

# An Appraisal of Library Services Provision to Prison Inmates in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper is an assessment of Library Services provision to literate prison inmates in South-West Nigeria. The questionnaire method was adopted. Responses were collated and analyzed. The study revealed that inmates have a variety of information needs which are not adequately met. It noted that Library stocks in the prison libraries are grossly inadequate and poorly managed. It was also revealed that the collections are managed by staff without training in information management and handling. It noted inadequate attention from government and society. The study recommends readership promotion campaign, organized library visits by library association to prisons as well as provision of outreach services to inmates by nearby public libraries.

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## Introduction

Prisons are established confinements for the safe keeping of those legally interned or awaiting trials. Whichever is the case, except for those who are to be executed upon the pronouncement of death penalty on them, prisons are expected to transform and reform the interned towards the re-integration of the affected individuals into the larger society on completion of their terms. For prisons to achieve the objectives of reformation and rehabilitation there is the need for training and re-training of inmates. Training and re-training require exposing them to adequate and timely information.

Information is a major resource in human development as access to it could improve their knowledge. Iloeje (2001) submits that information is the heart of the world's development. He further explains that increased access to timely, accurate, relevant, reliable and current information remains a significant precursor to technological innovations.

Libraries as major custodian of information, which have been professionally processed and stored for retrieval should play positive roles in every segment of society. Anafulu (1998) posits that the library is the engine room and power house where information is collected,

stored, processed, and retrieved for use. A library as a body of collected information brought together for the purpose of knowledge dissemination and utilization should be a central clinic for all (Ibegwam 2003). Prison as a reformatory institution and inmates being members of the larger community should of right be exposed to information and knowledge for educational and training purposes, person development as well as study kits and do-it-yourself tools. They are expected to be kept abreast of development and news around the globe to make them better individuals. This submission is corroborated by the European Prison Rule 82 as cited by Grimes (2000), "every institution (prison) shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with a wide range of both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make use of it. This study therefore is a probe into the availability or otherwise of information services to prison interns in Nigeria, using some prisons in the south-west as case studies.

## **Justification for the study**

Prison inmates are members of the larger society whose movements are restricted. The prison aside from serving as a custodian for convicted people doubles as a reformatory and rehabilitative centre. Information, no doubt plays a vital role in the reformatory and rehabilitative process. This study is necessary because the findings will reflect the kind of attention the prison system in Nigeria enjoys from the public and policy makers. It is assumed the findings will either leave the policy makers fulfilled or further challenged; and also bring about a general awareness of the information needs of the interned. Ultimately library services have its challenges in view of economic uncertainties in Nigeria. This study may therefore be a wake-up call for increased social responsibility awareness on the part of government and citizens in paying increased attention to prison inmate.

## **Objectives of the study**

- To identify the role of adequate information in reforming prisoners.
- To identify the need for professional dispensation of library services to inmates.
- To identify the adequacy or otherwise of library services provision to prison inmates in Nigeria, using the selected prisons as case studies.
- To probe into the prisoners perception of information for their reformation and recreational activities.
- To evacuate the efforts of the library association in the development and growth of prison libraries.
- To create a general awareness of the need for inmates to have access to information.

## **Research Questions**

The study asked the following questions.: who are the inmates? do they have information

needs? what role could information play in rehabilitating prison inmates? are there library services for prison inmates in Nigeria? are the various stakeholders – libraries, library associations, government, prison officials – adequately aware of the role information could play in reforming the interned? how adequate are the library services (if any) being currently rendered to prison inmates in Nigeria.

## Scope of the study

This study is limited to some selected, but prominent prisons in the south-west region of the country – Nigeria. The selected prisons are expected to be good samples, representative of other prisons in the country. These prisons have been in operation before the independence of Nigeria. From this view point it is apparent they have history behind them and they may be good representatives of the past and the present. The selected prisons are located in Ibadan, Oyo, Ijebu-Ode and Ilesha. The four towns, apart from being major towns in the south-west served as provincial headquarters during the colonial days. The Ilesha prison was actually one of the first prisons in Nigeria thus making it one of the oldest in Nigeria.

## Significance of the study

This work is an attempt at evaluating information services provision in Nigeria prison libraries using the south-western area as a case study. It also attempts to probe into the perceived impact of information on the reformation and recreation activities of the prisoners.

The findings would therefore be beneficial to the country's leadership, and particularly the prison authorities, in the decision to provide the interned with adequate but censored information or otherwise.

## Literature Review

Prisons, like other segments of the universal community, deserve functional libraries for the provision of information resources to prison inmates and prison officials. Oketunji (2005) submits that libraries are built and maintained to provide information resources for a specific, defined community. As such, like academic libraries, school libraries et cetera; there are prison libraries.

