

AN EVALUATIVE STUDY OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN NASARAWA STATE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Abstract

Ineffective library services could affect the growth and development of children especially in their academic pursuits. This study was therefore conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of library and information services to children in Nasarawa State Public Library. Descriptive survey research method was used for the study which the target population was 39 comprising of children between the ages of 8-12 and staff of Nasarawa State Public Library. Questionnaire, interview and observation were used for collecting data. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage tabulation were used in analyzing the data. Results revealed that the services provided at the children's section in Nasarawa State public library are effective. The study revealed that lack of trained personnel with necessary knowledge of the group, lack of adequate funds and information resources as well as inadequate information technology are factors hindering effective library and information services in Nasarawa State Public Library. In order to enhance library services provision, some suggestions such as provision of adequate financial support, proper staff development programme through training and retraining within and outside the library, provision of ICT facilities such as Internet services to mention but a few were recommended.

Keywords: Evaluation, Information Services, Children, Public Library, Nasarawa State

Introduction

Libraries are repositories of information and knowledge. Islam (2004) argued that library is a learning institution which stores knowledge treasures and is usually maintained and organized by a well-trained personnel or a professional. They are distinguished into various types in order to make available their information resources and to reach out their services for user's satisfaction. Some of such libraries are Public Libraries, Academic Libraries, Special Libraries, School and National Libraries. The primary concern of every library is to provide adequate information resources to users, educate or train them on how to locate information sources as well as disseminate information resources to them. This is mainly to assist the users especially the adolescents and children to self-improve themselves in information searching exercise.

Children and adolescents mainly have access to Public Libraries to satisfy their information needs..

Public library is a type of library that serves the entire public. It is designed to be accessed by the entire public and is funded through public resources. The public library staff are usually librarians and para-professionals. Public library is popularly referred to as Information Center used by different people, containing variety of information sources that are made available to users. To support this, Aina (2004) stated that some libraries are restricted to serve a specific purpose to some group of people, but the public libraries with varieties of resources do not have such restriction to users of any kind. Its expectation is to serve every citizen in the community where it belongs without discrimination and age differences. Parvathamma and Reddy (2009) opined that public libraries are known for improvement of literacy with all kinds of information through educational resources being made available. Similarly, Akanwa (2010) argued that public library is a type of library equipped with resources known as information and normally renders its services to every citizen of the country which consists of all age groups, both educated and non-educated.

A survey of recent literature revealed that libraries according to Usoro and Usanga (2007) continue to play a major role in fostering literacy in our nation, particularly among those segments of the population that need special assistance in developing literacy skills, such as preschool, elementary school children and secondary school students. Public libraries are in a remarkable position to expose children to great quantities of print and meaningful language opportunities that researchers have emphasised are crucial to reading achievement. Celano and Neuman (2001) further stressed that children who had been exposed to a library preschool program showed a greater number of emergent literacy behaviors and pre-reading skills than did those in a control group.

In every public library, there is a space or section mapped out as the childrens' section. In this section of the library, children are served with library resources and programmes that correspond with their ages. Akanwa (2006) defined the childrens' section of the public library as that which makes available, books, activities and information resources without charges of any kind to the children at all age brackets. The public library does not only provide information and library services but also available is a librarian that supervises and serves as a guardian to the children in the use of resources in the section. According to The World Book Encyclopedia (2012), a child that is below 3 years of age is an infant and cannot take part in any group activity nor will he or she be able to use the library, while a child of 17 years can either make use of the model school library, or the public library, and where there is none, can move straight into the adult library. Pearl (2013) expressed the view that children between the ages of 3 years to 16 years can make use of public libraries and are referred to as children in public libraries.

The public library through its collections supports children's information needs and contributes to their intellectual, emotional, social, educational and language development. Akanwa and Akanaga (2012) indicated that the public library also makes

available information resources such as books and non-book materials to support and aid the lives of the children. They further argued that the information resources equally expose them to a wider range of endless opportunities to learn and update themselves on the recent developments. Akanwa and Akanaga (2012) also noted that of all the services provided for children by the public library, the most important of them is to ensure that the child has books to read for information and recreation purposes and the audio visual materials to view. The following information resources are expected to be found in the children's section of the library: books, journals, computers, recordings of all types of study, magazines, newspapers, filmstrips, video tapes, slides and so on. Literature has always argued that public library provides varieties of services to children and these services are in form of books, extension activities (programmes), audio visual resources and Information Communication Technology (ICT). Books are crucial materials necessary for children's growth and development; therefore, the public library should make available quality literature for children's use. Thus, the education, the enlightenment and entertainment provided by the public library is meant to be enjoyed by children of every locality.

