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Provision of Access to Library and Information Services: Challenges for Public and Community Libraries in Limpopo Province

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ABSTRACT

Background

The government of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) has committed itself to guaranteeing more capital and political support for public and community libraries to redress the past imbalances in (through) the provision of access to information for rural communities. The allocation of the Conditional Grant to all nine provinces in the country; initiation and implementation of Mzansi libraries online project; the introduction of the Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter; and lately, the launching of the National LIS Policy in South Africa, all necessitate regular monitoring and evaluation of any prevalence of the undesirable encounters that may still deter public and community libraries from achieving their mandate of providing wider access to information for the people living in rural environments.

Methods

This study sought to identify the challenges that public community libraries in Limpopo province face in meeting the information needs of people living in rural communities. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used to collect data through the use of a closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire from the public librarians employed in the selected public and community libraries in Limpopo Province.

Results

The study established that deterrents to maximum and all-out provision of access to library and information services in Limpopo Province are related to outdated and irrelevant reading materials, small buildings, lack of or no databases, insufficient internet access and connectivity, as well as lack of materials for people living with disabilities.

Conclusion

The study found that there are information needs that cannot be met by these libraries. Studies of this nature in the country will make it possible to propose possible solutions and strategies for the future improvement of LIS, more especially for the future implementation of the National LIS Policy for the RSA.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of public and community libraries in every community is not a privilege, but an essential requirement for the provision of access to information to members of the community. Community or public libraries are special institutions that can contribute positively towards the battle against poverty and the tackling of inequalities (Stilwell 2011). They exist to provide facilities for lifelong learning, educational materials for school children, reference materials for post matric students, access to government services, as well as other information expected to overcome daily information needs of community members. Uzoikgwe and Chinwendu (2017:80) highlight that many families that are living in rural areas, “who cannot afford to obtain information resources when their basic needs such as food, water, light and shelter cannot be met”, depend solely on public and community libraries to access information to address educational, informational and recreational needs and wants. Real, Bertot and Jaeger (2015) confirm that public and community libraries are “the only sources of access to information in many rural communities”, while Goodman (2008) points out that “community libraries are built to serve the needs of rural populations outside the reach of standard information services”.

Therefore, the pronouncement that public or community libraries play a fundamental role in fostering social and economic development of people, ideally those living in rural environments, cannot be overemphasised. Due to the worth attached to existence and use of public and community libraries, governments across the world are committed to prioritising them; investing more in public and community libraries and recognising their potential as strategic interventions and role players in advancing the economic and social development of citizens. The South African government in particular, demonstrates this determination through the provision of Conditional Grant and political support for libraries. After decades of neglect, both public and community libraries “have been recipients of significant extra funding from government in a programme to transform urban and rural public library infrastructure, facilities and services” (Patel, Skarzynski & Nassimbeni 2015). The government of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) initiated a Conditional Grant allocated to all the nine provinces in South Africa by the National Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), “to improve the policy framework for public libraries, infrastructure development, ICT (information and computer technology), library resources, staff capacity, and visually impaired readers’

needs” (Kekana 2013:3). Malotle and Selwana (2016:11) reaffirm that the Conditional Grant was meant to redress the past imbalances and inequalities in the library and information services (LIS) sector by improving and refurbishing existing services, establishing new libraries and purchasing new books for public libraries. The conditional grant also targets previously disadvantaged communities’ objective of providing and improving library infrastructure and services to meet community needs and to promote a culture of reading (Bopape... et al 2017).

Furthermore, the National Council of Libraries and Information Services (NCLIS), in conjunction with the DAC, documented the LIS Transformation Charter in 2014. The purpose of the LIS Transformation Charter is:

[to define] “the challenges facing the LIS sector in South Africa and to provide a clear framework of principles and mechanisms for effecting the changes needed for libraries to contribute to the elimination of illiteracy and inequality, and the building of an informed and reading nation”.

(LIS Transformation Charter 2014).

