



# LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE DIGEST

*Journal of the Nigerian Library Association  
Anambra State Chapter*

Volume 5, 2011.

## Article

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### FEE-BASED SERVICES IN SOUTH EAST STATES PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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#### Abstract

*A central tenet of public libraries is the idea of equal access to its information resources by all irrespective of age, background, educational level or economic status. These libraries however cannot be immune from the economic and technological developments that are reshaping social and cultural institutions globally. These changes are forcing public libraries to shift from their traditional operational modes of granting free access to information to all with books on the shelves to exploring new technology in order to survive in today's market driven economy and maintain their relevancy in the scheme of information delivery. Such new operations and services require more funds than the government have been able to provide. Public libraries are therefore being constrained to open up new revenue streams and the attachment of fees to their services is a most veritable option. This survey therefore examines fee based library services in the five South East states public libraries. The types of services for which these libraries charge fees and the rationale for setting prices for such services are also studied. Data was also collected from the staff and users of the State Public Libraries through questionnaires and interviews. The data was analyzed using statistics and tables. It was discovered that the five State Public Libraries charge fees for core service. The study while recommending that alternative sources of income for the State Public Libraries should be explored also recommends that they should resuscitate their bindery and book depot services.*

**Key Words** - fee-based services, state public libraries, library services.

#### Introduction

The traditional roles of public libraries have always been to acquire, organize and make available to all the information resources that comprise its holdings irrespective of age, class, status, creed or background. The present world of libraries is a vastly different one from that of the late nineteenth century when librarianship took its full shape as a profession. The advent of information communication technologies and its usage in information service delivery has brought new trends in rendering of library services. Mason (2010), in outlining these trends stated that;

Two significant developments have been largely responsible for drastic alteration to the environment in which libraries function; one, the information-technology boom has forced libraries to reassess and reconfigure the ways in which they supply information, the other, increasing privatization, has changed the climate from one in which libraries were dedicated to disseminate information and knowledge in the public sphere to all levels of society, to one in which marketplace and the concept of information as a commodity dominate and where the guiding concepts of inclusiveness and free access are being challenged.

Continuing along the same vein, Lakos (1977) defined this new environment in which libraries operate as a rapidly changing one, shrinking resources, rapid increase in information, changing and diverse client needs and remote user-diverse population and increased demand.

In Nigeria, the State Public libraries which are funded by State Governments have been under pressure technologically and financially. A common experience of state governments in Nigeria for the past few decades has been fiscal stress and this has brought about budget shortfalls. Many interests compete for government funding and this has proved the undoing of many public libraries which rely solely on state governments for operational costs, staff salaries, building maintenance, daily newspapers, acquisition of new books and other running expenses.

Again, Library Boards which run state public libraries are classified in government as non-revenue generating bodies. In the present market driven economy where state governments need to augment their federal allocations with internally generated revenue, the state public library has been relegated to the least of establishments that attract government attention. This has greatly affected state public libraries who receive meager budgetary allocations from the state governments.

The original concept of public libraries was to serve as repositories of culture and recorded history of mankind and as a place where people can go freely in search of information for education and pleasure. For this to be attained, an appreciable level of funding is a necessity. That is why Anafulu as cited by Igbo & Dike (2006), pointed out that it is through adequate funding that the procurement and processing of materials, hiring of personnel, purchase and maintenance of equipment are made. Conceding to this Butterworth (2000), added that inadequate funding hampers public libraries from

expansion into the electronic sphere which requires huge sums of money to be spent on technology. According to her the public is increasingly becoming more demanding and expectations are growing about the type of service they require. This is at a time when access to information is vitally important to all levels of global economy. People who need quality information are disappointed in public provision and are increasingly turning elsewhere.

### **Fee or Free?**

A section of Librarians have vigorously attacked the idea of charging fees for services in public libraries while some have pointed out that it's the best that can be done in the given circumstances. It can be argued historically however that many libraries began with fee paying services but evolved to free services as postulated by Rookaya et al (1998) and Giacoma (1989). The American Library Association as reported by Halliday (1991) was of the view that the charging of fees and levies for information services including those utilizing the latest tools is discriminatory in publicly supported institutions providing library and information services.

