

## Public Library as an Effective Tool for Youth Empowerment in a Period of Economic Recession: Onitsha Divisional Library Experience

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### Abstract

Public libraries serve as an avenue for skill acquisition and career development through their youth empowerment programs. This study surveyed the public library as an effective tool for youth empowerment in Onitsha Divisional Library. It adopted descriptive survey research design. Four research questions and four purposes of study guided the research. The population of the study was made up of 423 youths. One hundred (100) youths that benefited from the youth empowerment program of the Public Library were selected using accidental sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire titled "Public Library and Youth Empowerment Questionnaires (PULYEQ)". Data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages and mean rating. The findings of the study revealed that the Onitsha Divisional Library hosts youth empowerment programs for youths to develop their entrepreneurial talents and acquire new creative skills, but the program lacked adequate funding. Based on the findings, it is recommended that enough funds should be provided by the government for the public libraries to consolidate the programs by acquiring the required infrastructure and equipment required for effective skill acquisition.

**Keywords:** *Public Library, Entrepreneurship, Youth Empowerment, Skill acquisition Onitsha Divisional Library*

### Introduction

Unemployment is an ill wind that is fast spreading all over the countries of the world; no nation is exempted from its negative effects. Although most of the western countries have devised proactive and effective schemes to combat its effects, the developing nations are still living below average of the acceptable margin and grappling with this menace. The

explanation made by the United Nations is that in most African countries, the youths are basically the ones that are unemployed.

Youths are said to be confronted with unemployment which is caused by lack of capacity and essential productive skills for both creative employment in existing organizations and for self-employment (Sagagi, 2010). Many youths are not empowered because they have not acquired

the kind of skills that are frequently demanded in the environment they operate, others are unemployed because their skills have been rendered obsolete by technological changes or because they have no skills at all (Kpakol, 2014). With inadequate skills and few opportunities, the youths face a future of low-wage employment in the informal sector with little security and prospects as a result of poor empowerment (Dandago & Muhammad, 2014). The expansion of employment opportunities In Nigeria is far below the growth in population because of lack of productive skills. This reality leaves the youths without any sustainable means of livelihood and these result to poverty and unemployment which have become the ugly twin faces of the state's economy. There is no doubt that one of the problems confronting many nations is how to remedy this problem by means of providing empowerment to the youths that will combat youth restiveness in almost all the Nigerian societies. Information is power, in this regard, the youths need current information on job opportunities and placements where they can get empowered and become self-reliant. Information dissemination through proper channels should be given priority, placed in the right perspective and the public library is best suited to fill this gap. Public libraries are strategically located as avenues for formal and informal learning and education for all, especially the youths.

Education of the youth is supported by the public libraries, through its services, activities and programs. The youths are equipped with skills needed for survival in the labor market through the provision of

information resources, knowledge sharing and programs provided by the libraries (Anasi, 2010). In addition to making available information on job opportunities, libraries can be an avenue for skill acquisition and career development through their youth empowerment programs. The empowerment programme of public libraries is in line with the inclusive education programme of UNESCO, 2015 as documented by (Umeh, Nnadi & Osuji, 2021).

Nwosu (2000) defined a library as a collection of books and other informational materials kept for the purpose of reading, study, and making reference. It can also be seen from the above definition that the libraries were regarded as the store house of information resources. In the past, emphasis was placed on the preservation of informational material rather than on the dissemination of information and services to users. However, with the emergence of new technology and in line with the emergent purpose of education which focus on self-reliance, the concept of library has changed completely from where information material are stored to service institutions and learning centers.

Many activities can take place in a library especially public libraries which have a wide mandate and varied user groups . This is predominantly applicable to public library which serves the entire community's diverse needs, interests and caters for all members of the community including children, youths and adults. Public library is defined as a library which is accessible to the public and generally funded by public resource (Dhiman, 2011). Public library, as

its name suggests, is for the people and by the people. It exits from civilization of mankind and acts as the important custodian of human culture, knowledge, and social customs (Kaliya & Baskaran, 2010).

Librarians have long upheld the principles of universal access to public libraries because the UNESCO(1994) states that the public library is a local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for long life learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. The origin of public library services rest in antiquity with the first recording of human thought in the concept of a system or an institution which could preserve thoughts for future use.

Laila (2014) stresses that a public library is a welfare center which provides useful services to the community by fostering education, promoting culture, providing scope for healthy recreation and disseminating information to all sections of the society, which often provides community information. Public library provides relevant information sources and services which can support economic and social development. It has a crucial role in supporting educational institutions in the society. Public libraries are becoming modern avenues equipped to let youths and others practice skills and share what they learn. Libraries offer the perfect place for young people to continue developing team work and critical thinking skills while sharing knowledge and creativity with others. Public libraries exist in many countries across the world and are often

considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population.

