SPECIAL LIBRARY SERVICES IN OWERRI: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT
The paper discusses special libraries established in Owerri since the creation of Imo State thirty years ago. Six special libraries were x-rayed. This study identified types of services rendered, users and extent of patronage. It also examines the type of personnel and how information sources are organized. The facilities and accommodation provided are also examined. Finally, problems were identified and possible solutions recommended. Data was collected using oral interview and personal observation checklist, and analyzed using tables snd simple percentages. Findings indicate that of all the problems identified, inadequate funding is the major problem that hindering effective special library services in Owerri. The paper concludes that the future will be bright for special libraries in Owerri if sufficient funds were allocated to them from both federal and state governments to enhance effective library services.

Introduction
Establishment of special libraries in government and private institutions is to help manage information resources for the benefit of workers and the institutions. There is urgent need therefore for individuals at all levels particularly scientists, research workers, business executives and government officials to have well-organized information that will help them function effectively in their work.

Precise definition of special libraries is elusive because of the diverse nature of the group of institutional libraries involved. A special library is defined by Oklahoma Department of Libraries (2004) as "a library serving a special purpose or clientele. e.g. a library in a private business, hospital, governmental agency etc".

Every special library is identified by the activities of its parent organization. Nwosu (2000) identified types of special libraries to include: research, media, law, ministry, industrial and departmental libraries. (Free Encydopeadia) identified special libraries as follows: medical, museum, prison, corporate, government, law. and non-governmental organization libraries respectively. Nwosu (2000) opined that research libraries are the most developed groups of special libraries in Nigeria. Some of these libraries include: The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (11TA) Ibadan. Geological Survey Department Kaduna. National Institute of Social and Economic Research (N1SER) Ibadan, Federal Institute of Industrial Research Oshodi (FI1RO). Project Development Agency (PRODA) Enugu among others. The services of each of these libraries mentioned above are therefore tailored to meet the special information needs of their users, i.e. staff of the parent organizations. Hence. *Wandswortb* Borough *Council (2006)* identified the services of special libraries to include: fax and photocopying, home delivery, local history, reference and information service, access and facilities for people with disabilities, among others. Nwosu (2002) opined that the services of special libraries are specialized, going beyond the regular services in other types of libraries. Ajibero (2001) enumerated and examined these services. They include: selective dissemination of information (SDI), bibliographic services, indexing, abstracting, photocopying services, referral services, just to mention a few.

This issue of special libraries offering specialized services brings us to the question - Who are the users of these services? *Encyclopedia* Americana (1988 ed.) called users of special library as "specialized personnel" while In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)* those who avail the services of special library are called "a discrete user group".

The resources of special libraries are limited to a particular field. Thus a special library collection may be narrow in scope but it will have depth within the specialty it covers Ackermann (2004) and Ajibero (2001) listed the resources found in special libraries in Nigeria to include among other things, books, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, documents, manuscripts, pictures, maps and music score. Non-print .media are also found which include, transparencies, slides, records, audio-cassettes, microfiche, video cassettes etc. Acquiring and disseminating these resources depends on the ability of the librarian and should be done according to the guideline or standard. Thus ALIA (2005) "Guidelines for Australian Special Libraries" stipulated that the librarian shall write and review the resources management policy annually to identify core information resources as acquired, organized and managed for the organization.

Special library services are not without problems, Ajibero(2001) Ogundane (2002) dealt extensively on problems of special library services which include: poor funding, under-staffing, attitude of management, poor 1CT culture, inability to adopt a standard, problems of foreign exchange, inadequate accommodation, lack of bibliographic control, inability of special libraries to form a network which will enable them share their resources among special libraries and so on.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this survey are:
1. To identify the types of services rendered by these libraries.
2. To identify their users/patrons and the extent of patronage.
3. To find out the type of personnel and how information sources are organized.
4. To examine their facilities and accommodation provided.
5. To identify the problems inhibiting effective service delivery.

Methodology
The work used oral interview and observation checklist to elicit information. Oral interview was designed and conducted with the Heads of the sampled libraries, professional librarians and other support staff of the libraries. There are many ministry libraries in Owerri but for the purpose of this study only six were selected. They include: Federal Medical Centre. Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Imo House of Assembly, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and lastly, Ministry of Commerce and Industry Libraries in Imo State respectively.

On-the-spot observation was made to confirm the information obtained in the course of !he interview.