Arguing along the same line, Cheshier (1997), on a cautionary note pointed out that if a librarian assumes that in periods of financial distress he can simply pass costs on to those who use services heretofore 'free', he may find himself in a position of destroying his 'market' or even precluding development in it. Echoing the same thought, the Winsconsin Library Association (2006) warned that if as a result of budgetary constraints in many countries the proposal to charge fees for access to some or all to all public library materials is carried out, it would seriously impact negatively on library use. Kagan (1999), issued another warning that if the free-of-charge public libraries are abandoned then public librarians should expect any political support they have ever had to erode and even fade away. This could lead to libraries being eventually integrated into the market and this would effectively end any hope of equality of access to information.

Nielsen (1989), in contending for equal access on information opined that in this global democratic era, denying people free access to information can stall the democratic process in any given country because democracy needs a well informed citizenry to thrive and the introduction of fees in public libraries will create barriers to accessing information for the 'have-nots'. Libraries had always surcharged patrons for late return of borrowed books and this is primarily done to deter readers from keeping books that

others might need. According to the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994), the public library is the responsibility of local and national authorities which must be supported by specific legislation, funded by the national and local governments and free.

However, in this conflict between ideals and economic realities a cross section of the Library and Information Science profession seriously agitate for fee paying services in libraries. Kassel (1999) and Coffman (2009), agree that charging for library services has become an integral part of modern library services which has the capacity to enhance the institutional image and prestige, make contributions for interaction and have the potential for making money and diversifying revenue streams.

It can be argued that it is much more reasonable for state public libraries to charge fees than to reduce services, eliminate some totally or even close down the libraries because of the current low level of funding. One can also agree that it is much better\* for a library to provide a given service for a token fee than leave the provision of that service to the profit making segment of the information industry. Thus the postulation of Jose and Bhat (2007) that the concept of the public library as a not-for-profit organization is rapidly changing in today's knowledge economy and that it is totally justifiable to regard library and information services as saleable products. Mahmood, Hameed and Haider (2005), opine that the opportunities offered by the new technology and the need to exploit them have focused attention on user's charges as a way of raising money because the recession of the past years has blocked some other avenues for expanding budgets as government in various part of the world are trimming back their public spending.

The business of information provision is most unquestionably growing quite competitive, Osif (2006). Libraries now face competition from different sources in the provision of its basic services. Also the resource base of state public libraries need to be diversified to be able to cope with major social, technological and economic trends in modern society, (Hicks) 1980. This paper therefore sets out to find out if state public libraries in the South Eastern Nigeria are charging for any of their services, the status and modalities of such fee-based services in the State Public libraries.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study was initiated to investigate fee-based services in South East Nigeria state public libraries. Specifically it sought to;

- Ascertain if state public libraries in South Eastern Nigeria provide fee-based services
- Discover services that have price tags attached to them
- Determine the factors that influence such charges
- Find out users views on fee-based services.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive survey design method was used for the study. Two sets of questionnaire which were used as the main instrument of data collection were distributed and the Directors of State public libraries were also interviewed. The questionnaire for Directors of State public libraries was divided into two sections. Section A was used to elicit the personal details of the respondents. Section B sought for information on groups/categories of library users, the type of services rendered by the library, which of these services attract fees, the modalities for fee-based library services and the legal framework for it. The questionnaire for library users was also divided into two parts with the first part asking for the provision of details. The second part was meant to find out the regularity of the respondents use of the library, the services they use in the library, the ones they pay for and their perceptions and reactions to fee-based services in state public libraries. Five questionnaire items were shared amongst the Directors of State public libraries in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. One hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were also issued to users of the five State public libraries at an equal ratio of 24 (twenty four) per State public library.

The Directors of the State public libraries returned their questionnaires while 120 (one hundred and twenty) users of the five State public libraries returned theirs. There was a hundred percent return of the questionnaires because they were delivered personally. All the questionnaires returned were analyzed because they were all legible. Tables and percentages were used in analyzing the data. The Directors of Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Anambra responded to the phone interviews for additional data. The Director of Abia state public library was not available.