The introduction of ICT skills is one of the major functions of the public library to children since they need ICT skills to be able to function effectively in the present jet age. In the past, libraries had a much more narrow definition – they were places to check out books, and that was about it. Over the years, advent of ICT has helped to bring new community activities to local libraries. Now, with the rise of the Internet and digital media, libraries including public libraries have been changing in order to keep up with the demands of their patrons (www.publiclibraries.com). A lot of literature in librarianship have indicated that children should be encouraged to acquire ICT skills at very tender age, such that they will not develop phobia for new technology. The children's section should organize technology training classes, where computer fundamentals, operating systems, e-reader and skills in searching the Internet could be taught to the children. These programmes will help the children to get a good grasp of the use of new technology (www.publiclibraries.com).

However, from the above sentences, there is no doubt that provision and guidance in the use of library and information services and literature/ books are very essential in children's life for their intellectual, emotional and social adequate growth and development. This is why it is important for State Governments to establish, equip, and maintain public libraries in their states such that children will benefit from the use of such library services. The extent to which public libraries with particular reference to Nasarawa State Public Library provides library and information services to children in the locality is what this study has evaluated and ascertained.

Literature Review

The importance of public library in the development of a child cannot be over-emphasised. Every child needs books and library in their life development. Public library serves as an institution that makes available information bearing materials and renders services to people of different age brackets – young and old. Pearl (2013) specifically pointed out that the library is indeed the cultural centre of a child, therefore, the public library should make available records of best man creation and thoughts from all historic

periods. The contributions and developments in music, arts, literature and ideas man has held about himself, in his concept of the universe, in his beliefs about religion and the mortality of man are also expected to be made available by the library. According to Walter (2003), the services being rendered to the children by public library have been dated to over a century ago. There is no doubt that there is awareness that the services of the public libraries in particular are a crucial part of the national socio-economic development and the improvement of life in general and its quality. Usoro and Usanga (2007) postulated that the libraries long-life education is needed by the children in accordance to the national policy of education in Nigeria. They further argued that most children (especially those from rural areas or economically disadvantaged backgrounds) first meet books in schools, and had limited access to books in the homes or communities. No one should doubt the importance of children's libraries to children and their families all over the world. They are often the first encounter with life long learning, introducing the readers and learners of the future to an exciting, rich and varied resources. The 21st century has brought with it many challenges as well as many opportunities. It is up to the managers and practitioners of public library services to make sure that children have the best start in their reading and learning lives. The children's services librarian must plan, market, implement and evaluate activities and services to children of all ages, based on their development and interests, and the objectives of the library (Aagaard, Dunne, East, Indergaard and Kruger, 2003).

The succession of the universal basic education relies essentially on the extension of the library information services to the children. Public libraries in Nasarawa State are expected to extend library services to nomadic populations, remote communities, rural primary schools, and day care centers. If we want children and all citizens, to acquire literacy, we must reach them as well as provide reading materials (Unagha, 2008, Correa, 2002). Apotiade (2002) revealed that a successful national development can be attained through education if the masses can attain literacy that is really necessary for any successful nation today. He submitted that public libraries contribute greatly to the nation's growth by making available books and non-book materials that meet and support the educational needs of both adults and children. It is for this cause that the public libraries came into existence.

