Management Challenges and the Growth of Public Libraries in Nigeria: Refocusing the Public Library Crusade

Bernard Beshigim Aniah
College of Health Technology, Calabar
Cross River State, Nigeria
gracefulben001@gmail.com

Abstract
This paper examines the persistent management challenges that hinder the growth and relevance of public libraries in Nigeria. While libraries remain essential for promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and democratic participation, they are constrained by chronic underfunding, weak governance structures, obsolete staffing practices, and poor adoption of technology. The paper argues that current advocacy for funding, though necessary, is insufficient unless accompanied by strategic internal reforms. It proposes a refocusing of the public library crusade towards professionalization of staff, digital transformation, improved governance, and proactive community engagement. The position advanced is that sustainable growth of Nigerian public libraries depends on a dual strategy of demanding resources while simultaneously demonstrating operational excellence.
Keyword: management challenges, public libraries, growth, library development, Nigeria

Introduction
Public libraries serve as fundamental institutions for education, social inclusion, and national development. Globally, they provide equitable access to information, support lifelong learning, and promote cultural preservation (IFLA, 2017). In Nigeria, their role is particularly vital in bridging literacy gaps, supporting formal and informal education, and reducing digital exclusion in an information-driven society (Aina, 2004).

Despite this relevance, Nigerian public libraries remain under-developed, under-utilized, and poorly managed. Collections are outdated, infrastructure is dilapidated, and user patronage is steadily declining (Ochogwu, 2013). The dominant discourse often emphasizes inadequate government funding, yet evidence suggests that managerial deficiencies play an equally decisive role (Agagu & Akande, 2008). This article, therefore, seeks to highlight management challenges, analyze their effects, and propose a redefined strategy for revitalizing the public library crusade in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarifications
a) Public library: An institution, usually funded and managed by government, that provides free and equitable access to knowledge, culture, and information resources for all members of society (UNESCO, 1994).

b) Management challenges: Difficulties in planning, staffing, financing, directing, and controlling resources effectively within an institution (Agagu & Akande, 2008).

c) Public library crusade: Sustained advocacy by library professionals, associations, and stakeholders to improve the status, funding, and visibility of libraries in Nigeria.

d) Growth and development: Not just the expansion of library infrastructure or collections, but the enhancement of service delivery, adoption of ICT, and increased societal impact (Adebayo & Amusan, 2018).

Management challenges affecting public libraries in Nigeria

1. Chronic underfunding and financial mismanagement

Budgetary allocations to libraries are consistently meagre, often below 1% of state expenditures (Okiy, 2005). Even when funds are available, weak financial controls and delayed releases undermine planning and sustainability.

2. Weak governance and political interference

Library boards are often dominated by political appointees lacking professional expertise, resulting in weak oversight and absence of strategic direction (Bozimo, 2010).

3. Human resource deficiencies

Many libraries are staffed by non-professionals or under-skilled personnel lacking ICT competence and modern service delivery skills (Adetunmbi & Amusa, 2019). Professional development opportunities are scarce and inconsistent.

4. Infrastructural decay and technological inertia

Most facilities are dilapidated and ill-equipped with basic ICT infrastructure. Failure to invest in integrated library systems or e-resources alienates digitally inclined users (Tiamiyu, 2003).

5. Poor marketing and community engagement

Library services are rarely marketed, leaving communities unaware of their value. This perpetuates the image of libraries as outdated book depots rather than community information hubs (Nzotta, 2009).

Effects of the challenges on growth and development

a) Declining patronage: Students, researchers, and professionals increasingly bypass libraries due to poor resources and outdated services (Ogunmodede, 2018).

b) Obsolete collections: Lack of coherent acquisition policies results in irrelevant and outdated holdings.

c) Failure to bridge the digital divide: Without ICT services, libraries cannot empower users with digital skills or provide equal access to online information (Udoh, 2014).

d) Erosion of public trust: Communities and governments lose confidence in libraries, weakening political will for further investment.

Refocusing the public library crusade in Nigeria

1. Strengthen governance and autonomy

Library boards should be granted financial and operational independence, with leadership appointments based on professional competence and accountability (Ekere & Udo, 2016).

2. Digital and service model transformation

Libraries must reposition as community information and digital resource centres by:
- Investing in reliable internet and ICT infrastructure.
- Expanding e-resources to complement print collections.
- Offering digital literacy programmes for youths, entrepreneurs, and professionals (IFLA, 2018).