## **Analysis of Data**

**Table 1 Types of Information Services the five State Public Libraries Provide**

<b>Names of services</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>
Library membership	√	√	√	√	√
Lending of books	√	√	√	√	√
Special Loans	√	√	√	√	√
Reservation of Books	√	√	√	√	√
Reference services	√	√	√	√	√
Indexing	√	√	√	√	√
Binding	√	√	√	√	√
Certification of documents	√	√	-	√	√
Internet services	-	-	-	√	√
Book Depot services	-	√	-	-	√
Abstracting	-	-	-	√	√
Hiring of facilities	√	√	-	-	√
Interlibrary loan	-	-	-	-	-
Literature search	-	-	-	-	-
Newspaper clipping	-	-	-	-	-
Photocopying	-	-	√	√	√

To determine the information services provided by the libraries, sixteen categories of services were identified and listed. Table 1 reveals that all the libraries indicated that they provide library membership, lending of books, special loans, reservation of books, reference services, indexing, binding. All the libraries except Ebonyi State public library offer certification of document services. Abia, Anambra and Imo indicate that they hire facilities to public, while only Enugu and Imo State public libraries offer abstracting services. Anambra and Imo State public libraries run Book Depot services while Enugu and Imo State public libraries offer internet services.

**Table 2: Fee-Based Services In the five State Public Libraries**

<b>Names of services</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>
Library membership	√	√	√	√	√
Lending of books	-	-	-	-	-
Special loans	-	-	-	-	-
Reservation of books	-	-	-	-	-
Reference services	-	-	-	-	-
Indexing	√	√	√	√	√
Binding	√	√	√	√	√
Certification of documents	√	√	-	√	√
Internet services	-	-	-	√	√
Book Depot services	-	√	-	-	-
Abstracting	-	-	-	-	-
Hiring of facilities	-	-	-	-	√
Interlibrary loans	-	-	-	-	-
Literature search	-	-	-	-	-
Newspaper clippings	-	-	-	-	-
Photocopying	√	-	√	√	√

From the table above, the types of services for which fees are charged in the five libraries are shown. The table indicates that the five libraries charge fees for the provision of library membership, binding and certification of documents. Three of the libraries offer fee-based services on indexing, hiring of facilities and photocopying. Two of the libraries also offer abstracting services while two also provide internet and book depot services.

**Table 3: Reasons for Fee-Based Services in the five State Public Libraries**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>
Funding for the library is too low so we need to augment by charging fees for services.	√	√	√	√	√
The public libraries need to be self sustaining financially	-	-	-	√	√
The library needs to earn more money	-	-	-	-	-
Some particular services are expensive to provide so must be paid for	-	√	√	√	-
Charging marks out the serious from the unserious users so helps in saving time in service delivery	√	-	-	-	-
Information is a most valuable asset so it is reasonable to charge the users for its provision.	-	-	-	√	-
Value is added to anything that has a price tag so we fees to make our users understand that we render valuable service charge	-	-	√	-	-
Charging for our services helps to reduce the pressure of Demand on few staff that is available	-	-	√	-	-

When respondents were asked why their libraries embarked on fee-based services, majority revealed that funds for public libraries are low so money is needed to augment their finances. In the interviews with the Heads of the libraries they cited other reasons for embarking on fee-based library services to include the exit of BAI (Book Aid International) from Nigeria and the suspension of the intervention of ETF in public libraries which according to them has adversely affected their funding thus they sought out new revenue streams for their libraries. Mention was also made of the fact that since funds are needed to provide some services especially internet services then the libraries are duty bound to seek a return on investment (ROI) by charging fees for such services.



**Table 4: Legal Frameworks for Fee-Based Services in the five State Public Libraries**

	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>
YES	√	√	-	√	√
NO	-	-	√	-	-

From the above table, four of the libraries have laws enabling them to embark on fee-based services. Only Ebonyi State public library does not have the legal backing to charge fees for its services. The Eastern Region Library Board which was enacted in 1955 and later amended in 1958 gave birth to the East Central State Library Board Law which made it clear in section (17) 1(c) that the funds of the Board shall include all charges due or amount received by the Board. However with the creation of states, the Anambra State Library Board was enacted in 1976 and it states in part 2 section (2) b (1) that the facilities of the State library can be made available to members of the public on reasonable terms which may include imposition of fees for services rendered to the public and part 5 (15) 1 (c) also indicates that the fund of the Board shall be include all charges, dues or amounts received by the Board. This section of the law also echoes in part iii (b) 1 Of Abia State Library Law, Imo State Library Law and Enugu State Library Law. However, the Ebonyi State Library Law does not empower it to charge fees but rather part iii (13) 1 (f) states that the functions of the Board include the establishment and running of a book depot (Ogbonna) 2010.