Data Analysis and Discussion
The results were collated using tables and percentages. The results were also presented with reference to the services rendered, users and extent of patronage, the staffing and arrangement of information sources, facilities available and accommodation.

Table 1: Services of Special Libraries

S/n	Name of Lib	Ref.	Cir.	Internet	Indexing	ABS	ILL	SDI	BB	Photo-copying
1	FMC Lib.	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	√
2	Min. of Justice Lib.	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	Min of Edu. Lib.	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4	Imo House of Assembly Lib.	√	√	x	√	√	x	x	x	x
5	Min. of Comm. & Econ. Planning Lib.	√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	x
6	Min. of Commerce & Industry	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 1 shows that services of special libraries in Owerri include: reference (Ref.), circulation (Cir.). Internet, indexing, abstracting (ABS). interlibrary loan (ILL), selective dissemination of information (SDI), bibliographic (BB) and photocopying services.

The result shows that FMC library offers reference, circulation, internet and photocopying services to their patrons: Ministries of Justice. Education: Commerce and Industry libraries offer reference and circulation services; Imo House of Assembly library offers reference, circulation, indexing and abstracting services while Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning offers SDI, abstracting, bibliographic, inter library loan, indexing and reference services to their client.

This implies that often times; it is what the library has that determines the type of service it renders. For instance, it is only FMC library that offers both photocopying and Internet services to their patrons because they have the facility to do so as is shown in table above. The result also reveals that FMC. Imo House of Assembly and Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Libraries rendered more services to their patrons than others. This in our opinion is because of the calibre of professional librarians they have.

Therefore, professionalism is sine qua non for effective service delivery. Table 3 below clearly shows the calibre of staff in these libraries.

Table 2: Users/ Patronage of Special Libraries

Name of Library	Users	No. of users per *day*	% of users Per Day	Rate of Patronage Per Day
Fed. Med. Center Lib.	Medical doctors, nurses and Student nurses, pharmacists & other staff	60	29	V. high
Min. of Justice Lib.	Civil servants -Judges, lawyers, magistrates & so on	30	14	Low
Min. of Education Lib.	Civil servants. Teachers & students.	40	19	High
Imo House of Assembly Lib.	Legislators & the staff	25	12	Low
Min. of Com. & Economic Planning Lib.	Civil servants. Finance analyst. Statisticians. Bankers. Economic planners etc.	50	24	High
Min. of Com, & Industry Lib.	Civil servants. Industrialist, directors etc.	5	2	V. low
Total		**210**	**100**	**100**

Special libraries cover a specific discipline or serve a special group of people. Therefore, users of these libraries are specialists in their area of operation. For instance, in Table 2. the users of FMC Library are medical doctors and students who are on internship, practicing and student nurses, pharmacists and other staff. Ministry of Justice library has staff, civil servants like judges, lawyers, and magistrates as their patrons. Ministry of Education Library has civil servants, teachers and students as their clientele, Imo House of Assembly Library has legislators, staffers as their patrons. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Library has civil servants, finance analysts, statisticians, bankers, economic planners etc as its patrons while Ministry of Commerce and Economic Library has civil servants, industrialists, directors etc as its clientele.

This table also shows the users, the number of users and the percentage of users per day in these special libraries studied as well as the rating of their patronage per day. The percentage of users and rate of patronage per day are based on the total number of users in all the special libraries studied. This table shows that some of these libraries have good number of patronage per day than others.

FMC Library has the highest number of patronage of 60 or 29% number of patrons per day. Patronage of these libraries depends on the type of services they offer, availability of facilities and the current stock they have. The researchers discovered many outdated library stock during the on the spot observation. Followed by FMC Library in the number of patrons, is Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Library with 50 or 24% of patrons per day.

Ministry of Education Library has 40 or 19% number of users per day. The rate of patronage per day is also high. Following this library is Ministry of Justice Library with the number of patrons of 30 or 14% per day, Imo House of Assembly Library has 20 or 12% number of users per day with low patronage respectively. The last but not the least is Ministry of Commerce and Industry Library, which has only 5 or 2% of patrons per day. The possible reasons for poor patronage of these libraries is because of obsolesce of their stock though not shown on the table above. Another contributing factor is due to the menial type of services offered, more especially on those libraries with non-professional staff. Another possible reason is inadequacies of the facilities provided. It is to be noted that the percentage number of users per day is based on the total number of users in all the special libraries studied while the rating of patronage per day is based also on the total or percentage number of users that make use of these libraries on daily bases.