Furthermore, the DAC commissioned the South Africa Public Library and Information Services Bill⁶ with the purpose of legislating public library norms and standards for LIS at the national level in the RSA. In addition to this, the government launched the LIS National Policy for the RSA in March 2018. To produce this policy, the policy task team consulted expansively with “scholars, practitioners, users of library and information services, civil society and political leaders, both inside and outside the LIS sector”. The task team “has met individuals and groups from each of the nine provinces. It has received numerous formal submissions and has made a particular effort to engage with both policy implementers and policy beneficiaries” (Nkondo, Hart & Nassimbeni 2018)

⁶ “To provide for measures to redress the inequality for the provision of public library and information services and resources; to provide principles for public library and information services; to provide guidelines for the Minister to determine national norms and standards in order to maintain consistency for the delivery of public library and information services; to promote access to public library and information services by providing free membership and free admission to public library and information services; to promote co-operative governance and co-ordination for the responsibility of public library and information services; to establish the National Public Library and Information Services Committee; to provide for the composition, disqualification of membership, functions, meetings and decisions of the Committee; to provide for the Minister to dissolve the Committee and to appoint an interim Committee; to empower the Minister to make regulations; and to provide for the assignment of functions; and to provide for matters connected therewith”.

Furthermore, there are ⁹ grant funds from the Carnegie Corporation that are also used by various libraries in South Africa to increase access to the Internet and to purchase library materials, thereby strengthening the collections of these libraries. These materials “include those published by South Africans locally and abroad, thereby building the collection of contemporary indigenous fiction and nonfiction in all eleven official South African languages” (LIS Transformation Charter 2014). Additionally, Mzansi libraries online project, courtesy of Gates Foundation grant, is enhancing ² work already started by the Department of Arts and Culture's Community Libraries Conditional Grant, which provides:

[the] “pilot libraries an opportunity to redefine their services based on free access to Internet; introduction and incorporation of new technologies in existing and new services; re-designed spaces and technology infrastructure; and training and development of library end-users and staff, based on identified training needs”.

(Matolong 2014).

“Efforts of this nature also set to guarantee more access to, and uninterrupted use of, internet services in community and public libraries across the country” (Bopape... et al. 2017:2). All these measures are steps in the right direction in gradually addressing the findings uncovered in previous surveys (viz., NEPI⁷ 1992; ACTAG⁸ 1995; and Public and PacCLISA⁹ by Van Helden & Lor 2002) on the state of LIS in the RSA. In these surveys, the issues of policy, governance and funding of public libraries and information services are on top of the list of challenges that are ¹⁰ faced by the public library and information services in the country, which in many respects emanated from ⁴ the legacy of apartheid and a period of funding-neglect in the first decade of ²¹ democracy. Following the establishment and improvement of a number of public and community libraries supported by distribution of the DAC Conditional Grant, as well as the initiation of the Mzansi Libraries Online project and other initiatives to improve access to information, there is a need to establish whether there are any problems and challenges that public and community libraries still face. Patel, Skarzynski and

⁷ National Education Policy Investigation (1992) Library and information service: Report of the NEPI Library and Information Services Research Group. A report of the National Coordinating Policy. Cape Town.

⁸ Arts and Culture Task Group (1995) Report on Libraries and Information Services Sub-Committee. Pretoria: National Library of South Africa.

⁹ Van Helden, P. & Lor, P.J. (2002) Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa: PaCLISA final report. Pretoria: National Library of South Africa”.

Nassimbeni (2015) express the view that there is lack of ⁶ research showing that the extra funding is achieving its objectives of empowering communities, promoting reading and improving literacy rates. In the same vein, Real, Bertot and Jaeger (2015:6) lament that “rural public libraries have been relatively understudied when compared to public libraries as a whole”; while earlier, Stillwell (2011) reported that “research on public libraries and social cohesion was constrained due to lack of comprehensive information”. Therefore, the present study investigates the challenges that public or community libraries encounter in their quest to advance social and economic statuses of the people of Limpopo. The ¹⁹ objectives of this study are, namely:

- To ascertain the library resources and facilities provided in public and community libraries in Limpopo Province;
- To identify any information needs that cannot be met by public and community libraries in Limpopo Province;
- To establish the perspectives of librarians regarding the changes that they would like to see happening in these libraries; and
- To reveal obstacles that impede the ¹³ provision of library and information services in Limpopo Province.