Although some Nigerian public libraries have reading materials, most of them do not have current information resources. This could be the reason why Bankole (2000) stated that States and Open Library benefits in Nigeria have not recorded much development. Akanwa and Akanaga (2012) observed that unlike Imo State Public Library, Nasarawa State Public Library has not also acquired children's books in recent years, probably because the capital budget has not been released to the library for sometime now. The library had depended on donations from foreign bodies. There was also a total lack of ICT services in the children's section. Ikem and Ajala (2004) argued that lack of fund is a real handicap for ICT application in libraries and Nwachukwu (2006) equally disclosed that the problem of funding is crippling the services of the public library. This has caused a lot of problems such as inadequate provision of resources, physical facilities and lack of ICT facilities in public libraries. Public libraries are losing their staff on daily basis. As normally indicated, borrowing a common pool of resources is the way of the library. From books, to CDs, to computers and Internet usage, libraries offer services to their communities free of charge

(www.publiclibraries.com). These services are funded by the government, and by extension tax revenue. Unfortunately, the funding libraries have received in recent years has not always been enough. Thus provision of current information resources and Internet services are yet to be achieved in most public libraries in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Public libraries are established in order to provide adequate library services to users. Some of the public libraries have reading resources that are not current. Most public libraries due to economic crunch affecting the country have not of recent acquired children's books. This has affected the library services rendered by the children services librarian. ICT facilities are equally not available in these libraries as observed by the authors. Public library users especially the children have little or no knowledge of computer usage and this has negatively affected their academic and social development. However, studies have shown that the services provided by the public libraries particularly to children are not satisfying their information needs. Most children depended only on school activities or programmes for their information needs because the public libraries are providing inadequate services to users. This situation is becoming worrisome considering the fact that provision of inadequate services to children would lead to low use of the public library, its resources and services by the children and this would invariably affect the academic performance of the children. It is on this background that this study intends to investigate the extent to which services of the public libraries are satisfying the information needs of its users, particularly, the children. This study, therefore, evaluates the library and information services to children in the Nasarawa State Public Library.

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of Public Library services to Children in Nasarawa State Public Library.
2. Evaluate the competency of the librarians serving in the Children's Section of the library.
3. Identify factors affecting the provision of services at the Children's Section of Nasarawa State Public Library
4. Identify ways of enhancing better provision of library services to children in Nasarawa State Public Library.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research was used to collect data from the Nasarawa State Public Library. The population of the study comprised of thirty three children met within the Nasarawa State Library Board complex. The staff in the children's section as at the time of the study were 6 giving a total of thirty-nine (39) population of both children and staff used for the study. The instruments employed for data collection were the questionnaire, interview and observation. The questionnaire was distributed to the children (8-12 years), who visit the library mostly on Saturdays. The librarians in the children's section of the library were interviewed to obtain information for the study and direct observation was undertaken to physically assess some information resources in the library.

Data analysis and discussion

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of library and information services to children in Nasarawa State Public Library, respondents were asked to identify with some statements that could reveal the level of effectiveness of library and information services in Children's Section of the State Public Library. The finding is presented in Figures 1-4.