3.   Professionalism and continuous capacity building

Policies must enforce recruitment of certified librarians and mandate continuous professional development (CPD), particularly in ICT and management skills (Okojie, 2012).

4.   Stakeholder engagement and partnerships

Libraries should actively pursue Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) with technology companies, NGOs, and development agencies for infrastructure upgrades and digital content (Adeyemi & Popoola, 2008).

5.   Performance-based management and funding

Introducing key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to patronage, programme delivery, and digital services will promote accountability and justify budget allocations.

Conclusion

The challenges confronting Nigerian public libraries reflect not only financial neglect but deep-seated management deficiencies. Addressing these issues requires a paradigm shift in the public library crusade - from funding advocacy alone to internal reforms, digital readiness, professional competence, and strategic partnerships. Only by coupling external resource mobilization with operational excellence can Nigerian public libraries reclaim their relevance as catalysts of national development.

Recommendations

1.   Legislative framework for library governance

The National Assembly and respective State Houses of Assembly should enact functional laws granting greater operational autonomy to public library boards. Such legislation will empower library management to make independent administrative, financial, and developmental decisions, thereby enhancing accountability and efficiency.

2.   Prioritization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Government and relevant stakeholders should adopt an ICT-first approach in library management. This includes providing digital infrastructure, online databases, and internet access to modernize library services and attract younger users.

3.   Continuous professional development (CPD) for library staff

Library authorities, in collaboration with professional associations such as the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), should institutionalize mandatory and continuous professional development programmes. Training in emerging technologies, digital cataloguing, and user-centred services will improve the competence and motivation of library staff.

4.   Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) and strategic collaborations

The government should encourage strategic partnerships between public libraries and corporate organizations, NGOs, donor agencies, and community groups. Such collaborations can complement public funding, enhance innovation, and support community-based literacy programmes.

5.   Performance-based and sustainable funding.

The Federal and State Ministries of Education and Culture should adopt a performance-based funding model in which budgetary allocations are tied to measurable outcomes such as user growth, literacy impact, and technological advancement. This approach promotes transparency and ensures funds are effectively utilized for library development.

References

Adebayo, W., & Amusan, B. (2018). Growth and development of public libraries in Nigeria: Issues and prospects. *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, 10(7), 105-115.

Adeyemi, B., & Popoola, S. O. (2008). Public-private partnership as a funding option for public library services in Nigeria. *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, 3(2), 24-33.

Adetunmbi, V. O., & Amusa, O. I. (2019). Manpower challenges and the digital readiness of public libraries in Southwestern Nigeria. *Library Management*, 40(1/2), 72-84.

Agagu, S. A., & Akande, T. R. (2008). Management challenges of public libraries in a developing economy: A case study of Ondo State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*, 207.

Aina, L. O. (2004). *Library and Information Science Text for Africa*. Ibadan: Samaru Press.

Bozimo, E. (2010). The library and information profession in Nigeria: Challenges and the way forward. *Nigerian Libraries*, 43(1), 1-13.

Ekere, M. A., & Udo, M. O. (2016). Autonomy and accountability of public libraries in Nigeria. *Journal of Applied Information Science and Technology*, 9(1), 21-30.

IFLA. (2017). *IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994: The Key to Development*. The Hague: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

IFLA. (2018). *The IFLA Global Vision Report Summary: Navigating the Future*. The Hague: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

Nzotta, B. C. (2009). The effective marketing of library and information services in a competitive environment. *The Information Technologist*, 6(2), 1-10.

Ochogwu, M. G. (2013). The public library and community development in Nigeria: A review. *Nigerian Libraries*, 46(1), 45-56.

Ogunmodede, A. B. (2018). The impact of digital resources on public library patronage in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, 6(2), 52-66.

Okiy, R. B. (2005). The state of public libraries in Nigeria and the way forward. *Library Review*, 54(5), 319-326.

Okojie, V. (2012). Capacity building for information professionals in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(7), 80-87.

Tiamiyu, M. A. (2003). Information and communication technologies in Nigerian universities: An evaluation. *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT*, 1(2), 1-11.

Udoh, E. R. (2014). The role of public libraries in bridging the digital divide in Nigeria. Information and Knowledge Management, 4(2), 1-8.

UNESCO (1994). *UNESCO Public Library Manifesto*. Paris: UNESCO.