Revealing these challenges could perhaps serve both as a point of departure or reference in the implementation of the LIS policy in South Africa, and as a platform for proposing possible solutions and strategies for future improvements in the provision of LIS in South Africa. In Limpopo Province, public and community libraries operate in both urban (cities) and rural (villages) settlements. However, “the greater percentage of the population found in the province is based in rural areas where poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are prevalent” (Mokgaboki 2002:78). Mojapelo (2017) notes that “the inheritance of uneven allocation of public and community libraries during the apartheid era is still visible in the whole province”. It is therefore assumed that [The] ¹ Limpopo Department of Sport, Arts and Culture through its Library and Information services unit also plays a vital role in promoting public and community libraries in the province through the improvement of access to library facilities and the promotion of a sustainable reading culture (Bopape et al... 2017:3). But it would be proper to reveal the challenges encountered in the newly established community libraries and improved or refurbished public libraries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1 It has been persistently noted that “the public library and information services sector in South Africa is rooted in its colonial past and from public library backgrounds of other countries that are based on Anglo-American and Eurocentric library practices” (1 Stilwell 1989; Witbooi 2007; Davis 2009; Dick, in Mkeni-Saurombe & Zimu 2013). This has led to the deprivation of access to information for people living in rural communities. In an effort to counteract the deprivation of access to public libraries, innovative services in the form of Community Resource Centres were introduced to serve the communities with reading materials and advice to local citizens. A concept of a Community Resource Centre has therefore existed subsequent to the previous 26 political dispensation, when certain communities were excluded from the use of public libraries services (Mostert 1998:73). Dent (2006) also makes mention of the Community Information Centres that were established in countries like Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania and other countries in Africa, whereby local homes or churches provided space for people to sit and read. These community centres were supported financially and administratively by the communities themselves and by non-governmental organisations.

It was only after the introduction of the new democratic government that “public libraries were faced with the task of delivering information services to the communities as a whole, not only to the well-educated, literate, and the middle-class members of the community” (Mostert 1998:73; and Dent 2006:18). Lor, Helden and Bothma (2005) report that, after 1994, funding for Community Resource Centres was diverted to the new legitimate government and “as a result many of community resource centres were closed down, while some were merged with local public libraries”, which resulted in the development of a new concept which refers to public libraries as community libraries. Though there are norms for community libraries and for public libraries (Aicheson 2006; and Mostert 1998), in this study these terms (i.e., community libraries and public libraries) are used interchangeably.

Mkeni-Saurombe and Zimu (2015: 41) reckon that [For] the South African government to develop informed inhabitants, “who are able to participate in the global and knowledge economy”, there is a need to transform 18 urban and rural community

library infrastructure, facilities and services with special emphasis on previously underprivileged communities.

The provision of library and information services to the majority of the people, more especially those who are living in rural areas, has become crucial, and it is time to create community libraries that play a vibrant role by serving as essential resources to satisfy educational and information needs of the community, as well as developing the quality of life for these communities. Eryaman, in Leckie, Given and Buschman (2010:136), makes mention of “transformative libraries that can provide democratic and free spaces in which young people can meet, talk about their problems, and experiences, reflect on their rights, and work to create change in their communities as well as allow disadvantaged people to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills and values of cooperation and civic virtue”. Mojapelo (2017) notes that “public and community libraries have a role to play in the attainment of the goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) for the development and advancement of people’s lives”. Public libraries and community libraries are Community Information Centres, and therefore should provide people with community information services (CIS).

There are numerous long-standing and current definitions of the concept ‘community information’ which have been provided by several authors, who also share the same sentiment regarding the role that public libraries should play in providing such information. Community information is defined as “survival information, the kind of information necessary for the participation as full and equal member of society” (Almna 1995:40; and William 1984:385). It is the “community information service through which a public library provides community information to the surrounding community” (Krishnapada 2016:797). Feather and Sturges (2003:92) also define community information as “the information that people need or want in order to live their everyday lives and further that it enables individuals and groups to make informed decisions about themselves and the communities in which they live”. Furthermore, Islam and Mezbah-ul-Islam (2010) state that community information services “are defined as offering information assisting individuals and groups with problem solving and facilitating political participation”. According to Donohue (1976), community