A public library is an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, age, language, religion, nationality, gender, disability, economic and employment status, and educational attainment.

Public library is now acknowledged to be an indispensable part of community life as it promotes literacy, provides all ranges of reading for all ages, and center for community information services. It is made up of the headquarter with branch and divisional or community libraries. Moreover the public library should be able to improve and transform the lives of the society by empowering the youth whose future governance is in their hands by creating and disseminating information to them without restrictions. Based on the forgoing, every community is expected to have a public library with spelt out goals of operations through which the youth could be helped in their educational process. Such library services should provide youth with stimulating and rewarding experiences in the mode of learning and make them better library users in life.

Youth can be referred to as the time of life when someone is young, this involves

childhood and the time of life which is neither childhood nor adulthood, but rather somewhere in-between. Youth also identifies a particular mindset or attitude. United Nations (2004), referred to a youth as; all persons falling between the ages of 15 to 24 inclusive. Youth is an experience that may shape an individual's level of dependency, which can be marked in various ways according to different cultural perspectives. Henze (2015) defined youth as a period of life in-between childhood and adulthood. This period is distinctively characterized by: leaving the parental home and establishing new living arrangement, completing full time education, forming close, stable personal relationship outside of the family often resulting to marriage and children, testing the labor market, finding work and possibly settling into a career, and achieving a more or less sustainable livelihood. It implies that youths need sustainable empowerment to cope with basic life of independence which their characteristics showcased.

Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. They do this by addressing their situation and then taking actions in order to improve their access to resources and transforming their consciousness, beliefs, values and attitudes. Youth empowerment rests on a core belief that young people are experts on their lives, with unique perspectives to bring to their community. Empowering youths must be multi-faceted at the state level, community level and family level, each of these levels having its own set of responsibilities and

tools which it can utilize to empower the youths. Youth empowerment program is a process by which youths gain control over the factors that shape their lives. It is a process by which youths increase their skills, assets, attributes and build capacities to gain access or make their voice heard. Youth empowerment is a process where young people acquire skill, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people (Ledford, Lucas, Diavaghi & Ravel cited in Oladeji, Oyediji, Adenika, Ayinla, Otayokhe & Ajiboye, 2022). Public libraries provide opportunities for youth empowerment by engaging the youths in activities that will help shape their own future. Youth empowerment programs are recorded to have tremendous positive effects on the lives of many youths all around the world.

The Onitsha Divisional Library was opened on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1996, by the Military Governor, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu with the aim to provide or serve information needs of the community. The then administration under the leadership of Mr. Peter Obi gave Onitsha Divisional Library a new look, as most of the old books were weeded out and replaced with more current ones. It was furnished, repainted, beautified and compound was renovated. Mr. Peter Obi went further to establish a Microsoft Center for E-library services and initiated the youth empowerment programs, which includes: Information youth empowerment program, educational youth program, cultural youth program and recreational youth program.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Unemployment in Nigeria has been very high. Most youths are turning to crimes and restiveness due to poor means of employment available to them. Job opportunities and placement are in short supply for the teeming youth population in our country. The youths are not empowered because they lack basic skills needed in the present dispensation.

If the youths do not acquire skills, they cannot engage in viable ventures that will improve their economic capabilities. Some do not even have the resources to pay for acquisition of the skills that will empower them and this has increased the rate of unemployment. However, the library may have to empower the youths by conducting programs and projects to empower the youths on different specializations. Failure to empower the youths with entrepreneurship education, skills and motivation, will set them back in embracing entrepreneurship and achieving self-reliance there by giving rise to increased unemployment and other associated ills in Nigeria. Moreover, the public library is a potent democratic institution that brings people from all walks of life in their need for information, education, ICT literacy and self-development. If the public library empowers these youths by its program, they will be repositioned to participate in the society and contribute meaningfully to its growth and sustainable development. Therefore this research set to provide empirical evidence of how the public library serves as an effective tool for youth empowerment; a case study of Onitsha Divisional Library.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the Onitsha Divisional Library as an effective tool for youth empowerment. The study specifically intends to:

1. find out the purpose of conducting youth empowerment programs;
2. ascertain the types of youth empowerment programs organized by Onitsha Divisional Library for the youths;
3. identify the problems associated with the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library;
4. suggest strategies for improving the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the purposes of conducting youth empowerment programs?
2. What are the types of youth programs organized by Onitsha Divisional Library for the youth?
3. What are the problems associated with the youth empowerment programs in Onitsha Divisional Library?
5. What are the strategies for improving the youth empowerment programs in Onitsha Divisional Library?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Public Library**

A public library is a library that offers services to the public free of charge, and it also provides educational, social and



political information to the people in a particular community (Olanlokun & Salisu, 1993). Generally, public libraries are accepted as public goods. Furthermore, he remarked that public libraries are libraries set up to provide free but traditional services to everyone. A public library serves the community and is generally referred to as a layman's library or university. It is a state, local or town affair, authorized by the state law, supported from the public fund and operated for the benefit of the general public (Ebiwolate, 2010).

