

LIBRARY INCLUSION: IMPLICATION FOR LIBRARANS

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Abstract

Social inclusion is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions that enable full and active participation of every member of the society in every aspect of life including decision-making. The growing social injustices/exclusion has hampered the peaceful relationship that existed among the library, its users and the academic environment. Social exclusion has been noticed in the operations of library services and policies, in areas of infrastructure, facilities, information resource provisions, attitude of librarians and policies among others. It is the opinion of the researcher that social inclusion is the panacea for social, economic, cultural and academic growth in any academic environment in which library services and policies act as agents of social inclusion and change. The implication of the study for librarians is that, for the library to play its role as a social agent of change and transformation, less privileged students (economically disabled), physically disabled students, cultures, values, and individual differences, among others should be given a space in the library to utilize the facilities, resources there in there should be total inclusion of the various idiosyncrasy of individuals library services and provision which will foster social justice and cohesion.

Keyword: Library Services, Inclusion, Librarian

Introduction

The 21st century library has witnessed tremendous innovations: and expansions in areas of advancements in information technology, which has triggering information explosion and the hunger for access to qualitative information for social development. Access to information resources has become a major puzzle for information seekers that is why, Librarians have been positioned to act as information source providers and also make access to information easier accessible for patrons. However, when there is availability and accessibility of Library resources and the needed services by patrons can be used to foster social inclusion in our academic institutions and society at large. Social inclusion explains the extent to which an individual, family groups, organizations, communities and so on can integrate fully and participate in society to control their destinies while taking into cognizance a variety of variables about education, economic resources health, housing recreation (library service) culture employment and even civic engagements

Again, it empowers the poor and the marginalized people to take advantage of global opportunities. It encourages people to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and also ensures that they enjoy equal access to services, markets, political, social and physical spaces. Academic libraries provide a variety of services that support and expand teaching, learning and research according to the capabilities of institutions (Bitagi & Garba, 2008).

The Concept of Social Inclusion

According to the World Bank, social inclusion is the process of improving the items on which individuals and groups take part in society- improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity. Social inclusion according to UNDESA working papers (2015) states that, is:

A Relational process of increasing opportunities for social participation, enhancing capabilities to fulfil normatively prescribed social roles, broadening social tiers of respect and recognition and at the collective level enhancing social bonds, cohesion, integration or solidarity.

Social inclusion can refer to a process of encouraging social interaction between people with different socially relevant attributes or an impersonal institutional mechanism of opening up access to participation in all spheres of social life (World Bank, 2013; WHO, 2008, Sen, 2000).

Boota, (1996) sees social inclusion as the process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. Also looking at inclusion in education UNICEF, (2015) believes that it is a means of creating conducive learning and teaching environments for all children in regular schools, regardless of difference in socio economic background, disability, race, colour, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity, among others. Inclusive education is an approach that looks into what is needed to transform the educational systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners (UNESCO, 2003). However there are certain questions that prompt action as it concerns social inclusiveness. They includes:

- What category of library users has access to knowledge?
- Who are the user community that utilizes the library and what are their information or knowledge needs?
- Does the library have available technology that aids creation and access to knowledge?
- How can the library boost its knowledge base by providing the requisite knowledge needed for the library to function?
- Can the different users of the library participate in the content creation of the library so that all their voices can be heard?

Finally, many factors may hinder inclusion in the ICT era including the cost of Information communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, barriers to ICT and bandwidth, electronic devices, their accessories and applications, ICT skills competencies for users and information specialists, and copyright. Language barriers, gender inequality, publishing skills, software problems and issues

Forms of Social Exclusion in Libraries

There are varied forms or dimensions of social exclusions in libraries, they include:

1. Social exclusion, which is manifested in the following;
 - Limited access to information resources needed by an information seeker
 - Limited access to quality educational resources
 - limited access to the physical library (lack of provisional access for those with disabilities in terms of entering into the library, access to information resources for the blind, the deaf, dumb, lame and for other categories of physically challenged.
 - Limited awareness of the information resources and services available in the library.
 - Limited access to welfare, housing and life opportunities for librarians this affects their effectiveness.
 - Limited access to reading space, recreational space, and practical training on how to access information resources, recreation, and sick bay.
 - Limited access to ICT due to limited ICT skills.
 - Limited internet services and manpower (personnel)
 - Restricted membership of the library (student, non- student, show evidence of studentship/staff ship, etc.)
2. Economic exclusion: this is manifested in:
 - Limited access to employment opportunities (man know man syndrome)

- Limited access to services, infrastructure and amenities.
 - Restricted membership of the library based on payment of school fees or library registration fees, library dues, etc.
3. Political exclusion is manifested in the following:
- Not being part of the decision-making process.
 - Isolation from the processes and structures that facilitate increased participation (collection development policies and physical building plan of the library, resource acquisition).
4. Cultural exclusion is manifested in the following:
- Language: most library users are excluded through spoken language (exclusion from broad cultural practices).
 - Some cultures/individuals permit discussion/taking while studying but the library is restricted to absolute quietness which negates individual choice of value.