information ⁵ is the “information needed to cope with crises in the lives of individuals and communities”, whereas according to Kempson (1986), it is “the information for self-reliance and self-determination”. Edwards (1977) has defined community information as “the information in the community for the community”, while Gorichanaz and Turner (2017:100) define community information as “what enables people to participate fully in their communities”. In ⁵ a simple language, “community information is that information which supports individuals to resolve their ⁵ day-to-day problems related to their continued existence. The two types of information needed by any community include “Survival information related to health, housing, transportation, income, financial assistance, education, child care, legal protection, economic opportunities, political rights, civil rights; and citizen action information, needed for effective participation as individuals or as members of a group ‘in the social, political, legal, and economic process’ (Donohue 1976; Pettigrew 1996). ⁵ Another important and implied dimension of the community library is “the neighbourhood information or trans-local information, such as information about medical specialists and employment opportunities in the neighbourhood” (Kalia & Sardana 2002). Furthermore, Durrance (1986) mentions another component of a community library called ‘local information’, which is “information appropriate and useful to the community, including a calendar of local events, courses and other educational opportunities, and basic information concerning government agencies, local organizations, fraternal groups, and clubs”. Hernon and Mathews (2012:144) make mention of the public or community libraries that adapt to the changing environments in which they operate, whereby they serve as “multipurpose community centres offering business information services, tax assistance, safe havens for children after school, and even places where immigrants can learn English”.

As part of provision of community information, public and community libraries ¹⁰ play a significant role in the economic development of the communities they serve by providing services such as ¹⁶ free and public Internet access, space, education, question answering, and materials on many business-related subjects (Bishop, Mehra & Partee II 2016). ⁷ Public libraries are also Community Information Centres, hence they are well placed to provide information services also to the small-scale business community. A survey by Farquhason and van der Merwe (2016:31) showed ² that 13% of library users

reported using library services for business purposes, including communicating with business partners, looking for information on how to grow a business and listening to video lectures online. Gichochi, Onyancha and Dulle (2017) conducted a study on the provision of business information services by public to small-scale business enterprises in Kenya. It was found that the provision of such information is in “a desolate state owing to inadequate business collections, lack of sufficient information, communications technology facilities, poor awareness of business information service, a poor reading culture, and weak collaborations of public library with stakeholders”.

Today, community information is not only delivered to the people through printed books, but also through access to computers and the internet. “Public and community libraries have a substantial role to play in providing access to technology-enhanced services and therefore improving ICT literacies of the users” (Mojapelo 2017). Hart (2010:83) notes that “providing internet connectivity to the developing world will help realise goals for health, education, employment and poverty reduction”. Public and community libraries are identified as institutions which should provide computer and internet services and resources to their users. Mobile technology has therefore also “increased the potential of using computers and the internet in providing web access to government portals, where users can access accounts, submit/download forms, conclude transactions, register for grants and services, or get the latest news, medical advice, regulations, and much more” (Farquhason & van der Merwe 2016:31).

However, provision of public and community library and information services to the rural communities has therefore, been a big challenge. The LIS Charter (2014) indicates that the challenges faced by “public and community libraries in South Africa derived from the legacy of apartheid and a period of funding neglect in the first decade of democracy”. The challenges in the LIS Transformation Charter (2014) also relate to infrastructural deficits, human resource demands and operational difficulties. Similarly, findings of the study conducted by Uzoigwe and Chinwendu (2017) on the assessment of state government support to public library in Enugu state, Nigeria, revealed poor funding, poor staffing, poor remuneration of library staff, lack of current collections, poor facilities and un-automated library services. Jiyane, Mugwisi and Moyane (2016) acknowledge that “public libraries face a plethora of challenges most particularly in the information age”. Hildreth and Sullivan (2015) reckon that expanding

access to information is ²one of the challenges that public and community libraries face in today's environment. Free availability and ¹¹access to computers and the internet in public and community libraries is seen as a major necessity for members of the community. Unfortunately, Nkondo, Hart and Nassimbeni (2018) report that they "heard of computers being out of action for weeks, slow and unreliable internet connections, WI-FI quotas running out early in the month, time restrictions on online searching, and tardy responses to request for technical support".

Therefore, in spite ²⁵of the Conditional Grant by the National Department of Arts and Culture libraries still face budget related challenges (Mnkeni-Saurombe 2010; and Mojapelo 2017). Due to lack of funding, other key success factors such as space, resources, electricity, internet connectivity, equipment and security are also affected. Hernon and Mathwews (2012:144) caution that "inadequate funding for libraries may possibly result in reduced opening hours, staff positions eliminated, acquisition budget reduced, and branch libraries closed for one or two days or even permanently". "Many libraries in rural areas are at a crossroads where they find themselves in a financial situation that does not allow them to advance and they often must reduce to fewer hours and/or less accommodation for their patrons" (Troknya 2014).