Effectiveness of Library Services to Children in Nasarawa State Public Library

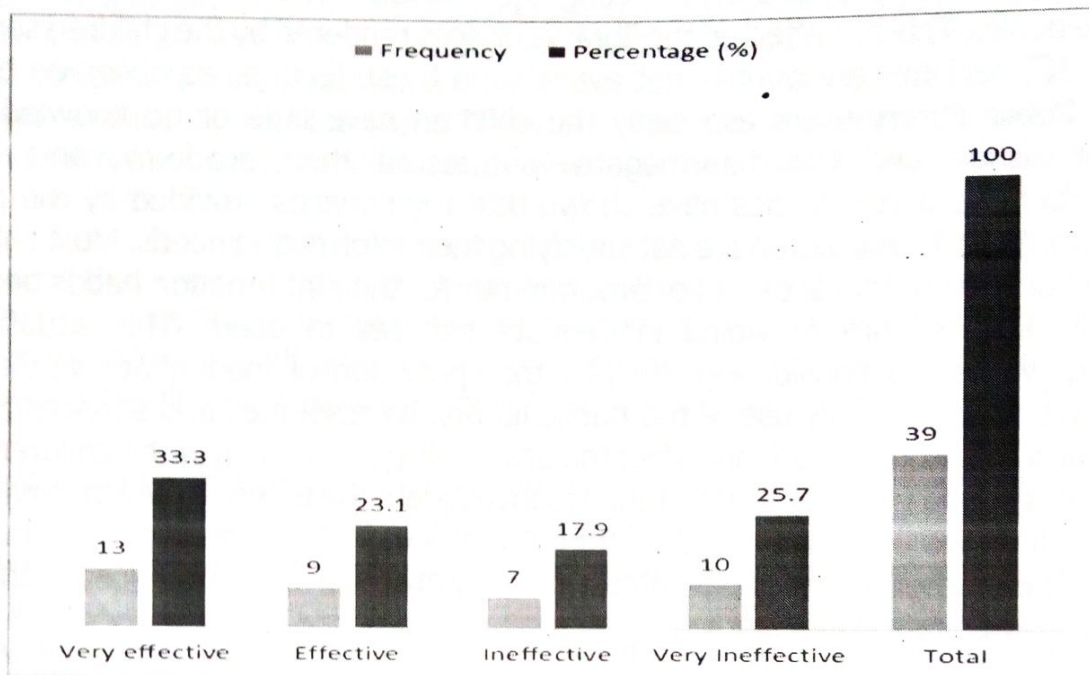


Figure 1: Bar Chart showing the effectiveness of library services to children

Figure 1 indicated that 33.3% of the respondents signified childrens' library services in Nasarawa State Public Library as very effective, 23.1% signified the childrens' library services as effective, 17.9% signified ineffective while 25.7% considered the services as very ineffective.

In the same vein, availability of adequate library services in the children's section of the library equips children with lifelong learning and literacy skills enabling them to participate in society. Put differently, by providing a wide range of materials and activities, public libraries provide an opportunity for children to experience the enjoyment of reading and the excitement of discovering knowledge and works of the imagination. Children and their parents should be taught how to make the best use of a library and how to develop skills in the use of printed and electronic media. Public libraries have a special responsibility to support the process of learning to read, and to promote books and other media for children. The library usually provides special events for children, such as story telling and activities related to the library's services and resources. Children are normally encouraged to use the library from an early age as this will make them more likely to remain users in future years. In multilingual countries books and audio-visual materials for children are made available in their mother tongue (Aagaard, Dunne, East, Indergaard, Kruger, 2003).