The primary purpose of the public library is to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individual groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. The public libraries are important cornerstone of a healthy community which gives people the opportunity to find jobs, explore medical research, experience new ideas, get lost in wonderful stories, while at the same time providing a sense of place for gathering. The library is a unique and valuable resource.

The UNESCO manifesto for public libraries cited by Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012) stipulated that the services of the public libraries are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. According to the UNESCO manifesto, the key mission that should be at core of public library services includes creating and strengthening reading habit in children from early age, supporting both individual and self-conducted education, as well as formal education at all level,

providing opportunities for personal development.

Moreover, it behooves the public libraries to package information and bring them close to the users most especially the youths who need empowerment, it is only through information that the youths can widen their horizon and fit into the developmental process in the society. In fact, they need effective utilization of information services to become better citizens of tomorrow from learning of skills to functional livelihood, knowing how to read, write, think, understand, analyze and discuss the issues facing the country.

Surajdeen (2016) succinctly put it that they should dwell on these five concepts which are patriotism, reading culture, critical reasoning, skill acquisition and policy making to function effectively. This is the reason libraries and information centers are vital in bridging the gap between knowledge and ignorance.

In an interview with Anyaeji (2019) some functions of the public library were listed to include; promotion of all types of education, formal, non-formal, adult and life-long learning by keeping adequate stock of books and other reading materials and making them available to all sections of the community; serving as information center or referral contact points for specialized sources of information on empowerment opportunities, public utility services, facilities provided by social welfare agencies and others; contribute to the cultural enrichment of the society by organizing extension activities like, lectures, seminars, symposiums, book

exhibitions, and cultural gatherings; encouraging the positive use of leisure and providing materials (books of fiction, magazines and newspapers, films, television, radios; cassettes and gramophones records etc.) for change and relaxation; provision of information for self-development in all walks of human life. People need to develop their individual knowledge by reading, exploring and studying materials in public libraries on their own choice.

Similarly, youth empowerment functions of the public libraries are seen to be the programs done by the public libraries for young people who tend to get empowered and reposition them for self-reliance. These youth empowerment programs are conducted to fill in certain gaps in the society to make it peaceful. Part of the youth empowerment functions of the public libraries are to make the youth to have a positive leadership skill, it makes them to be well educated with current information, it tends to reduce crimes among the youth, it places the youths on a position to be employed, it provides the youth with a sense of purpose to fulfill certain aims in their lives (Interview with Anyaeji, 2019).

### **Concept of Youths**

A youth is defined by Agufana (2015) as the period of evolution from the reliance of childhood to adulthood's freedom, specifically in relation to employment and education, because 'youth' frequently signifies individuals between the ages of those departing from compulsory education to finding their first jobs. Youth is a relative term, defined by a given age range, and with

its meaning varying across cultures, groups, and countries. Tenuche (2009) noted that youths are young men and women between the ages of 15 and 24 years. In Nigeria, university graduates, aged 30 years and below, are recognized as youths (NYSC Acts, 1973). "Youth" is traditionally defined as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. African Youth Charter (n.d) defined youths or young people as people between the ages of 15 and 35. Youths in any country represent the future of that nation. However, several African countries define their youth population differently. For example, Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa define the youth population as those between 15 and 35 years of age; Nigeria and Swaziland defined it as those between 12 and 30 years; and Botswana and Mauritius defined it as those between 14 and 25 years (Yusuf, 2017). These varying definitions of the youth population make it difficult to effectively discuss issues affecting youths in Africa generally and to compare information across countries. The age band used in the African Youths Report is too wide because it is generally agreed that people in their 30s are adults, and hence, are not part of those youths who are in transition to adulthood.

In line with the definition of youths, there are a number of characteristics that are associated with who a youth should be. The Youth empowerment model (2013) defines the youths as all young persons who in most cases are single (unmarried) and are still in their virile and active period of life. They are persons who are still dependent on their parents for food, clothing and shelter and may not have a reasonable source of income

to survive without parental or family support. The youths are usually identified with some juvenile qualities that still represents them as been not matured enough to handle certain responsibilities such as elective positions, family matters or independent actions (Adamu, 2007).

