

# **Public Library Services in Nigeria: Clientele Evaluation of Offa Township Library**

by J.S. Opaleke

## **Abstract**

The usefulness of any public library depends on its ability to serve the community as a general center of reliable information and to provide opportunity and encouragement for people of all ages to educate themselves continuously. Hence, this study seeks to discover who the clientele of Offa township library are, their status, and their views on the state and services of the library in terms of location, collections, infrastructural facilities, services rendered, security, and general activities believed to be vital to the clientele of a public library.

Investigations show that 51.28% of library users are mostly students ages 19 and below, while 78.20% of respondents are male users. An overall assessment of the library shows that users are relatively pleased with the operation of the library but want something done with the opening hours, newspapers collection, shelf arrangement, and period of lending.

## **Introduction**

A public library is a library established for the use and benefit of the citizenry. A public library is, according to Akinyotu <sup>1</sup>, the university where all could seek and acquire knowledge and information that are vital to the fruitful pursuit of individual and societal goals.

The public library, through its provision of current newspapers and periodicals, serves as a public information center, and, through its circulation of books and other learning resources to the citizens, becomes the chief instrument for free distribution of knowledge in a democratic society. Hence, its improvement must be sought not only by the government but the entire community.

## **Background Statement**

Offa, the seat of Old Ibolu Kingdom and headquarters of Offa L.G.A. whose citizens' main industry is education, had the first library in the town through the Native Authority (N.A.) in 1946. This small structure was built close to Offa Grammar School, Offa, the first voluntary agency insti-

tution in the Old Northern region, established in 1943. Then the site was within the reach of the populace.

With the increasing population of the town and obsolete collections in the library, a philanthropic organization in the town called "Club 80" launched an appeal fund and built a new structure that was later handed over to the Offa local government authority for management in 1993.

With the handing over, the library has since been put into use, and is supposed to serve students of primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions in the town, literate civil servants, and traders. Are these people really utilizing this opportunity, and how satisfactory are the services of the library since it was handed over to the local government authority?

### **Statement of Objective**

Due to the relocation of the library from the heart of the town and the civil service procedure adopted for its management, the study seeks to know:

- the users of the library;
- the impression of the patrons with the location, infrastructural facilities, collection, library arrangements, services rendered, safety, and general issues related with library management; and
- suggestions by the clientele for any improvement.

### **Literature Review**

It is essential that public libraries justify their existence and prove that they are basically an educational community utility. To this end, evaluating the library provides a factual basis on which to plan and make judicious budgetary allocation.

Quite a number of surveys in the literature reveal that studies have been carried out on public library evaluation, but only those that are closely related to the present one will be reviewed.

Ogunrombi<sup>2</sup> examined the uses made of resources in meeting clientele needs of Oyo State Public Library, Dugbe, Ibaden, and highlighted clientele comments for the improvement of library services. In his analysis, 20% indicated that the services are good, 54.16% ranked the library services as poor, and 29.7% opined that the services are fair. Ogunrombi opined that poor services of the library as claimed by the respondents occurred because the users use their own textbooks to study the library.

Balogun<sup>3</sup> investigated the problems affecting the effectiveness of library services provided for the library patrons of Kwara State Public Library. His investigation shows that library services were hampered by an unclearly defined acquisition policy to guide its developmental program, poor budgetary allocation, lack of certain physical facilities, and short closing hours.

Ekoja<sup>4</sup> appraised the satisfaction the adult literate users of Sokoto State Library, Sokoto, derive from its services. In his investigation, the users found satisfaction in the opening hours, assistance and disposition of staff, photocopying services, adequacy of books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and furniture, conduciveness of the environment, etc. On the other hand, he found that the users were dissatisfied with non-lending of books, improper shelving and shelving delay, constant power failure, and so on.

Antwi<sup>5</sup> studied the relevance and adequacy of Bauchi State Library services. His findings show that 74% of the users were secondary school students. Their assessment shows that the readers were satisfied with the assistance rendered by the library staff, the disposition of library staff, and the seating capacity of the library, but did not find the collection adequate and relevant. The study concludes that the clientele rated the overall services of the library as above average.

Malumfasi<sup>6</sup> studied the services of Kano State Public Library services where he found that 98.3% of the users questioned were satisfied with the facilities. On the other hand, his collation revealed that 81.6% were not satisfied with the library collection. According to him, the materials were irrelevant to their needs because they were either obsolete, too advanced or too elementary, and many subject areas were not covered.

Chweh<sup>7</sup> carried out research on areas in which public and academic libraries can be assessed. His results bring out fifty areas of library services which are very important to users and which can be used for library evaluation. The areas include: availability of books (that users look for), periodicals, quality of reference services, good reference collection, and so on.