Studies (Bopape et al. 2017; Hart & Nassimbeni 2013; Wishart 2012; Hart 2010; and Raseroka 1986) have shown that most of the people who use public and community libraries today are post-school students who are registered for degrees or diplomas with universities, FET Colleges and Open Distance Learning Institutions. Conducive space for studying, writing assignments, accessing and consulting reference materials, as well as accessing and retrieving information from the internet ¹⁷are some of the services and resources that this user group seeks and pursues in public and community libraries. This gives rise to the question as to whether or not public and community libraries are in a good position to serve the information and resource needs of this user group. Students studying in public and community libraries may not have full access to electronic resources and databases. One of the reasons public and community libraries are under used "could be that they do not offer what people need or want" (Hart 2010:82).

3. METHODOLOGY

To find out if the challenges and problems discussed above prevail in ¹⁷ public and community libraries in Limpopo Province, the librarians employed in selected libraries were asked about the library resources and facilities they provide in their respective libraries; the existence of any information needs that cannot be met by their libraries; their perspectives regarding the changes that they would like to see happening in these libraries; and about the obstacles that impede the provision of library and information services in their respective libraries. The study adopted ⁷ both quantitative and qualitative research approaches through the use of a questionnaire that had both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The research population for this study were public librarians employed in selected public and community libraries in Limpopo Province. Table 1 below shows the libraries from where the researchers collected the data. The libraries are grouped according to the districts. At the time of collecting data for this study, there were ¹ ninety-four (94) ¹ public and community libraries in all five districts of Limpopo Province (National Library of South Africa's *Directory of Public and Community Libraries in South Africa* 2012:68-75). The researchers selected the libraries using convenience sampling method, that is, they concentrated only on public and community libraries that were easily accessible. In each of the public and community libraries visited, every staff member who was found was provided with the questionnaire to complete.

The questionnaires were delivered to each of the selected libraries on 22nd to 23rd November 2016 and collected a week later on the 1st and 2nd December 2016. Completed questionnaires were collected from the libraries and 43 (i.e., 86%) out of fifty (i.e., 50) distributed questionnaires were completed.

Capricorn District	Vhembe District	Mopani District	Greater Sekhukhune District	Waterberg District
Senwabarwana library	Xihlovo library	Ba-Phalaborwa public library	Ga-Phaahla library	Mokopane Public Library
Lebowakgomo library	Makhado Public library	Tzaneen public library	Jane Furse	
Mogwadi library	Thulamela library	Letsitele library	Marble-Hall Public Library	
Polokwane Library				
Moletji library				
Mankweng Library				

Table 1: Participating Libraries

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Respondents' Profile

In this section, the study presents on the profiles of the respondents in terms of their gender, age, qualifications, years of service, and the number of staff in each library. The respondents for this study are made up of forty-three (i.e., 43) library workers, which consisted of thirty-one (i.e., 72%) females and twelve (28%) males. Results presented in Table 2 further show that nineteen (i.e., 44%) of the respondents were aged between 36-40 years, fifteen (i.e., 35%) between 26-35 years, four (i.e., 9%) below 25 years, another four (9%) between 46-66 years, while only one (i.e., 3%) was aged above 56 years.

Gender (N=43)	Variable	Frequency
	Males	12 (28%)
	Female	31 (72%)
Age (N=43)	Below 25 years	4 (9%)
	26 – 35 years	15(35%)
	36 – 40 years	19 (44%)
	46 -55 years	4 (9%)
	Above 56 years	1(3%)
Highest Qualification (N= 43)	Matric	15(35%)
	Degree	23(53%)
	Masters	0 (0)
	Diploma (Technical/TVET)	5(12%)
Years of Experience (N=43)	Less than 1 year	3(7%)
	1-3 years	9(21%)
	4-6 years	8(19%)
	7-10 years	5(12%)
	More than 10 years	18(42%)
Number Staff in libraries	Administrative staff	89(29%)
	Professional librarians	133(44%)
	Temporary (interns, volunteers)	80(27%)

Table 2: Profile of Librarians

When coming to qualifications, twenty-three (i.e., 60%) respondents indicated their highest qualification as degrees, fifteen (i.e., 30%) matric, five (i.e., 10%) held diploma from technical and/or TVET. No one had a Master's degree or any other equivalent qualification. When asked how long respondents had been working in those libraries, three (i.e., 7%) stated that they had been working for less than a year, nine (i.e., 21%)

from 1-3 years, eight (i.e., 19%) from 4-6 years, five (i.e., 12%) from 7-10 years, while eighteen (i.e., 42%) had been working for more than 10 years. Table 2 further reveals that respondents indicated that there were 133 (i.e., 44%) professional librarians, 89 (i.e., 29%) administrative staff, while 80 (i.e., 27%) were temporary (i.e., interns, volunteers) workers in all libraries combined.