Youths are mainly those still undergoing undergraduate programmes or academic training in tertiary institutions and probably form a majority of job seekers (Alanana, 2007). The youths are usually short changed in policies of government relating to access to resources, education, training, employment, and broader economic development opportunities. They are the backbone of the development of the country. Indeed, if Nigeria is to be sustained as a viable entity there must be a very good plan to tap the energy and resourcefulness of the youth population to fast track economic development (Abdul-Lateef & Adam, 2015).

In relation to the library, a youth is seen as a person who can access the collection of the library and are at their lucid state of sanity. A youth as described by Ajufo (2013) is a person who is within a reasonable age that can use the library. They have vital roles to play in the development of the country as they perform duties that contribute to sustainable resilient communities. Oputeh (2015) stated that any nation that denies its youths the necessary enabling environment to participate in nation building processes does so at its own risk. This is because they are the foundation of any society. Their energies, resources, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their

creative talents and labor, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments (Onyekpe, 2007). Indeed, the nation finds motivation and builds strength in youth dreams, hopes and energies. To make good and meaningful decision for nation building, the youths desire accurate, timely and vital information. The public libraries, especially and the community information centers help ensure access to free information flow (Davis, 2007) that will help them make informed judgments and decisions.

### **Youth Empowerment**

Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. They do this by addressing their situation and then taking action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their attitudes through their beliefs and values. Generally, youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have, therefore, needed to be developed and empowered. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are, potentially and actually the greatest investments for a country's development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001). These youths must be developed intellectually, morally, socially with relevant skills to face a rapidly advancing technological world.

Since, information is so essential to nation building, the library collates and makes this basic necessity of everyday life available (Sharma, 2013). According to Atuti (2013) and Abiona and Bello (2013), library services can facilitate peoples' involvement



in local consultation, help develop and support community, organize and empower role performance and promotion of democratic participation. All these are elements of nation building. Information creates new ideas and modify behavior, effecting changes and enhancing efficiency in all human endeavors. Nigerian youths are leaders of the future and they need access to a wide range of information to provoke them and deepen the choices they make in event of employment and educational opportunities.

Importantly, the young people have various information needs which may arise from curiosity, school assignments, personal situations and developmental stages of growth. Silvio (2006) studying Sudanese youth using semi – structural interviews, found that the youth's information needs are multifaceted including education information, racism information, employment information, political information and health information. In addition to fulfilling their information needs, they prefer to use informal sources such as from trusted friends, relatives, co-workers rather than visiting the local public library. Hence, information gathering has a wide-range of values among the youth as it promotes education, independence, equality and health. Youth empowerment aims to improve the quality of life. Youth empowerment is achieved through participation in youth empowerment programs. However, scholars argue that children's rights implementation should go beyond learning about formal rights and procedures to give birth to a concrete experience of rights (Golay and Malatesta, 2014).

Youth empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity. However, Youth empowerment is different from youth development because development is centered on developing individuals, while empowerment is focused on creating greater community change that relies on the development of individual's capacity (Ledford and Lucas, 2013).

In relation of the public library, youth empowerment is seen as a public library's social responsibility program that is meant to improve on the youths' social economic lives (Ajufo, 2013). Youth empowerments in public libraries are social programs set out to assist the youths to redefine themselves with abilities that can help them become self-reliant.

### **Purpose of Conducting Youth Empowerment Programs in Public Libraries**

Youth empowerment has also been used as a framework to prevent and reduce youth violence. Research shows that youth empowerment programs can improve conflict avoidance and resolution skills, increase group leadership skills, and civic efficacy and improve ethnic identity and reduce racial conflict (Ledford & Lucas, 2013).

Youth empowerment programs are aimed at creating healthier and higher qualities of life for underprivileged or at-risk youth. The purpose of youth empowerment programs is to provide opportunities for the youth to build their own enterprises and create wealth for themselves and the nation through; organizing and conducting

training, seminars and workshop and linking them with financial institutions for financial support (Golay & Malatesta, 2014).

Other purposes of youth empowerment programs are to encourage young people to participate in a wide range of activities appropriate to their age and stage of development; to promote youth employment through programs and already existing activities and initiatives; to create a productive and self-sustaining youth population, capable of protecting themselves and their communities against the risks of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Violence; to mobilize the youth to participate in environmental and natural resource management for health, safety and increased sustainable livelihoods; to help young people to gain a greater understanding and respect for their own traditions and those of others by engaging in programs that reflect the principles of equality, diversity and inter dependence (Ledford & Lucas, 2013).

In the library situation, the purpose of the youth empowerment programs has been harnessed by the public library. The public library has its purposes for organizing the youth empowerment programs. Golay and Malatesta (2014) also stated that the purposes of youth empowerment in the public libraries are to provide youths with avenue to acquire relevant job skills, to reduce the level of ignorance and crime among young people, to serve as an opportunity for the youth to develop their skills and talents; thereby making them a better person, to create a productive and self-sustaining youth population, to

encourage youths to do great things for themselves, to help the youths to be self-reliant, serve as a framework to prevent and reduce youth violence, increase group leadership skills, and civic efficacy, to help the youths to develop confidence and self-identity, promote youth employment through programs and already existing activities/initiatives, improve ethnic identity and reduce racial conflict among youths and creating healthier and higher qualities of life for underprivileged youths.