Horrocks<sup>8</sup>, in his survey of the Regional Central Library in Enugu, showed that 75% of the clientele had some formal education, with male users outnumbering the female, and their age bracket ranging between 18 and 24 years.

## **Methodology**

Survey methods were adjudged best to exploit the needed information; hence one hundred users who patronized the library within the four days of study were the population used as samples and were randomly selected by the last week of January 1997.

Twenty-five copies of the questionnaire were randomly administered each day between the hours of 8 to 9 a.m., 10:30 to noon, and 1 to 3 p.m., which are the peak periods of clientele visits to the library as per the library statistical record. Unavailability of a reliable and well documented register of bonafide users accounted for the use of visiting patrons to the library.

The responses received from the questionnaire administered to the readers and informal interviews held with the head of the library staff serve as sources of data for this study.

## **Analyses and Findings**

From one hundred copies administered, seventy-eight responses were found adequate and usable to extract the needed information and thereby analyze for discussion. This represents 78% of the expected returns. According to Gay,<sup>9</sup> for descriptive research a sample of 10% of the population is minimum for a large population.

### **Part A: Background Information**

#### (1) Age and sex distribution of the library users

51.2% of the respondents are within the ages 19 and below. 27.18% are within age bracket of 20 to 29; 8.59% are within 30 to 39 years (Table 1). This shows that the library usage decreases as people advance in age. This agrees with Onadiran<sup>10</sup> that the bulk of the users in all the public libraries are between 15 and 24 years of age. The reason for this low number may be due to the fact that most Nigerian adult readers read newspapers, magazines, one or two local papers, and nothing else.<sup>11</sup>

Also, the percentage of male users is high compared to female. 78.20% of respondents are male readers while 21.79% are female (Table 1). When compared with the result of Onadiran's findings, female users are low in all public libraries. This is because of the educational level of women and their domestic activities.

Table 2 shows that 84.61% of the respondents are students. 6.41% are unemployed, 5.12% are professionals, and 3.84% are civil servants. This finding agrees with other findings of Horrocks, Antwi, and Angolu.<sup>12</sup>

It is very sad to note that the same pattern of the past still exists even today in our public libraries in term of users' age, sex, and occupation.

**Table 1**  
**Age/Sex Distribution**

Age	Male	Female	Total	%
0-19	33	7	40	51.28
20-29	23	6	29	37.18
30-39	4	3	7	8.59
40-49	1	1	2	2.56
50-59				
60+				
Total;	61	17	78	100
%	78.20	21.79	100	100

**Table 2:**  
**Occupational Distribution**

Occupation	No.	%
Laborer	—	—
Skilled Trader	—	—
Office Worker	3	3.85
Professional	4	5.12
Housewife	—	—
Student	66	84.61
Unemployed	5	6.41
Others	—	—
Total	78	100

## **Part B: Library Collection**

The collection development of any library is the architect of successful library services. Hence, the investigator sought to know the readers' views on the quality and quantity of the various collections displayed for readers' use. Tables 3-9 show readers' assessment as per the respondent analysis.

**Table 3:**  
**Availability of Books**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Strongly Satisfied	04	5.12
Satisfied	24	30.76
Fairly Satisfied	30	38.46
Not Satisfied	10	12.82
Strongly Dissatisfied	10	12.82
Total	78	100.00

**Table 4:**  
**Availability of Journals/Periodicals**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Strongly Satisfied	7	8.97
Satisfied	11	14.10
Fairly Satisfied	29	37.17
Not Satisfied	14	17.74
Strongly Dissatisfied	17	12.82
Total	78	100.00

**Table 5:**  
**Availability of Reference Collections**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Strongly Satisfied	6	7.69
Satisfied	17	21.79
Fairly Satisfied	24	30.76
Not Satisfied	14	17.94
Strongly Dissatisfied	17	21.79
Total	78	100.00

**Table 6:**  
**Availability of Newspapers and Magazines**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Strongly Satisfied	6	7.69
Satisfied	12	15.38
Fairly Satisfied	20	25.64
Not Satisfied	27	34.61
Strongly Dissatisfied	13	16.66
Total	78	100.00

On book collection, 5.12% of the respondents were strongly satisfied, while 30.76% were satisfied and 38.46% were fairly satisfied; 25.64% were dissatisfied. For journal assessment, 8.97% of the respondents were strongly satisfied with the library serials collection, while 14.10% were satisfied and 37.17% were fairly satisfied. 17.74% and 12.82% indicated their dissatisfaction (Tables 3-4).