4.2. Library Resources and Facilities

Through this question, respondents were asked to indicate facilities and resources provided in their libraries.

Variable	Yes	No
Children book/services	43 (100%)	00 (0%)
Databases	09 (21%)	34(79%)
Computers with internet access	42 (98%)	01(2%)
Computers for typing	41 (95%)	02 (5%)
Wi-Fi	32(74%)	07(16%)
Newspapers	33(78%)	09 (21%)
Magazines	32 (74%)	11 (26%)
Reference materials	34 (79%)	09 (2%)
Inter-library loans service	14 (33%)	29 (67%)

Table 3: Library Resources and Facilities

The results reveal that all forty-three (i.e., 100%) respondents indicated that the library was providing children's books/ services, forty-two (i.e., 98%) indicated that they were providing computers with internet access, thirty-three (i.e., 74%) newspapers, thirty-two (i.e., 74%) magazines, 34 (i.e., 39%) reference materials, while fourteen (i.e., 33%) indicated that they were providing interlibrary loans followed by nine (i.e., 21%) for databases. Databases and inter-library loan service are the least resources and services that libraries provide.

4.3. Information Needs that Cannot be Met

In this section, the respondents were asked whether there are information needs that are not met by the library, and, if so, which needs were those.

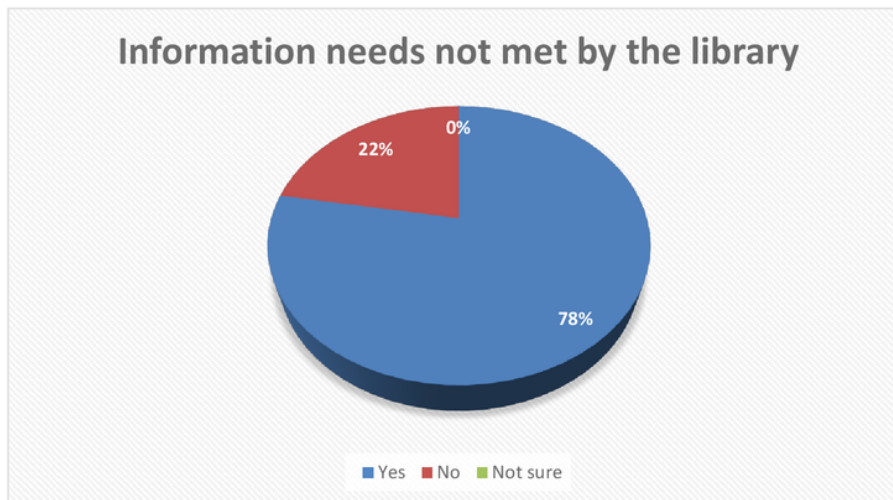


Figure 1: Information Needs Not Met by the Libraries

Twenty-eight (i.e., 78%) respondents indicated that there were ¹² information needs that cannot be met by the library while only 8 (i.e., 22%) indicated that there were no ¹² information needs that cannot not met by their libraries. The reasons advanced for existence of ¹² information needs that cannot be met included the following:

- *Lack of databases:* Ten stated that their libraries had no databases and online sources to enhance their collection and broaden their searches. One complained that the library still used the manual system for providing library services, for example, that there is no online catalogue to facilitate interlibrary loans.
- *Limited study materials* were also mentioned to indicate that there were fewer sources in such a way that may users had to share a book. One respondent wrote that, “There are fewer (one/two) books and most of the times users have to argue over it. Sometimes users did not find what they wanted”.
- *Irrelevant and outdated library collection:* Fewer librarians also indicated that library books were outdated. This is apparent in libraries that were modelled on Western patterns of librarianship. Okiy (2003:127) reports that “the Nigerian public library in general are stocked with literature that is foreign, outdated and irrelevant to the information needs and interests of the people expected to read

them". It was stated that fields such as music and art were not catered for by the library collection. On the other hand, one librarian indicated that they did have business-related materials but SMMEs were not visiting the library. Another one indicated that there were no toys to cater for children. One also indicated that there were no magazines and newspapers that were mostly requested by users. The study conducted by Abu, Grace and Carroll (2011) in Malaysia also found out that resources were not up-to-date. Books and magazines in those libraries were too old and outdated. The study also revealed that even current sources were not geared to the needs of the community. This in conflict with the statement from the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) which states that collections and services of the public libraries "are developed to meet the current, emerging and future needs of the local community and include print and electronic resources".