These purposes of youth empowerment in the public libraries is to assist in providing particulars of information for the youths to keep them become abreast of new information on job opportunities. The library as part of its purposes will extend avenues where high literacy can be achieved among the youths to enable them gain useful resources on youth empowerment programs and the opportunities therein (Kurtis, 2015). It aims to expose the youth to wealth creation activities and skills that may be available for a fee in other sectors but are provided at no cost in public libraries.

Types of youth Empowerment Programme Organized by Library for the Youths

Youth empowerment cuts across so many areas. These areas have their own specific contents. The diverse areas of coverage of the youth empowerment is what gave birth to types of youth empowerment. In Nigerian libraries, there are youth empowerment programs that support the skills development of the youths. According to Ajufo (2013), in supporting these youth empowerment programs, the public library has developed a number of youth empowerment programs that it

carries out to promote access to information that will aid job opportunities and employment. There are models of youth empowerment programs used in empowering the youths. A variety of youth empowerment initiatives are underway around the world.

**Library Week:** Public libraries can organize library week. The reason for this activity is to promote the objectives of the library which is to bring the library alive to the users. Here, a special week is set aside to celebrate library use and other activities that will enhance readership. This readership feature will encourage youths to read books and resources that may contain useful job tips. Most of these books contain adverts and job applications as well as other initiatives of government aimed at youth empowerment. This library week has served as an avenue for intellectual sensitization youth empowerment programs.

**Book Exhibition and Book Talk:** This is a low-cost effective strategy organized so that users can talk about the interesting books they have read. They could describe characters and bring out similarities in many characters. A librarian could pick a book and talk on it; stimulate interest in the book and ask users to read the book and could come back for further literacy analysis of the book. Such reading of and book talk can also expose some contents of certain books that provide youth empowerment programs and job placement therein.

**Writing Skill Training:** Most public libraries in advanced countries organize

this activity on the evenings of weekends like Saturdays (Yueh, 2015). Here, they invite people to come and talk and train library users on writing skills, how they can write applications and curriculum vitae, and other areas where they can gainfully get placement and useful tips to better their lives.

**Creative Activities:** This activity involves the creativity of the library youth who displays a certain skill or talent among other library users. These creative skills such as bead making, hat making, fascinator, hand fan making, bags, shoes, baking, fashion and design, event decor are taught to the youths. They are also taught how to display creative arts that can encourage someone into dancing or singing, painting, lettering, tie and dye, sculptor and drawing. Resource persons are brought in to teach the youths the skills. This has popularized the maker spaces in public libraries. These are also named hacker spaces or hack lab which is an area that offer library patrons an opportunity to create intellectual and physical materials using resources such as computers, 3D printers, audio, and video capture and editing tools and traditional arts and craft supplies. Teasdale (2020) describes it as shared workspaces where participants use digital and analogues tools to create objects, develop ideas and sharpen abilities. These spaces support creative practices including traditional hobbies and crafts, computer-aided design and digital fabrication (Martin cited in Teasdale, 2020). Public libraries are increasingly investing in maker spaces and some conceptualize it and related programmes as core services (Koh, Abbas and Willett cited in Teasdale). These spaces are framed as learning

environments that provide educational and other benefits.

### **ICTS and Computer Programs**

**Training:** Computer software's and Internet services such as desktop publishing are taught to the youths. Librarians can teach basic ICTS skills. Public library also organizes youth group and advise them on avenues of how to be gainfully employed. They also provide free computer training to users. Resource persons are brought in to educate users at specified occasions.

**Partnering and Networking:** The public library can also carry out youth empowerment programs by seeking out alliances with organizations inside the country and overseas that may be willing to come forward and sponsor youth empowerment objectives.

### **Conferences, Workshops, & Seminars:**

The public library also organizes conferences, workshops, and seminars to enable local and neighboring youths who may be students or researchers with different professional & non-professional groups to interact and share their socio-economic ideology and other matters related to their future. This according to Kurtis (2015) will help them:

- Support local resources (physical space, cultural institutions, and advocacy groups)
- Draw on community expertise and personal experiences and provide a space to talk about the things that “matter the most”

**Competitions, Awards & Trophies:** The public library can also organize competitions and give trophies and prizes for various achievements within the youth sphere. In a competitive environment, both at national and international levels, it would motivate them with due recognition. Besides winning awards of attractive prizes and certificates winners attract sponsorship and economic empowerment from government and philanthropists. This will also facilitate:

- a. The need to build and upgrade technological capacity, stimulate innovation and improve competitiveness and market access.
- b. Capacity building which is very important in fostering technological upgrading and improving the quality of products
- c. To become a better competitor i.e. knowing their competitors. Knowing who are doing what, allows them to pinpoint, if and where they are lagging behind. An added bonus is that, with a good amount of competition they won't have to make the same mistakes (Yueh, 2015).