Tables 5 and 6 indicate the degree of reader satisfaction with reference and newspaper collections. Judging by Onadiran's results, reference collections are poor in public libraries. Consequently, the number of users that consulted reference materials is also low. With the growing number of tertiary institutions in Offa township, there is need for improvement in the serial collections.

Tables 7-9 give the breakdown of respondent assessment of quality of collections for adults and children and their assessment of the size of the collections.

**Table 7:  
Quality of Collections**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	11	14.10
Good	16	20.51
Fair	28	35.89
Bad	10	12.82
Very Bad	13	16.16
Total	78	100.00

**Table 8:  
Quality of Children and Collections/Services**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	3	3.84
Good	7	8.97
Fair	30	38.46
Bad	18	23.07
Very Bad	20	25.64
Total	78	100.00

The size of the library collection does not determine the efficiency of its operations but rather the quality of the few collections. On the other hand,

the size gives the readers a wider opportunity to search for information. The respondent assessment shows that there is need for great improvement on both the quality and quantity of the library collection.

**Table 9:  
Size of Collections**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	4	5.12
Good	19	24.35
Fair	30	38.46
Bad	10	12.82
Very Bad	15	19.23
Total	78	100.00

Other problems exist. Although the actual number of the library collection was not investigated, the collection displayed is an eyesore. Going by Ojunseye's recommendation<sup>13</sup>, the books stocked fall short of minimum standard of one book per head of literate population. The investigator's interview revealed that budgetary allocation to the library is too small to meet the library needs. Moreover, the acting library officer in charge is not given a free hand to operate.

### **Part C: Infrastructural Facilities**

Provision of good infrastructural facilities in a library will sometimes improve the number of the library clientele. Hence, some of the essential facilities expected in a library were given for assessment by the respondents. This is divided into seven areas (Tables 10-16).

**Table 10:  
Provision of Chairs**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	26	33.33
Good	28	35.89
Fair	8	10.25
Bad	10	12.82
Very Bad	6	7.69
Total	78	100.00



**Table 11:**  
**Provision of Good Lighting for Reading**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	44	56.41
Good	30	38.46
Fair	4	5.12
Bad	—	—
Very Bad	—	—

**Table 12:**  
**Provision for Parking Space**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	13	16.66
Good	13	16.66
Fair	18	23.07
Bad	12	15.38
Very Bad	5	6.41
Total	78	100.00

**Table 13:**  
**Provision of Social Activities Bulletin Board**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	4	5.12
Good	8	10.25
Fair	20	25.64
Bad	32	41.02
Very Bad	14	17.94
Total	78	100.00

**Table 14:**  
**Provision of Comfortable Lounge Area**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	6	7.69
Good	17	21.79
Fair	18	23.07
Bad	25	32.05
Very Bad	12	15.38
Total	78	100.00

**Table 15:  
Provision of Enough Desks for Reading**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	20	25.64
Good	24	30.76
Fair	12	15.38
Bad	14	17.94
Very Bad	8	5.12
Total	78	100.00

**Table 16:  
Pleasant Atmosphere**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	26	33.33
Good	44	56.41
Fair	5	6.41
Very Bad	—	—
Total	78	100.00

Going by the users' assessment, the facilities provided within and outside the library for users are not only good but comfortable. This could have arisen from the fact that the club members that donated the building are literates.

**Part D: Location of Library Materials**

Tables 17-20 show reader assessment on access to the library materials. Table 16 shows how dependable and how well the available catalog serves the readers. 8.97% of the respondents claim it is fairly dependable, while 91.07% say it is not dependable. Tables 18 and 19 analyzed assessment on materials collection, shelf arrangement, reserve collection, and library system and organization efficiency.

**Table 17:  
Available Catalog Dependability and Ease of Use**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Dependable	—	—
Dependable	—	—
Fairly Dependable	7	8.97
Not Dependable	71	91.01
Total	78	100.00

**Table 18:**  
**Easy Access to Materials**

Rating	Frequency	Valid %
Very Accessible	22	29.48
Accessible	30	38.46
Fairly Accessible	16	20.51
Not Accessible	10	12.81
Total	78	100.00

**Table 19:**  
**Shelf Arrangement**

Rating	Frequency	Valid
Very Good	10	12.82
Good	23	29.48
Fair	21	26.92
Bad	10	12.82
Very Bad	14	17.94
Total	78	100.00

**Table 20:**  
**Access to Reserve Books**

Rating	Frequency	Valid %
Very Accessible	10	12.82
Accessible	11	14.10
Fairly Accessible	27	34.61
Not Accessible	30	36.45
Total	78	100.00

**Table 21:**  
**Library System and Organization Efficiency**

Rating	Frequency	Valid %
Very Good	18	23.07
Good	25	32.05
Fair	19	24.35
Bad	8	10.25
Very Bad	8	10.25
Total	78	100.00

Generally, respondent assessment indicated that users have problems in locating their needs. As Marsterson said<sup>14</sup>, a library may register little sat-

isfaction with public library materials and its arrangement in the sense that borrowers fail to find what they seek simply because their expectations are low. Nonetheless, all efforts must be geared up to satisfy readers to locate available library collections without spending much time.