Competency of the Staff in the Children's Section of the Library

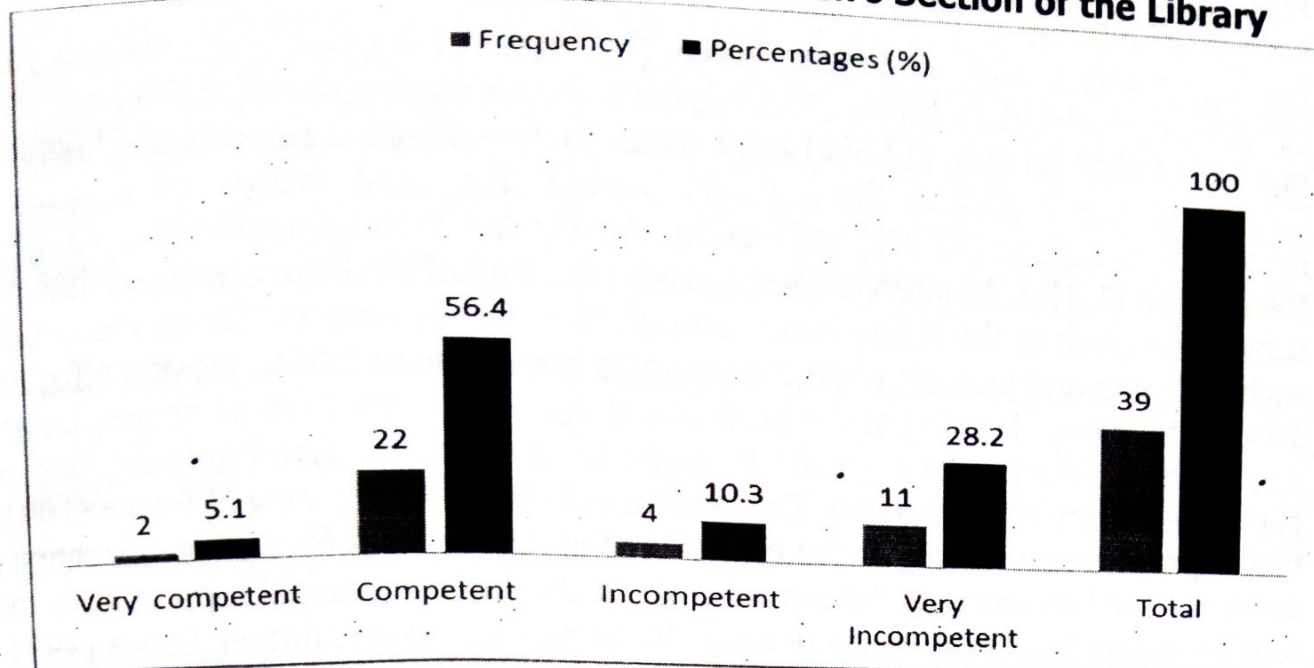
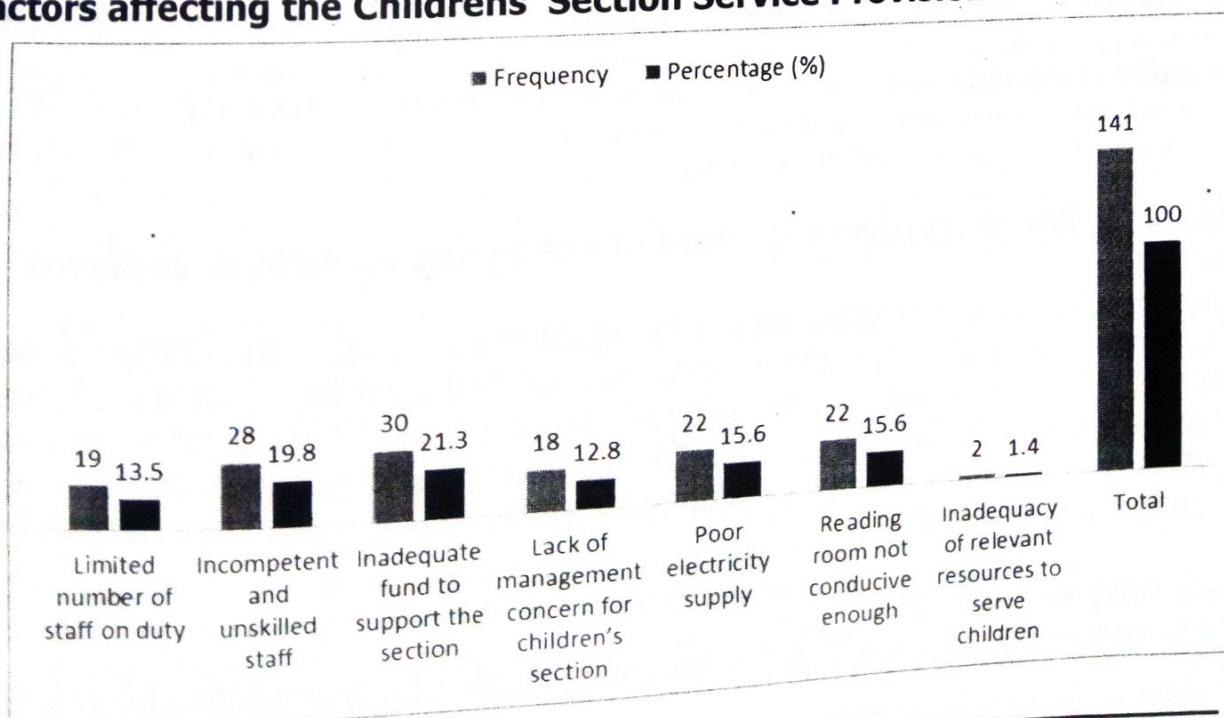


Figure 2: Bar Chart showing the competency of the children's section

Figure 2 revealed that 5.1% of the respondents considered staff at the children's section of the Nasarawa State Public Library very competent, 56.4% considered them competent, 10.3% of them considered the staff as incompetent, while 28.2% of them considered the staff as very incompetent. This finding is not surprising judging from the finding in Figure 1 where over 50% of the respondents indicated that the library and information services provided in the children's section of Nasarawa State Public Library is effective. It is only where the library staff are competent that the library services provided would be effective. Competency in this paper is measured against years of experience in the Childrens' Section of the library; and the observations of the authors confirmed that some of the library staff have been working in the Childrens' Section of the library more than 10 years. The experience gathered over the time has helped them to render effective services to children.