### **Public Awareness Programs/Projects**

**Activities on How to Apply for Jobs:** The public library also carry out youth empowerment programs by promoting and facilitating national awareness campaigns and educational programs on youth socio-economic development. They obtain from members and other avenues, information relating to youth affairs, and disseminate such information amongst the public and

the society by means of journals, circulars, publications, lectures, seminars, conferences or otherwise (Yueh, 2015). Here, the youths are taught how to write their resume and curriculum vitae as well as how to apply for jobs online and offline. Programs such as spelling B, competitions, outreach to secondary schools and provision of interactive sessions, create opportunity for the talk shows and facilitation.

### **Problems Associated with the Youth Empowerment Programs of Public Library**

Youth restiveness in Nigeria has been a prominent issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including things like hostage-taking of prominent citizens and expatriate oil workers, as well as oil bunkering, arms insurgence, cultism, etc., especially in the Niger Delta region and kidnapping in the northern and eastern parts of Nigeria. The government is still insincere about youth empowerment programs. The public library that has a role to play in improving the implementation of youth empowerment policies and programs which are deficient in certain ways but this drive is impeded by certain problems. Germane among the problems associated with the youth empowerment programs of the public library are: under-funding of the library, insufficient library resources, lack of skilled librarians, high cost of library resources, erratic power supply, lack of infrastructure to attract and engage the youths' interest in the library among others (Ahiazu & Nyemez, 2021).

### **Strategies for Improving the Youth Empowerment Programs of Library**

Various forms of youth empowerment programs which have existed for a long time are economically, politically, or religiously motivated. The problems of youth empowerment programs of libraries can be resolved if certain innovations are put in place. In this regard, libraries should play a crucial role in inculcating positive values, attitudes, and behaviors that promote harmonious relationships. Libraries help to ensure that people have access to information that will help them make informed judgments and decisions. Highlighted below are the landmark solutions for public library's youth empowerment programs (Ahiazu & Nyemez, 2021):

**Sufficient Library Resources:** Public library in their bid to carry out effective youth empowerment programs, need adequate provision of relevant resources that will assist them to organize youth empowerment programs. Such materials as books, computers, well equipped makerspace with machines, art and craft, culinary, dressmaking and production of household sundries and other items needed for hands on practice and workshops for youth participants. They should be readily available and provided.

**Provision of Adequate Financial Support:** Public libraries need funds to organize youth empowerment programs. Government funding to the public library should be increased. The librarian could engage community power brokers, change-agents, philanthropists, get into networking



and collaborative ventures with NGOs, agencies and other stakeholders for fundraising. Other strategies include:

### **Librarians Face the Ongoing Challenge of Finding Books and Materials that Capture Teens' Attention**

Public libraries should carry out youth empowerment programs and evaluate the teen's appeal for books and magazines. The youth's section of library web sites should increasingly feature original literary work of local teens, including book reviews, poetry, fiction and commentary. Public libraries should consider creating story-talk hours, creative activities or creative writing, clubs, drama presentations. These are great tools for attracting children and young people to read or attend programs in the library for intellectual empowerment.

**Sponsoring and Supporting Summits and Youth Events:** As central and attractive civic facilities, libraries can be both impressive and practical locations to convene youth for varied purposes. In turn, many young people welcome opportunities to bridge neighborhood boundaries, work collaboratively with adults, and think big about youth issues and potential.

**Use of Skilled Librarians who are Good Speakers:** Youths need to be motivated for them to be cultivated to partake and have repeated visits to the public library's youth empowerment programs. Hence, there is need for the library to draft in a good speaker as resource person to be the guest speakers during the programs. The use of volunteers is handy and cost saving.

**Reduced cost of Library Resources:** Library resources for use in the youth empowerment programs should be reduced and subsidized at low cost for the library to be able purchase them.