### **Part E: Library Services**

Respondent rating of library services appears to be encouraging (Tables 22-24). These services include quality of reference service, friendly service, and helpful staff. To some extent, respondent ratings of interlibrary loan and loan period shows disservice to the library clientele (Tables 25-26). According to Onadiran: "It is interesting to note the relatively low number of users who are completely satisfied with the public library services in Nigeria." And as Carter and Wallace<sup>15</sup> rightly indicate, the readers' satisfaction depends directly upon the kinds of books the librarian has available for his or her use in the discharge of his or her job.

**Table 22:**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	10	12.82
Good	18	23.07
Fair	24	30.76
Bad	20	25.64
Very Bad	6	0.76
Total	78	100.00

**Table 23:  
Friendly Service**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	18	20.07
Good	46	58.97
Fair	14	17.94
Bad	—	—
Very Bad	—	—
Total	78	100.00

**Table 24:  
Helpful Staff**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Helpful	20	25.64
Helpful	2	41.02
Fairly Helpful	15	19.23
Not Helpful	11	14.09
Total	78	100.00

**Table 25:  
Inter-Library Loan System**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	—	—
Good	12	15.38
Fair	32	41.02
Very Bad	17	21.79
Total	78	100.00

**Table 26:  
Adequate Loan Period**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Satisfied	2	2.56
Satisfied	14	17.94
Fairly Satisfied	34	43.58
Not Satisfied	28	35.89
Total	78	100.00

**Table 27:  
Adequate Library Hours**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Satisfied	8	10.25
Satisfied	8	10.25
Fairly Satisfied	9	11.59
Not Satisfied	53	67.94
Total	78	100.00

**Table 28:**  
**Quietness of the Library**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Quiet	48	61.53
Quiet	25	32.05
Fairly Noisy	5	6.41
Noisy	—	—
Total	78	100.00

Presently, the library operates between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Table 27 shows respondent feeling to these hours. 67.94% are not satisfied with the present opening hours. It is hoped that the dissatisfied respondents have reasons for not attending the library within the opening period. The current opening hours have prevented most expected library users who are civil servants, traders, and school children in lower grades. The failure of the library not to open on Saturdays and Sundays is, as Onadiran rightly puts it, "disheartening." He noted that no public library in Nigeria opens on Saturdays and public holidays. As to the quietness of the library, the respondents are satisfied and the library must keep it up.

#### **Part F: Site and Security**

Though the library is located in a relatively extreme end of the east side of town and the building fenced, the investigator sought for user appraisal of the present location of the library, its directional sign(s), and its security effectiveness. The respondent rating is analyzed in Tables 29-31.

**Table 29:**  
**Location of the Library**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	26	33.33
Good	44	56.41
Fair	7	8.97
Bad	1	1.28
Very Bad	—	—
Total	78	100.00

**Table 30:  
Direction Sign(s)**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Appropriate	—	—
Appropriate	32	41.02
Fairly Appropriate	17	21.79
Not Appropriate	29	37.17
Total	78	100.00

**Table 31:  
Library Materials Security System**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
Very Good	30	38.46
Good	14	17.94
Fair	24	30.76
Bad	2	2.56
Very Bad	8	10.25
Total	78	100.00

### **Problems and Suggestions**

Respondents went beyond the scope of the questionnaire to express their feelings about the management of the library. For instance, the readers expressed their bitterness about shelf arrangement, misplaced books, and the hiding of books. The staff is therefore urged to be vigilant and ensure that daily shelf reading is done.

Another area which requires improvement is favoritism in the discharge of library books to friends beyond the stipulated days. The staff are advised to be just and fair to their clientele.

Another problem area is the bringing of newspapers meant for the staff to the library. This is not ideal for effective library management and should be investigated. The library should be granted a specific sum of money to buy its own newspapers and weekly magazines even if it only a paper. This will enable the library to bind the copies of the dailies at the end of the year for reference.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the study have shown that the township library has come

to stay. The various areas explored and analyzed have even indicated that its services are quite satisfactory to the respondents. However, the management of the library should look seriously into the problem areas for necessary amelioration. This may include handing library control to the state library board for management and supply of competent professionals for effective services.

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