**Table 5: Factors Considered for Fixing Fees in the Five State Public Libraries**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>
Our clientele can afford to pay	-	-	√	-	-
Our services are valuable	√	√	√	√	√
The library needs the extra funding	√	√	√	√	√
It's the trend amongst libraries	√	-	√	√	√

From the responses represented in the above table the most adduced reason given by the Heads of libraries which they considered for fixing fees is the fact that state public libraries need the extra funding that fee-based services will bring in. The five Heads of the libraries noted that library services are valuable thus should attract fees. This tallies with Gray (1993), who sees charging for library services as a way to encourage library staff and users to value the library and what it offers. However, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo Heads of libraries also agreed that charging fees is the trend amongst libraries.

**Table 6: Awareness of Fee-Based Services in the five State Public Libraries**

<b>AWARENESS CHANNELS</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>
Radio Jingles	-	-	-	-	-
TV announcement	-	-	-	-	-
Programmes about the library on TV and Radio	-	-	-	-	-
Announcement in the reading Hall	√	-	√	√	√
Orally on one to one basis in the library	√	√	√	√	√
No awareness was created	√	√	√	√	√

Creating of awareness is a requisite part of planning when a new service format is being introduced. From the responses shown in the table above all the respondents said that no formal programme of awareness was embarked on amongst the immediate and potential users before fee-based services were embarked on. All of them said that awareness was done orally on one to one basis in the library. According to Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo Heads, announcement was made in the reading halls before the introduction of fee based services.

#### **Data Collected From Library Users**

**Table 7: Reasons for Charging Fees in the State Public Libraries**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
-Funding for the library is low so they need extra funds	9	7	10	6	7	39	32.5
Books in the library are old so they need to be replaced	7	12	4	13	9	45	37.5
-The services rendered by the state public Libraries are valuable thus must be paid for everything has a price now so not surprising that the library is charging for their Services	5	-	6	2	3	16	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Four statements were formulated to help respondents choose one as pertains to what they feel is the reason for the fee-based library services. The table above reveals that the majority (37.5%) of the respondents feel that books in the library are old so money is needed to replace them, while 32.5% feel that since funding for the state public library is low the libraries need all the extra funds they can make. Only 13.3% of the respondents were of the view that services rendered by the state public libraries are valuable thus must have a price attached.

**Table 8: How do you feel about Fee-Based Services in State Public Libraries?**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Abia</b>	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>Ebonyi</b>	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>Imo</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
The public library needs the extra funds from fees	-	8	10	3	1	22	18.3
The library needs New books so charging fees alright	14	9	5	3	5	21	28.3
The state public library is funded totally by the government so should not charge fees	10	7	9	18	20	63	53.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Users were asked their perceptions of fee-based services. 53.3% of the respondents were of the view that since state public libraries are funded totally by the government they should not charge fees for their services while 28.3% agreed totally with the introduction of fee-based services because they feel that state public libraries need new books and journals etc. 19% of the user respondents agreed that state public libraries need extra funds so it is quite alright to charge for services.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study one can safely conclude that South East states public libraries have ventured into the provision of fee-based library services. It was also established that this step was taken primarily because of inadequate funding by the state governments. The withdrawal of BAI (Book Aid International) and the suspension

of ETF intervention in state public libraries were also reasons offered for the introduction of fee- based services. It was also noted that in planning of fee-based services, users should be made aware of it for a reasonable period before it is implemented. This will give them time to accept it, make them feel they are a part of the planning process and curb any resentment they might harbour towards paying for hitherto free library services.

### **Recommendations**

Of note however is the fact that there is no interlibrary cooperation amongst the five state public libraries. This is an avenue that can be explored to enlarge the services of the libraries while fees can be attached to the service for transportation and handling of the information resources involved. The study also highlighted the fact that information communication technologies have not been introduced in any way on three of the South east state public libraries. These libraries need to step up to the challenges of being relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> century user and relevant authorities must be made to realise this.

For new revenue streams to be opened up, the five South East public state libraries need to resuscitate their moribund binding and book depot services because the findings of this study point to the fact that though these services exist they have been left to deteriorate and have been nonrevenue yielding for sometime. The library membership fees for children need also to be reviewed so that they can be encouraged to use the state public libraries. This has become most necessary now that the country is faced with mass failures in JAMB, WAEC and NECO exams.

This paper also recommends that state public libraries make themselves more visible by activating discussions on the electronic and print media and in social gatherings on the roles of the public libraries. This will undoubtedly stir the interest of public spirited individuals who will inject much needed funds into the state public libraries.

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