### **Methods**

A descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study consists of four hundred and twenty three (423) registered youth users of Onitsha Divisional Library. Accidental sampling technique was used to select 100 users who were known to have benefited from the youth empowerment programs of the Onitsha Divisional Library. The instrument used for collecting data for this study was an Observation Checklist and a structured questionnaire. The title of the questionnaire is Public Library and Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (PULYEQ). It has two sections. Section A is designed to collect relevant background information on the users, whereas section B sought to elicit information on the research questions. The Research question was designed on a 4 point rating scale of SA - Strongly Agree, A - Agree, D - Disagree, SD - Strongly Disagree to answer the items on the questionnaire, in research question 1,3, 4 and 5 while for research question 2, the two factor item of availability and not available was used in the instrument. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics particularly the mean scores for research questions 1, 3, 4 and 5 with a criterion mean (a mid-point mean score) of 2.50. The average of the individual score for response on a 4 point rating scale (SA = 4, A = 3, D = 2, SD = 1).

$$\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = 2.50$$

Thus any mean score range from 2.50 and above was regarded as positive. While any score from 0-2.4 was regarded as negative. For frequency and percentage of 50 and above it was regarded as the score limit for available while 0-49% was regarded as not available, for item on table 2, research question 2.

### Results and Discussion of Findings

Data collected were analysed based on the research questions that guided the study and presented in the tables as shown below:

#### Research Question 1: What are the purposes for conducting youth empowerment program?

**Table 1: Mean rating of the purposes for conducting youth empowerment program.**

S/N	Items	X	Decision
1	To provide youths with avenues to acquire relevant job skills.	3.05	Agreed
2	Helping the youth to develop confidence and self-identity	2.87	Agreed
3	To reduce the level of ignorance and crime among the youths	2.41	Disagreed
4	To serve as an opportunity for the youth to develop their skills and talents, thereby making them better persons.	2.78	Agreed
5	To create a productive and self-sustaining youth population	2.83	Agreed
6	Promoting youth employment through programs and already existing activities and initiatives	2.54	Agreed
7	Improving ethnic identity and reducing racial conflict among youths	2.47	Disagreed
8	Encouraging youths to do great things for themselves	2.58	Agreed
9	Serve as a framework to prevent and reduce youth violence	2.77	Agreed
10	To help youths to be self-reliant	2.27	Disagreed
11	Increase group leadership skills, and civic efficacy	2.60	Agreed
12	Creating healthier and higher qualities of life for underprivileged youths.	2.46	Disagreed

From Table 1, items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 11 have mean rating from 2.50 and above which is agreed. These items show that the purposes are effective for conducting youth empowerment programs. The table also shows mean rating of item 3,7,10 and 12 which are below 2.50, indicating disagreed.

**Research Question 2: What are the types of youth empowerment programs organized in Onitsha Divisional Library for the youths?**

**Table 2: Types of youth empowerment programs organized by Onitsha Divisional Library**

S/N	Items	Frequencies	Frequency Percentage
1	Public awareness programs/projects/activities on how to apply for jobs	80%	20%Available
2	Awards, competitions & Trophies	56%	44%Available
3	Conferences, workshops & seminars	70%	30%Available
4	Organize youth groups to learn computer	88%	12%Available
5	Creative activities such as bead making, fashion & designing in markerspace	77%	23%Available
6	Writing skill training	85%	15%Available
7	Book exhibitions and book talks	77%	32%Available
8	Library week	58%	42%Available
9	Partnering and networking	23%	77% Not Avai

Table 2 indicated that out of the nine youth empowerment programs organized by Onitsha Divisional Library for the youths, only one item partnering and networking was not available.

**Research Question 3: what are the problems associated with the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library?**

**Table3: Problems associated with the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library.**

S/N	Items	X	Decision
1	High cost of library resources	2.05	Disagreed
2	Lack of skilled librarians	2.88	Agreed
3	Insufficient library resources	3.06	Agreed
4	Inadequate financial support	3.15	Agreed
5	Lack of sponsorship and support for summit and youth events	3.15	Agreed

From Table 3, items 2, 3, 4 and 5 are above 2.50 indicating agreed, which implies that the items are problems faced in youth empowerment programs in Onitsha Divisional Library and only one item, i.e., item 1 was not part of the problems militating against the problems of youth empowerment programs in the library under study.

#### **Research Question 4: What are the strategies for improving the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library?**

**Table 4: Mean response on the strategies for improving the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library.**

S/N	Items	X	Decision
1	Reducing cost of library resources	2.89	Agreed
2	Use of skilled librarians who are good speakers	2.80	Agreed
3	Provision of sufficient library resources	2.31	Disagreed
4	Provision of adequate financial support	2.38	Agreed
5	Sponsoring and supporting summits and youth events	2.51	Agreed

The mean score of Table 4 with the items 1, 2, 4, and 5 are above 2.50 indicating agreed, and the items are accepted as strategies for improving the youth empowerment programs of Onitsha Divisional Library, while item three (3) was not an agreed strategy for handling the challenges.

