectual heritage (Sadiku, Shuaibu, &Agboola, 2018). Public libraries play a crucial role in their communities and contribute to the lifelong learning opportunities to the people in their service areas by providing services that meet the social, educational and recreational needs of the people, irrespective of their background economic social status, creed or age(Chimah, Nwali& Ibiam 2021).

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This method was adopted because it assisted the researcher in collecting original data for describing a population large enough to be observed. The population of the study is 3971, comprising 73 professional librarians, 198 non-professional libraries, 11 Directors of the Public Libraries studied and 3700 library users. The breakdown of the figures is shown on Table 3.1 below.

Source: Personnel and Circulation Records of Libraries Studied.

Table 1. Breakdown of the Population of the Study

S/N	Public library	Professional librarians	Non-professional librarians	Heads of Libraries	Users	Total
	South-east					
1.	Abia State Public Library Board Umuahia (ABSLIB)	18	70	1	418	507
2.	Anambra State Public Library Board, Awka (ANSLIB)	5	9	1	301	316
3.	Ebonyi State Public Library Board, Abakaliki (EBSLIB)	2	7	1	209	219
4.	Enugu State Public Library Board, Enugu (ENSLIB)	3	8	1	307	319
5.	Imo State University Library Board, Owerri (IMSLIB)	12	45	1	458	516
	South-South					
6	Akwa-Ibom State Public Library Board, Uyo (AISLIB)	6	11	1	440	458
7.	Bayelsa State Public Library Board, Yenegoa (BASLIB)	2	5	1	318	326
8.	Cross River State Public Library Board, Calabar (CRSLIB)	4	10	1	404	419
9.	Delta State Public Library Board, Asaba (DSLIB)	6	18	1	341	366
10	Edo State Public Library Board, Benin (ESLIB)	3	11	1	300	315
11	Rivers State Public Library Board, Port Harcourt (RSLIB)	1	4	1	204	210
	Total	73	198	11	3700	3971

The sample size of the study is 363 comprising 73 professional librarians, 198 non-professional librarians, and 3700 library users. This sample size was obtained from Taro Yammane (1969) statistical tool for determining sample size using 0.025 (2.5%) margin of error. The sampling technique used is the stratified random sampling technique.

The instruments that were used for data collection for this study are interview and questionnaire. Interview enabled the researcher to obtain substantial information from the heads of libraries especially on questions that need more clarifications. The questionnaire was titled. Documentation and Use of indigenous knowledge by public libraries. Questionnaire was used to collect data from library personnel. This method enabled the respondents to answer questions quickly too. The questionnaire was captioned, documentation and use of indigenous knowledge. The interview schedule was used to elicit information from Directors of the Library Boards.



Research Question 1: What types of indigenous knowledge do you document in the public libraries?

Table 1. Types of Indigenous Knowledge documented by the libraries.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
A	History, e.g. kingship system in town, origin & development of towns, communal conflict.	207	44	6	0	257	3.74	Significant
B	General traditional culture	187	52	18	0	257	3.68	Significant
C	Traditional medicine, e.g. herbal medicine among various groups.	190	50	12	5	257	3.65	Significant
D	Folk tales, riddles, moonlight tales proverbs etc	205	48	4	0	257	3.78	Significant
E	Agriculture, e.g. planting, harvesting, fishing, hunting etc	213	42	2	0	257	3.82	Significant
F	Cultural activities like music and dance, mat making etc.	108	75	70	4	257	3.11	Not Significant
G	Politics, stratification & resources allocation	220	32	5	0	257	3.83	Significant

Significant mean value = 3.65

Table 1. shows that at a significant mean value of (3.65), respondents strongly agreed that they document history at a mean value of (3.74), general traditional culture (3.68), folk tales etc. (3.78), agricultural activities (3.82), other cultural activities like mat making, music and dance (3.11), this is not significant as few respondents indicated above. The implication of this low response is basically because most of our cultural activities like mat making, music and dance in South-East and South-South have been partially or totally abandoned. Reasons being that the knowledge was not transferred to the new generation for continuity. If this is not put in check, it will result in total extinction of the culture. Meanwhile, political activities recorded highest at a mean value of (3.83). This analysis really shows that they really document indigenous knowledge in their different public libraries.

Research Question 2: What types of instruments do you use in documenting indigenous knowledge in the public libraries?