Advocacy for adequately maintained, accessible prison libraries have been enjoying serious attention worldwide. For example, Curry, Wolf, Boutilier and Chan (2003) conducted a nationwide survey of the libraries in Canada's 51 minimum and maximum security federal correctional institutions. The survey revealed that the prison libraries were meeting offenders' needs for recreational, cultural, educational and informative material. Can this be said of prison libraries in Africa? Our academic libraries lack enough fund to make them adequate information research centres; not to mention, services to those confined. Canadian prisoners, despite what looks like an excellent situation, still believe that there was much room for improvement in funding for staff and collections. They felt that their libraries were undervalued within the prison administration. (Curry et al 2003). In the United States on the

other hand, Shirley (2003) found out that standard library services delivery in prison libraries was being impeded by security concerns and limited budgets. If funds have been noticed to be the major challenge to prison libraries in the developed world; the case of the developing countries should therefore be a concern as many of the developing countries lack the financial strength of the developed countries as well as the will. Hence the need to conduct such a survey in the developing countries is most desirable.

The denial of information services to prisoners (especially to the permanently confined) can be detrimental to the objectives of the prison. The major objective of the prison to the convicted is reformation. Akpe (2004) supporting this claim, posits that the key element in prison administration is to reform and recover the convicted from a life of crime to path of rectitude. Daramola (2004) supports Akpe's submission when he submits that the main aim of imprisonment is for the safe custody of those legally interned and the detection of the cause of the anti-social behaviour that led to the incarceration with a view to transforming and reforming the interned. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the prison serves the dual role of custody of convicted prisoners, remand prisoners (awaiting trials) and detainees, and a reformatory institution.

However in Nigeria, the prison being characteristically a closed system receives little attention from the public and policy makers, and as an arm of the criminal justice system, the prison deserves utmost attention (NPS/DFID 2002). This neglect has led to calls for several initiatives by non-governmental organizations (NGO) to attract members of the public to their social responsibilities to this special group of people.

In his opinion, Daramola (2004) expresses the fact that prison was established to exploit diverse programmes such as adult and remedial education for inmates, skills and vocational training, religious instruction, recreational and attitude change towards the achievement of the information and rehabilitation of inmates; so as to facilitate their social integration into the society after jail terms. Daramola concludes that one should assert that these goals need adequate provision and utilization of information. The library, if well developed, will provide the information support needed for the achievement of the prison tasks. The use of books and other print and non-print materials (bibliotherapy) in the reformation of individuals have been found useful in mental patients and prisoners (Rubin 1978); as cited by Jarjoura and Krumboltz (1998). Rubin actually defined bibliotherapy as a program of activity based on the interactive processes of the use of print and non-print materials, whether imaginative or informational, facilitated by a librarian or other professional to achieve insight into normal development or to effect changes in emotionally disturbed behaviour.

Dixen and Thorsen (2001) opine that prison libraries provide an important means of self-improvement for inmates. They can act as a supplement to educational programs and can lead to better work opportunities, which in turn creates more stable and productive citizens". They went further to assert that many believe that libraries are vital to the rehabilitation of the prisoners helping them to strengthen character and lessening the rate of recidivism (returning to prison). One may then conclude that the library has a major role to play in the reformation and rehabilitation of prison inmates.

## Research Methodology

The populations for this study are the inmates of selected prisons in the south west of Nigeria. In eliciting relevant information, the questionnaire tool as well as observation method was employed. The questionnaires were administered with the assistance of the prisons welfare officers who selected inmates that can read and write; and willing to respond to the questionnaire. Seventy questionnaires were administered and at the point of analysis, only sixty-two (62) representing 88.5% were found usable.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Prison Surveyed, Questionnaire distribution and usable returns.**

Prisons	No. of Questionnaire Distributed	Usable Returns
NPS, Igbeba, Ijebu-Ode	15 (21.4%)	15 (21.4%)
NPS, Agodi, Ibadan	20 (28.6%)	18 (25.7%)
NPS, Lagbondoko, Oyo	18 (25.7%)	14 (20.0%)
NPS, Oke Eso, Ilesa	17 (24.3%)	15 (21.4)
Total	70 (100%)	62 (88.5%)

\*NPS – Nigerian Prison Services

Table 1 reveals the prison surveyed the number of questionnaire administered and the ones usable for data analysis. 70 questionnaires were distributed and only sixty-two (88.5%) were useful. Those not found usable were for various reasons, such as defacement, non-relevance of response as well as returning some blank. This research work did not concern itself with non-literate inmates as it is assumed that their information needs will be different. This could be a subject for further research.