#### **Discussion of Results**

##### **Purposes of Conducting Youth Empowerment Programs**

The findings of the study revealed that the purposes of conducting youth empowerment programs in Onitsha Divisional Library are varied: To provide youths with avenue to acquire relevant job skills, helping youths develop confidence and self-identity, to reduce the level of ignorance and crime among young people,

to serve as an opportunity for the youth to develop their skills and talents; thereby making them a better person, to create a productive and self-sustaining youth population, promote youth employment through programs and already existing activities and initiatives, improve ethnic identity and reduce racial conflict among youths, encouraging youths to do great things for themselves, serves as a framework to prevent and reduce youth violence, to help youths to be self-reliant, increase group leadership skills, and civic efficacy and creating healthier and higher qualities of life for underprivileged youths. From the analysis carried out using the grand mean (2.63), it was discovered that the items identified above are the purposes of conducting youth empowerment programs are effective in Onitsha Divisional Library. This agrees with the

view of Golay and Malatesta (2014) which says that the purpose of youth empowerment program is to provide opportunities for the young to build their own enterprises and create wealth for themselves and the nation through; organizing and conducting training, seminars and workshop and linking them with financial institutions for financial support.

### **Types of Youth Empowerment Programs organized by Onitsha Divisional Library for the Youths**

The finding indicated the types of youth empowerment programs organized by Onitsha Divisional Library for the youths and it showcased public awareness programs/projects/activities on how to apply for jobs, awards, competitions and trophies, conferences, workshops and seminars, organizing youth groups to learn computer, creative activities such as bead making, fashion & designing, writing skill training, book exhibition & book talk, library week, partnership and networking. Based on the results presented, it has been discovered that there are adequate youth empowerment programs available for youth empowerment in Onitsha divisional library. The results tallies with the view of Ajufo (2013) who noted that in supporting these youth empowerment programs, the public library has developed a number of youth empowerment programs that it carries out to promote access to information that will aid job opportunities and employment. There are models of youth empowerment programs used in empowering the youths.

### **Problems Associated with the Youth Empowerment Programs**

The results of the study revealed the problems associated with the youth empowerment in Onitsha Divisional Library and emphasized the following problems; high cost of library resources, lack of skilled librarians, insufficient library resources, inadequate financial support and poor interests in sponsoring and supporting summits and youth events. This is corroborated by Ahiazu and Nyemezu (2021) who itemized the following as problems of youth empowerment programmes; inadequate financial support, insufficient library resources, lack of skilled librarians and high cost of library resources.

### **Strategies for Improving Youth Empowerment Programs**

The findings of the results proffered strategies for improving youth empowerment programmes in Onitsha divisional library. It revealed the following: reduced cost of library resources, use of skilled librarians who are good speakers, providing sufficient library resources, provision of adequate financial support, sponsoring and supporting summits and youth events. This agrees with the view of Ahiazu and Nyemezu (2021) who in a study recommended provision of adequate information resources in the library, provision of infrastructures for youth's empowerment, provision of adequate funding for the library as strategies of improving youth empowerment programs in libraries.



## **Conclusion**

Public library in the new paradigm needs to embrace a more intensive user engagement to meet the requirements of the youths for their daily empowerment as society demands more skills from the youths to reposition them for the present day entrepreneurship driven world. It is important to understand the role of the public library in community development especially for the youth population. The public library helps contribute to the growth of education amongst youth and this in turn increases and strengthens the productivity of the community as well as enhances youth development. Information is a vital tool in all human endeavor. They are the link to national development (Achitabwino, 2007). In order to grow more efficiently in all aspects of society, developing countries must collect and provide access to adequate and up-to-date “information on employment, placements, health, government, population, education, family planning, youth empowerment, gender equality, environment, etc. (Achitabwino, 2007). In this regard, it is imperative that all hands must be on deck toward establishing effective libraries for the proper management, provision, and dissemination of information, because information is power.

Today's youths have to be equipped with different skills such as; literacy skills, creative skills, job skills if they are to remain relevant in the society. Public libraries must be repositioned to serve the leaders of tomorrow with information on current employment and educational opportunities, locally and internationally.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the librarians to develop this new paradigm, to grab the interest of the youths and get them empowered through creative and innovative programs and projects.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. Increase opportunities for entrepreneurial empowerment among youths in line with the varied reasons for setting up empowerment programmes. Ensure information skill training is pitched at a level which is appropriate to the individual's needs.
2. The types of empowerment programmes should be consolidated with well-equipped makerspaces in line with international best practices
3. Competent and well trained librarians with multiple skills and talents should be employed in public libraries to bring innovations that will give appropriate exposure and publicity for the youth empowerment programs of the public library.
4. Appropriate funding provisions for the public library should be made by the government while fund raising by philanthropists, NGOs, Community change agents and stakeholders to support the youth empowerment programs should be organized to increase the impact of the programme.

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