Factors affecting the Childrens' Section Service Provision



Competency of the Staff in the Children's Section of the Library

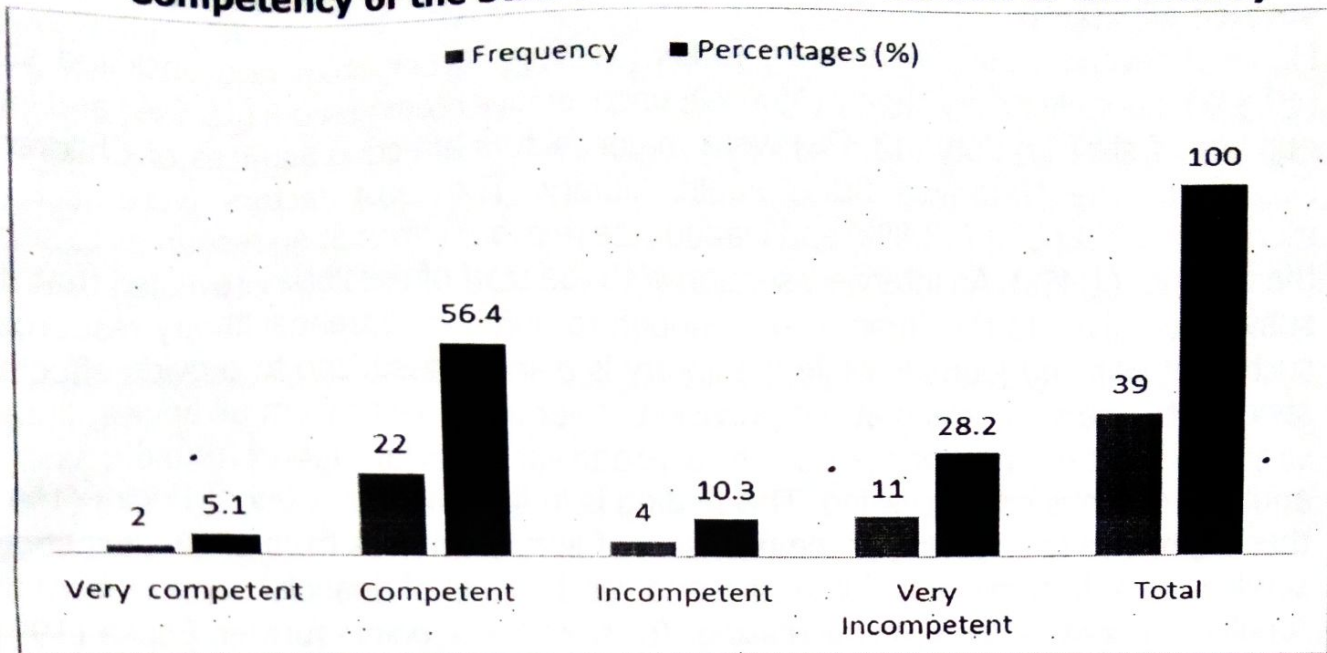


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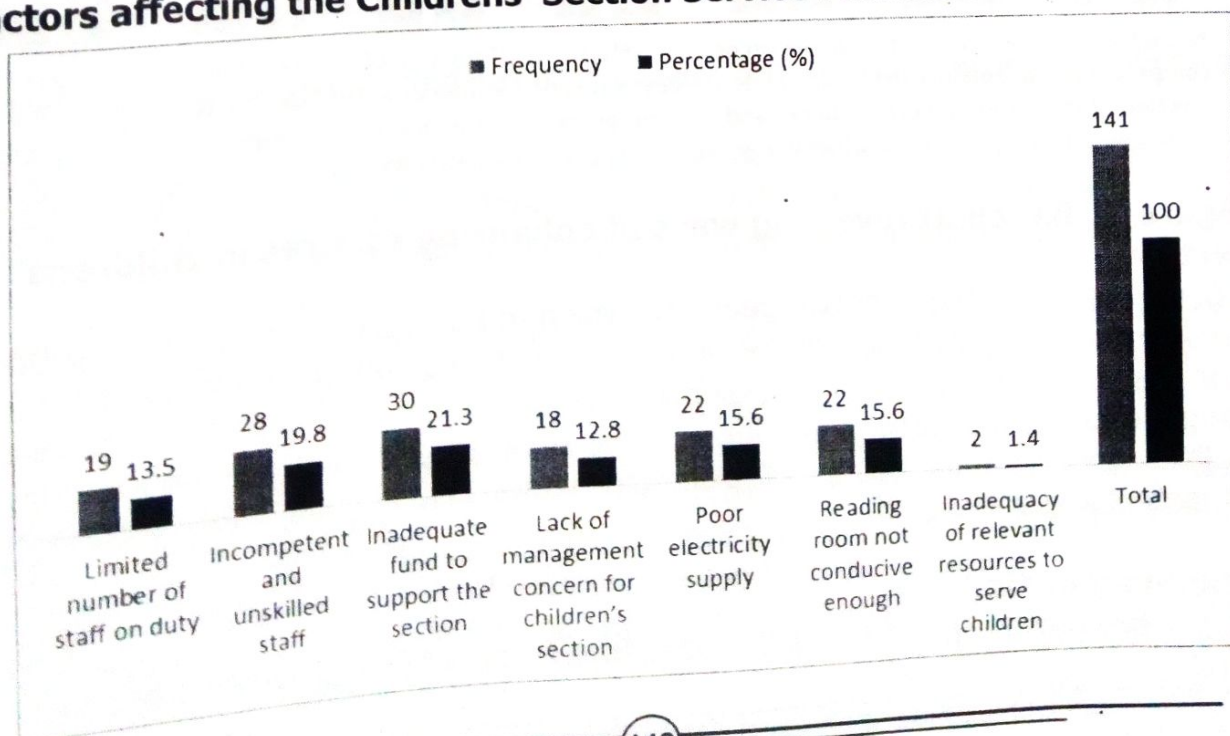


Figure 3: Bar Chart showing the factors affecting the Childrens' Section service provision

Figure 3 revealed that, inadequate funds (21.3%), incompetent and unskilled staff (19.8%), poor electricity supply (15.6%), unconducive reading room (15.6%) and limit number of staff on duty (13.5%) were major factors affecting services of Childrens' Section of the Nasarawa State Public Library. The least factors were lack of management support (12.8%) and inadequate relevant information resources to serve the children (1.4%). An interview session with the staff of the library revealed that the subvention given to the library is not enough to purchase essential library resources, such as books and journals while the library is being pressurized to provide effective services to users. Looking at the provision of library services from all angles, library services have become more capital intensive and yet financial support from the funding authorities keeps on decreasing. This finding is in line with the view of Edoaka (1991) that expressed that looking at the provision of library services from all angles, library services have become capital-intensive and yet the level of financial support from the funding authorities keeps on decreasing. To stress these points further, Edoaka (1991) stated that budgetary allocations for running the libraries in Nigeria are grossly inadequate.