- *No services for people living with disabilities.* Nine librarians stated that they could not meet the information needs of people living with disabilities. Some stated there were no computers and braille materials. Some mentioned that even the physical structure of the library was not user-friendly to people using wheelchairs. One librarian specified that there were no Job Access With Speech (JAWS) to allow the visually impaired to access and use computers.
- *Lack of reading space:* Fewer (3) librarians indicated that the libraries are too small, as such, there was no enough reading space. This means that most of the users who visited the library for a quiet and reading space were not catered for.

4.4. Suggestions on What Should be Changed in the Libraries

Table 4 shows what the respondents would change at their libraries. This was meant to identify areas that needed improvement in the libraries. Respondents were asked to rate what they would change in their libraries if given a chance to do so. The majority of respondents "strongly agreed" that they would change a number of things in their libraries. Thirty-one (i.e., 72%) respondents "strongly agreed" that they would change to large buildings, twenty-six (i.e., 60%) to current and up-to-date materials, twenty-

five (i.e., 58%) to buying more computers, and lastly, to increasing internet connectivity.

What would be changed	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Larger building	4(9%)	0(0%)	6(14%)	31(72%)
Current and up-to-date materials	1(2%)	3 (7%)	10(23%)	26(60%)
Extend opening hours	12 (28%)	5 (12%)	10 (23%)	8 (19%)
Reduce opening hours	31 (72%)	9(21%)	5 (12%)	6 (14%)
Expand reference collection	3(7%)	3(7%)	13(30%)	22(51%)
Provide handicapped access	4(9%)	5 (12%)	15(35%)	18(42%)
Buy more computers	3(7%)	2(5%)	10(23%)	25(58%)
Increase internet connectivity	3(7%)	1(2%)	10(23%)	24 (56%)
Acquire more children 's literature	2 (5%)	8(19%)	14 (33%)	16 (37%)
Acquire materials in home languages	3(7%)	3 (7%)	15(35%)	17 (40%)
Conduct community needs analysis	2 (5%)	3 (7%)	18(42%)	17 (40%)

Table 4: Suggestions on What Should be Changed in the Library

5.2.10. Challenges Encountered in the Provision of Library Services

On this question, the respondents were asked to state the challenges that hinder or prevent them to meet the needs of the users. ¹³ This was an open-ended question and, for the purpose of data analysis, the responses were categorised into themes.

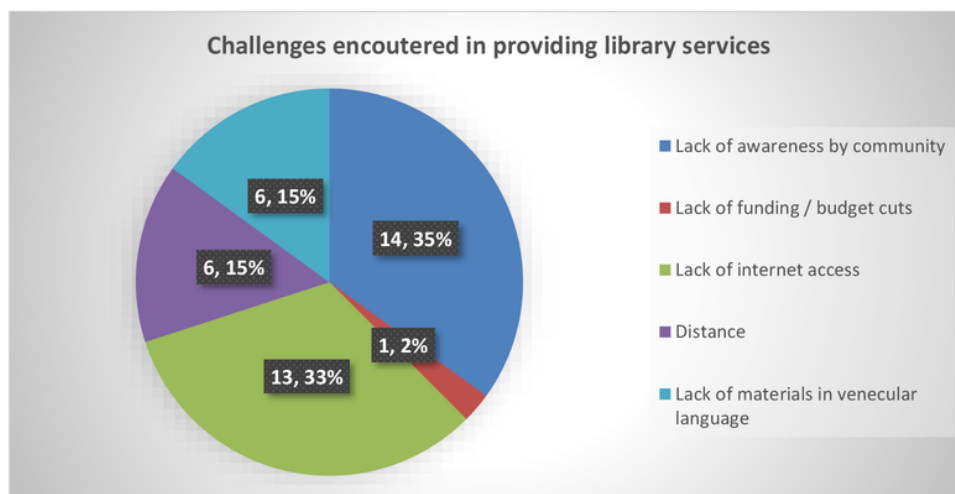


Figure 2: Challenges Encountered in Providing Library Services

Respondents stated that they encountered challenges in providing library services to their users. The challenges identified included the following:

- *Lack of community awareness:* Figure 2 shows that 14 (i.e., 35%) respondents out of 43, strongly agreed that there was lack of awareness by community about library services. Ten respondents did not answer this question. Reid and Howard (2016) state that the “topic of community engagement in public libraries has been researched in urban public library systems, little research explores community engagement in rural library systems”. It has been revealed by Goulding (2009) ¹⁰ that [the] provision of community library and information services “have been quite effective at involving local people in the simpler forms of community engagement, such as surveying their opinions and consulting them on a range of issues. Community engagement in public libraries, includes making the library space available for community activities; working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector as well as with other public services; involving volunteers in the delivery of library services; activities to support community involvement in various levels of decision making”.
- *Staff training and development:* The respondents indicated that they are not trained to serve people living with disabilities. Respondents also indicated that sometimes they are not permitted to ¹⁵ attend workshops to enhance their knowledge. Mostert (1998) mentions the ¹⁵ development of specific skills for staff that will enable them to render a pro-active community library service. Hart (2004) attributes ³ the need for public and community librarians to become more pro-active because of the transformation in education. The ³ new school curriculum, with its acceptance of the need for information literacy and its shift to resource-based learning, has given librarians the room to become agents of change. The word ‘agent’ implies a pro-active leadership role – in contrast to the more passive supportive role usually assumed appropriate for the library profession within educational circles (Hart 2004:110).
- *Library infrastructure:* The majority of respondents indicated lack and/or insufficient reading space in their libraries. Fewer indicated that some libraries

were not fully accessible to the public because of their geographic location. The results also show that the respondents stated that there was lack of library system and, as such, there were no online facilities such as online public catalogue and online databases to search for information. Another one complained about lack of library system, which suggested that they could not participate in interlibrary loans.

- *Competent and qualified library staff:* Fewer respondents indicated lack of competent and qualified library staff as the main challenge. As shown in Table 7, the libraries had both administrative staff and professional staff. In addition, there were volunteers. This is contrary to Table 2 which revealed that majority (60%) held a degree as their highest qualification. The study conducted by Fischer (2015) reports [the] results of a survey “conducted in 2015 of librarians who work for small town and rural public libraries throughout the United States. In the said study questions were posed about personnel statistics, budget, community involvement, programs, technology, and managerial challenges. The survey found that financial conditions had improved or will improve in the future and that the most challenging managerial issue was staffing”.
- *Management and administration processes:* Some respondents indicated they sometimes received conflicting instructions from both DSAC and Municipality. This challenge is also highlighted by Mnkeni-Saurome and Zimu (2015:43) in that the “provincial and local governments struggle to find common ground” with respect to the policy on the management and funding of community libraries. This affects provisions for public and community library services. Another factor included budget issues. “Libraries are receiving less budget wherein sometimes there would not be transport for outreach projects”, one respondent wrote. Still on the same issue, fewer respondents mentioned that they were not aware of some policies, such as procurement policy, and, in that way, some important materials were not bought for the library.
- *Library resources:* Most respondents indicated that their libraries had old/outdated collections. In cases where there was current collection, the

collection was not relevant to the information needs of the users. One respondent stated that they did not have books on music and for the arts, while the majority of users who visited the library wanted materials in those fields.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, most of the librarians working in public and community libraries and information services in Limpopo Province agree that there are information needs that cannot be met by these libraries. They cited irrelevant, outdated and limited study materials; lack of online databases; lack of library materials and services for the people living with disabilities; and reading space as some of the factors that make these libraries not to meet certain information needs. This was confirmed even when they were asked about what things they wished to change in their libraries. Their wishes are, succinctly put, to have larger library buildings and current and up-to-date library materials. In as far as challenges that they encountered in delivering library and information services, they were much concerned about lack of community awareness about the libraries and lack of proper training programmes for library staff. Lack of in-service training programmes for staff result in incompetent and inapt library staff; which was also mentioned as one of the challenges encountered in the provision of library and information services. Lastly, the librarians raised a concern about the conflicting instructions from the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture and the municipality. These challenges should be an issue for concern for all the provinces when the South African LIS sector is gearing towards the implementation of the LIS policy.

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