Table 2. Types of instruments used in documenting indigenous knowledge

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
A	Video recording is the most appropriate instrument that is used in documenting indigenous knowledge.	180	80	50	7	257	3.21	Significant
B	Digital camera is mostly used in documenting indigenous knowledge.	70	30	50	107	257	2.24	Not Significant
C	Documentation of indigenous knowledge is done by writing materials.	142	62	40	13	257	3.29	Significant
D	Documentation of indigenous knowledge is done by personal observation.	47	33	63	114	257	2.05	Not Significant
E	Teleconferencing is a method of documenting indigenous knowledge	10	41	82	124	257	1.75	Not Significant
F	Oral interview is a method of documenting indigenous knowledge	8	24	92	133	257	1.53	Not Significant
G	Audio recording is a method of documenting indigenous knowledge	132	78	40	7	257	3.30	Significant

Significant mean value = 2.50

Table 2. Showed that the mean responses on the types of instruments used for documentation in public libraries of South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria, is (2.50) significance mean value. Item 1, video recording is (3.21), digital camera is (2.24), this is below the mean value which made it non significant. Item 3, documenting by writing recorded high at (3.29), while item 4, documenting by personal observation recorded below the mean value at (2.02), this clearly showed that documenting through personal observation is not reliable. Item 5, teleconferencing equally recorded below at (1.75), indicating that many disagreed using teleconferencing as means of documentation. Item 6, oral interview also recorded low at (1.53), this indicates that most of them don't use oral interview as means of documentation in their public libraries because is not reliable. Item 7, audio recording recorded higher than the significant mean value at (3.30).

Research question 3. What are the reasons for utilizing indigenous knowledge in the public libraries?

Table 3. Reasons for the Utilization of indigenous knowledge in the public libraries

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
	What are the reasons for utilizing indigenous knowledge in your public library							
A	For Healthcare practices (Traditional medicine)	120	130	7	0	257	3.43	Not Significant
B	For Food preparation	200	44	10	3	257	3.71	Significant
C	For entertainment, impacting moral behavior and maintenance of peace and unitys.	104	150	5	0	257	3.40	Not Significant
D	For economic gain (exporting our cultural activities)	118	120	15	3	257	3.36	Not Significant
E	For Agricultural practices like planting, harvesting, fishing, hunting etc.	209	40	8	0	257	3.78	Significant
F	For promoting of culture	178	68	11	0	257	3.64	Significant
G	For Politics and governance.	148	92	17	0	257	3.50	Not significance

Significant mean value = 3.54

Table 3. revealed that respondents on where indigenous knowledge are been utilized agreed that they utilize it on healthcare practice like traditional medicine etc. as it recorded a mean value of (3.34), food preparation also recorded a mean value of (3.71) as 200 and 44 respondents shows they utilize it for entertainment, impacting morals, maintaining peace and unity in their various communities, at a high significance mean value of (3.40) for economic gain like exporting our cultural activities, 118 and 40 respondents agreed using it at a high significant mean value of (3.36), for agricultural practices, (3.78). Cultural activities also have a high mean value of (3.64), while political activities equally recorded a high significant mean value of (3.54).

Discussion of Findings

This section presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings based on the specific objectives of the study.



Types of indigenous knowledge being documented by the public library staff in South-East and South-South zones of Nigeria

This study reveals the types of Indigenous knowledge being documented by public library staff of South-East and South-South zones of Nigeria to include, history, for instance, kingship system in town, origin and development in town, communal conflicts, general traditional culture, traditional medical practices, herbal medicines, Folk tales, riddles, moonlight tales, proverbs, agricultural practices, cultural activities, politics and governance etc., at a significant mean value of (3.65). This is an indication that public library staff actually document indigenous knowledge in South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

The types of instruments used in documenting the indigenous knowledge

Research question two investigated the types of instruments used in documenting the indigenous knowledge by public library staff of South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The findings show that they use video recordings, digital camera, writing materials, personal observation, teleconferencing, oral interview, audio recording, etc. This table recorded not significant to almost all the options, except audio recording and painting/illustration which recorded (3.30%) and (3.38%) respectively.

Utilization of indigenous knowledge

Research question on where they utilize the indigenous knowledge in their public libraries revealed that they were being utilized for health care practices, traditional medicinal practices, for economic gains, agricultural practices, cultural activities, political activities etc.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study

1. The types of indigenous knowledge being documented by the public libraries studied, it was revealed that they document the following indigenous knowledge which includes: kingship system in town, traditional culture, traditional medicines, folk tales, riddles and moonlight tales, proverbs, agricultural activities, political activities etc.
2. The types of instruments they use in documenting the indigenous knowledge were revealed as follows: Video recorder, digital cameras, writing materials, personal observation, teleconferencing, oral interviews, audio recording etc.
3. The findings on where they utilize the indigenous knowledge revealed that they utilize the indigenous knowledge properly for developmental activities like: healthcare activities for food preparations, for entertainment, for economic gains like exporting the rich cultural activities etc. It is therefore, recommended that our indigenous knowledge practices should be properly utilized for so many beneficial activities like, medicinal practices, organic agricultural activities and other cultural activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are, made:

1. Documentation exercise, which is not only indispensable in human society but a lively field of research, brings the marginalized meanings of collection and preservation to practice in librarianship and should be explored.
2. Library and information science educators should explore and teach scientific methods of documentation studies, and equally deepen the scope and coverage of

- indigenous knowledge.
3. Researcher(especially of qualitative methods) that focused on documentation of indigenous knowledge should be promoted and encouraged among library and information science scholars and postgraduate students.
 - 4.. There should be training and retraining of public library staff on the proper documentation, preservation, dissemination and use of indigenous knowledge in South-East and South-South zones of Nigeria.

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