Ways of Enhancing the Services of the Children's Section in the Library

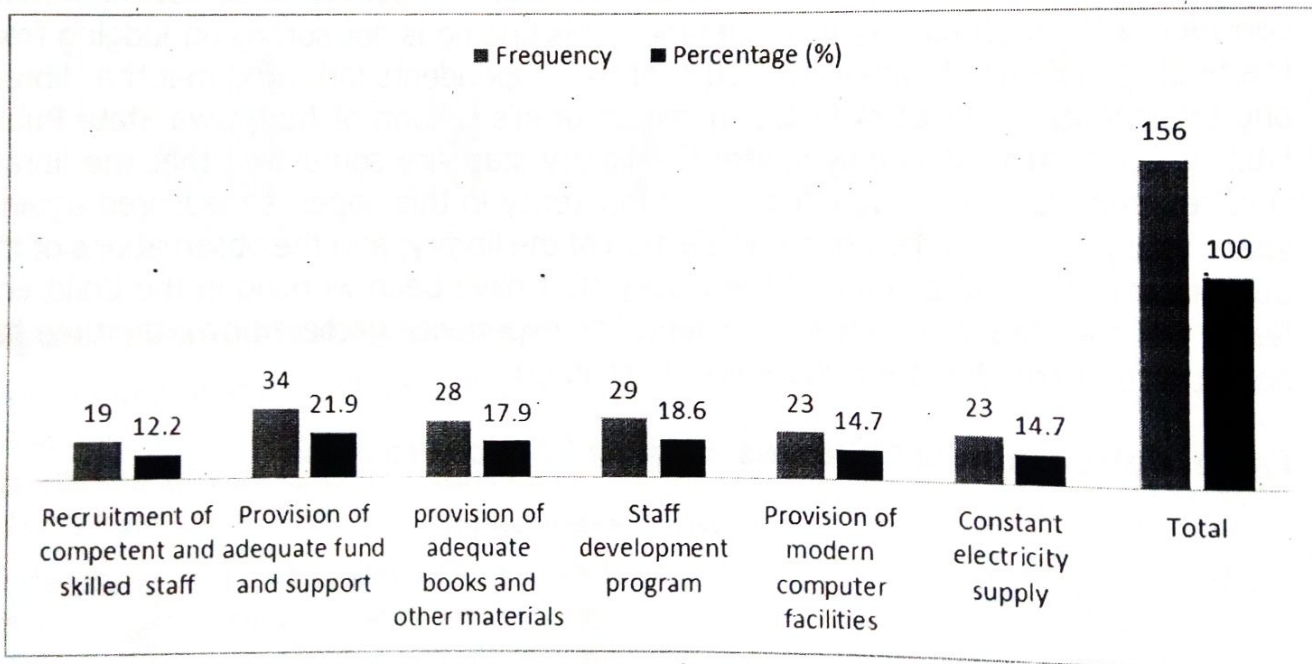


Figure 4: Bar chart revealing ways of enhancing services in childrens' section

Figure 4 revealed the possible means by which the services of the Childrens' Section could be enhanced. 21.9% of the respondents signified provision of adequate funds and supports, 18.6% signified staff development programmes, 17.9% signified provision of adequate books and other materials, 14.7% signified provision of modern computer facilities and constant supply of electricity while 12.2% signified recruitment of competent and skilled staff.

Summary of Findings

It was revealed in Figure 1 that the Nasarawa Public Library provided effective library

and information services at the Children's Section of the Library. This finding was not in agreement with the researchers' observations as it was observed that there were no qualified professional and para-professional staff who coordinate the services and activities in the Children's Section of the library. Probably, this was why 19.8% and 13.5% giving a total of 33.3% of the respondents indicated in Figure 3 that lack of competent and skilled manpower and limited number of staff on duty affected library services at the Children's Section of the Library. Effective library services are usually achieved when there are competent staff to carry out the library's responsibilities.

Figure 2 revealed that 61.5% of the respondents indicated that staff in the Children's Section of the Library were competent in providing adequate library services to the children. Probably, this was because the population of the pupils that used the library at a time are few in number and this helped the staff to effectively render the expected services to the users.

Figure 4 revealed that to enhance the services rendered at the Children's Section of the Public Library, there is need to provide adequate funds and support, embark on staff development programmes, provide adequate books and other materials, provide computer facilities, provide constant supply of electricity and also recruit competent and qualified staff.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The need to provide adequate library services in the children's section of Nasarawa State Public Library cannot be over-emphasized knowing the roles Public Libraries play in the educational development of children. School Libraries alone cannot provide adequate library services to the pupils in their various schools. This is why it is necessary for Public Libraries to be well equipped in order to assist in providing information resources needed in academic pursuit of school children. Children of today will become the future leaders of the country and provision of adequate and effective library services by the public libraries generally known as the People's University will go a long way in producing efficient and dedicated children for a better national development.

On the basis of the specific findings of this study, the following recommendations are being made:

1. The State Government should provide adequate financial support to state public libraries so that the library could provide relevant and adequate information resources that will motivate and attract the children to visit and use the library and its resources.
2. The library management should recruit competent and skilled staff in order to ensure that effective services are provided to the users. These staff should be encouraged to participate in staff development programmes such as conferences and workshop attendance within and outside the country.
3. The library manager should strive to provide a wide range of information resources in all formats (print and non-print) to fulfill the information, cultural, learning and leisure needs of children and youths in the locality.
4. There is need for the library management to install ICT facilities in the library especially in the Children's Section of the library in order to teach the children how

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