Causes of Social Exclusion in Libraries

So many factors can cause reasons for social exclusion, especially in libraries.

1. If you are not among the class of people acknowledged using the facilities, resources and services of the library. (Student, staff and other users) You may be excluded.
2. Unable to fulfil requirements for the membership/registration to use the facilities of the library.
3. Librarians' attitudes especially negative attitudes can turn off prospective library users from coming to use the library and its services.
4. Facilities: if a disabled person cannot climb the staircase of the library he/she is already excluded; the wheelchair clutches, and walk sticks may prevent such a group from accessing the library services and resources.
5. The kind of services provided in the library can determine whether people can come to the library after a first attempt. Providing current awareness services (CAS), and selective dissemination of information (SD53) using reference platforms can help bring people to the library as consistent patrons.
6. Library rules and policies can either include or exclude people from using the library.
7. Lack of advertisement/marketing of library products and services limits the patronage of the library

Effects of Social Exclusion in Libraries

According to a DFID policy paper of 2005 on "reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion" explained that social exclusion increases the level of economic inequality in the society and reduces the poverty-reducing impact of a given growth rate. Social exclusion in libraries can cause the following effects:

1. It increases the lack of awareness: When those who are supposed to use the library are excluded for any form or reason, the level of awareness may be reduced.
2. It reduces the level of productivity in terms of the quality of research and the academic performance of students.
3. It creates feelings of injustice and imbalanced Library service provisions.
4. It reduces the patronage and use of information resources provided by the parent institution.
5. It encourages mediocrity among the community of users that should use the library
6. It does not promote the image of social equality and equal opportunities.
7. Social exclusion encourages unhealthy competition within the system.
8. It does not promote the image of the library as the information hub of an institution because a large population of library users is excluded from the scheme of things.

Who Deserves Inclusion

Inclusion in the library is an approach that seeks to address the information needs and seeking behaviour of all students, lecturers, staff and visitors of all levels, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization or exclusion. In this context, the library should strive to accommodate all regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, cultural, emotional, linguistic, economic or other conditions.

Here are individuals who deserve inclusion thus:

- Persons with disability - physically challenged, deaf, dumb, visually impaired, among others.
- Persons with economic challenges: those unable to pay fees, dues register and afford any payment or subscriptions.
- Persons with language/linguistic issues: Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Eik, Tbibio languages that cannot use the official language.

- Persons who want recreation, a place for leisure, relaxation discussion, rest (sleep) and a place to watch movies.

Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges of Inclusion and Implication Librarians

To overcome these challenges as earlier discussed in the preceding sections, the following strategies are suggested:

- Librarians and management should be exposed to the new methods of library operations, services and knowledge sharing in other accommodate the interest of the library users.
- There should be a deliberate increase in budgeting allocation to libraries tenable they cater for the emerging needs of the library which include Information resources, human resources, structural, technological and infrastructural needs. The meeting of these needs will facilitate access to EP's various information resources and services of the library
- An intensive awareness and sensitization campaign should be carried out by librarians to inform library users of the resources in the library available for their use and the myriad services offered by the library to enhance information utilization.
- Training and retraining of librarians for inclusive library operations should be encouraged through workshops, attendance to seminars and conferences, symposiums and so on.
- Professional librarians should be employed to handle sensitive knowledge organization and dissemination operations and duties in the library
- The library and information science curriculum should be modified to include courses that will reflect and train upcoming librarians in inclusive education and services.
- Library policies should be made flexible enough to accommodate the information needs and seeking behavior of diverse library users to ensure total inclusiveness of librarians in library operations and services.
- There should be an avenue for librarians and management to consult and collaborate to bring out and understand the special needs of disabled library users in order to proffer solutions to assist these users.
- Collaborating with professionals in other areas (psychologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, special education staff, speech and language pathologist) to help identify the needs of people in their discipline and will help to enhance service delivery in the library.
- Librarians should engage in orientation for those with special needs with the user community.

Conclusion

The library is an intellectual service organization that is open to different categories of users. The use of the library is a right and not a privilege for everyone in the academic environment not minding their health or status. Based on this, a conscious effort should be made by both librarians' and library users to ensure the adequate and effective utilization of library resources and services by all who desire to use them.

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