Table 3: Staffing and Organization of Information Sources

Name of Library	Staffing			Organization of Info. Sources
	Prof.		Non Prof.	
Fed. Med. Center Lib.	No. 6	% 60	No. % 6 22.2	In house arrangement
Min. of Justice Lib.	-	-	4 15	In house arrangement
Min. of Education Lib.	1	10	3 11	In house arrangement
Imo House of Assembly Lib.	2	20	3 11	In house arrangement
Min. of Com. & Economic Planning Lib.	1	10	9 33.3	Cataloged & Classified using DDC
Min. of Com. & Industry Lib.	-	-	2 7.4	Poorly arranged
Total	10	100	27 100	

Table 3 shows the number and percentage number of staff in the libraries studied as well as the organization of their material resources. This table indicates that the total number of personnel in the libraries studied is 37 that is 10 professional librarians and 27 non-professional staff.

FMC Library Owerri scored highest with 6 professional librarians and 6 non-professionals bringing the number of entire staff to 12 with 60% and 22.2% respectively while Ministry of Commerce & Economic Planning Library which has the highest in the number of non-professional of 9 but with only 1 professional librarian having a percentages of 33.3% and 10% respectively.

Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Commerce and Industry libraries have no professional librarian at all but with only 4 or 15% and 2 or 7.4% of non-professional librarian respectively. Ministry of Education and Imo House of Assembly libraries have equal number

of non professional librarians of 3 or 11% each but with professional librarians of lor 10% and 2 or 20% respectively.

This result shows that the number of staff in special libraries in Owerri is far below expectation. The ratio of professional to non-professional librarians is also found wanting.

This table shows that four out of the six of these libraries $_t$ have an in house type of arrangement. It is only Ministry of Finance & Economic Library that was able to catalogue and classify her resources using Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme (DDC) while arrangement of information sources in Ministry of Commerce & Industry Library was in a sorry state. One would have thought that those libraries with a good number of professional librarians like FMC would have classified and catalogued their information sources but the opposite is the case. The situation is so because this library has no cataloguing tools not to talk of their currency. In table 4 below, heads of the sampled libraries, other professional librarians and their support staff were required to mention the facilities available in their libraries. The result is presented in Table 4. The parameters used to produce this result include: name of the libraries, year of establishment, library facilities e.g. furniture/fittings and ICT facilities and finally space or accommodation.

Table 4: Facilities and Accommodation

Name of Library	Year of Est.	Facilities		Space
		Furniture/Fittings ICT Facilities		
FMC Lib.	1996	Adequate Internet, scanner. – AC, chairs, fans &telephones, corn-tables computers & printer		Fairly sufficient
Min. of Justice Lib.	1976	Inadequate Nil		Insufficient
Min. of Education Lib.	1984	Adequate Nil		Fairly sufficient
Imo House of Assembly Lib	1976	Inadequate T.V. Intercom		Sufficient
Min. of Finance & Economic Lib.	1976	Inadequate though Computers, fax fully air-conditioned machines, land telephones & A.V. materials.		Sufficient
Min. of Com. & Ind. Lib.		Inadequate Nil		Insufficient

In Table 4, the result shows that four out of the six libraries studied were established in 1976 while two others were established in 1984 and 1996 respectively.

It also reveals that out of the six libraries studied only FMC library has internet facilities, scanner and printer. Also available are telephones, computers and audio-visual materials, air-conditioner, enough chairs and reading tables and fans but with insufficient space for the staff to work in. Finance and Economic Planning also has computers. A.V materials, telephones and fax machines etc. fully air-conditioned but with inadequate furniture/fittings, They also have enough space. Imo House of Assembly Library has T.V set, inter communication facility, enough space for both the staff and facility but lacked furniture/fittings. Ministry of Justice Library has inadequate furniture/fittings, faulty air-conditioner. It also lacked space.

Ministry of Education Library has adequate furniture/fittings like chairs, reading tables, fans. A.C but fairly sufficient space for their collection and staff. Ministry of Commerce and Industry Library has inadequate furniture/ fittings and space. ICT facility is also lacking.

From this study, some of the facilities of these libraries are inadequate. Some have enough space but the facilities to fill up the space are not there. What an irony!

The issue of space in these libraries is a very pathetic one. With the movement of ministries from Orlu Road Secretariat to their permanent site at Port-Harcourt Road, Owerri, one would have thought that space shouldn't have been a constraint to the libraries attached to these ministries; unfortunately the opposite is the case. Fr6m the findings above some still lacked space. Hence there was no initial provision made for the establishment of these libraries by the government.

The resources of special libraries are limited to the specialty it covers. Through personal observations the researchers discovered that most of the library stocks are outmoded or obsolete and also inadequate. Some of them include journals in their specific subject areas, leaflets, newspapers, magazines, some medical books in the case of FMC Library and so on.

The result of this study as shown in table 3 revealed that poor trained personnel is one of the major problems facing special library services in Owerri. The result also showed that in some of these libraries, information sources were poorly arranged. The likelihood of this poor arrangement could be as a result of non-formal training in librarianship by the staff working in this establishment. Two out of six of these libraries have no professional librarian at the all. This situation hampers effective library services.

The researchers are also convinced that inadequate facility is another problem facing special library services. The result in table 4 revealed that only three out of the six libraries studied have information communication technology but out of this number only one has an internet facility. This is too bad considering the fact that we now live in an information society where the development in information and communication technology is accompanied by a corresponding increase in knowledge, with a rapidly growing flow of information.

This table also showed that more than half of these libraries studied still have accommodation problem not minding the fact that majority of them have been established not less than 30 years ago.

Also discovered as a problem is poor motivation in terms of irregular promotion of staff. In these libraries, staff complained of poor salaries. The consequence of this is that staff especially the professional librarians among them usually migrate from the special library establishment to academic library to meet their counterpart thereby living special library with or without professional librarians.

Another problem discovered is poor attitude of the management of these libraries in Owerri. They have poor attitude towards the library and the personnel. Apart from that, some staff complained that some management staff will borrow library materials but will not return them at all or as when due. Mismanagement of fund by the management is also a problem.

Inadequate finance is the greatest among all the problems facing special library services in Owerri. Financial resources as we all know are the life wire of every organization and special libraries are no exception. Almost all the problems enumerated above cannot be solved without adequate finance. Finance allocated to special library from their funding agencies is very small and this prevents them from rendering effective library services.

Another finding is that the services offered by these libraries to their patrons are not qualitative. This could be as *a* result of inadequacies of the facilities available as well as outdated materials stocked in these libraries. The researchers also established that this poor service is also caused by a situation whereby a non-professional librarian is handling professional duties as it is in the case of two of these libraries studied. This is based on the result of the findings in table 1, 4 and 3 respectively.

Recommendations

All things considered, there is a bright prospect for Special Library services in Owerri. The future appears to accommodate more professional service with higher standards of performance in view of increasing public need for the service. It is now a common trend for special librarians to be graduates, a fact not too obvious a decade ago. Training and retraining programmes of all library staff for better service delivery is very important.

The future will also be bright for Special Libraries if adequate funds be made available by the government in order to arm the management of these libraries with the financial wherewithal for the procurement of information sources and improvement of services in Owerri. This will minimize the picture of financial neglect, which has undermined or sabotaged its ability to procure the necessary tools required for effective discharge of its services. This ugly situation has affected the ability of the library to meet the various needs of the users.

One problem with Nigeria librarianship especially Special Libraries in Owerri at the moment is the inability to embrace innovations once it is discovered. The system allows for much rhetoric and theorizing but when it comes to actual practices, institutions within the system are always hesitant to embrace.

It as far as innovations are concerned thereby elongating the pace of library development. Federal and State Governments should start Internet awareness campaign to educate policy-makers about the benefits of the services available on the global information network and the current state of isolation of libraries in Nigeria.

Irregular payment of staff salaries and other claims, which is prevalent at the time of writing this report, definitely affects staff morale and output. Consequently, efforts should be made to pay staff emoluments as at when due. Periodic in-service training; study leave, convenient working environment and facilities, and welfare packages should be devised to boost the morale of the staff.

The future of special libraries also lies in the hands of special librarians. The incumbent librarians on their part should try to reach out and convince management on the functions of library in the achievement of organization's goals and objectives.

There is no library that would be said to be self-sufficient: therefore, because of dearth of information sources, special libraries should adopt resource sharing or interlibrary loan services.

Conclusion:

Special libraries in Owerri have been responsible for the information needs of geometrically expanding legal profession, government, medicine, commerce, industries etc. Besides, they have also become vital in social and economic information resource centres for State and National development.

For special libraries to be developed and render effective services, as contained above, there is need for parent organizations or institutions to have or show commitment to libraries. Such commitments should be translated into the provision of adequate finance to establish, maintain and sustain special libraries.

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