**Table 2: Age of Respondents**

Age Range (years)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	05	8.1
20 - 29	32	51.6
30 - 39	16	25.8
40 & above	09	14.5
Total	62	100

Table 2 reveals that majority of the respondents fall into the tender age of 20 – 29 years. This closely followed by the 30 – 39 years age range. This suggests that crime rate is higher among these age grades. The reformative and rehabilitation objectives of the prison is assumed will be beneficial to those who fall between the ages of 18 and 30; as they still have a future if well reformed and rehabilitated.

**Table 3: Educational Background.**

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
SSCE/WASC	32	51.6
NCE/OND	18	29.0
HND/Bachelors	07	11.3
Others	05	8.1
Total	62	100

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents are holders of the Senior Secondary School Certificate. They constitute 51.6% of the respondents, while NCE/OND holders follow with 29%. Higher National Diploma/Bachelors Degree holders constitute 11.3% while 8.1% claimed they possess professional certificates. This table shows that the percentage of inmate respondents decreases with higher level of education. One may conclude that the level of education may have to do with the level of awareness of the full weight of the law since more than 50% of respondents are Senior School Certificate holders.

**Table 4: Category of Prisoners.**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Convicted Prisoners	24	38.7
Remand Prisoners	38	61.3
Detainees	-	-
Total	62	100

Table 4 reveals that majority of 61.3% of the respondents are inmates (awaiting trial) while 38.7% were already convicted. Further probing reveals that the high number of awaiting trial prisoners was occasioned by the slow process of litigation in Nigeria. Some of the inmates have been in prison for more than twelve (12) calendar months.

**Table 5: Library use by inmates.**

Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Often	8	12.9
Sometimes	12	19.4
Sparingly	24	38.7
Never	18	29.0
Total	62	100

Table 5 reveals that majority of the inmates 38.7% use the library sparingly, 29% do not use it at all; while 19.4% and 12.9% use it sometimes and often respectively. The table reveals that inmates do not consider using the library an issue of great importance. A lot of factors such as poor collection, ( see table 6) unconducive reading condition, attitude of the library staff, as well as prison's programme of activity may be responsible.

Table 6: Adequacy of Library Stock.

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate	6	13.6
Fairly Adequate	16	36.4
Inadequate	22	50.0
Total	44	100

In measuring the level of adequacy, cognizance was taken of the respondents who claimed to have used the prison library at one time or the other. 59% of the respondents rated the library stock as inadequate. 36.4% saw it as fairly adequate, while only 13.6% rated it as adequate. This revelation is at variance with the expected level of library services in prisons. Prison library should be an important means of self-improvement and reformation for inmates. Many reports have demonstrated that prisoners feel that library service is valuable. For example, when one of the deadliest riots in penal history occurred in 1980, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the inmates destroyed most of the prison's facilities but the library remained untouched. (Dixen & Thorsen 2001). If prisoners value good library services, efforts should be geared towards the improvement of prison libraries stock.

**Table 7: Importance of Information to Reformation and Rehabilitation of Prisoners.**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	16.1
Agree	34	54.8
Strongly Disagree	.	-
Disagree	06	9.7
No Response	12	19.4
Total	62	100

Table 7 shows that majority of the respondents agree that information is important to the objective of the prison services in rehabilitating and reforming them towards re-integration into the society. A close look reveals that non-users of prison library services either disagree with the majority or refuse to respond.

**Table 8; Prisoners Desired Information.**

Type of Information	Frequency	Percentage
News/ Current Affairs	54	87.1
Legal Information	38	61.3
Religious Information	32	51.6
Psychological Information	-	-
Recreational Information	22	35.5
Vocational Information	10	16.1

Educational Information	44	67.8
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In eliciting information for table 8, respondents were allowed, if need be to choose more than one option. From the table, it could be observed that majority of the respondents (87.1%) desire information on the current events in the society (News/Current Affairs), 67.8% want educational information while 61.3% want legal information. 51.6% desire religious information, while 35.5% and 16.1% desire recreational and vocational information respectively. None of the respondents desire psychological information. This may be attributed to the respondents' level of education and probably area of specialization in the case of those who had tertiary education. Psychology is an important subject in reformation as there are people with abnormal psychology. Perhaps efforts should be made to expose inmates to psychology and its importance through their acquisition.

## Summary of findings

The underlisted are the findings of this study into the adequate information provision in prison libraries in Nigeria. The questionnaire and observation method were the tools used in assessing the situation in the prisons used as case study.

1. Majority of the respondents fall into the 20 – 40 years age grade
2. Majority of them are Senior Secondary School Certificate holders
3. Majority of the respondents are still awaiting trials
4. Majority of the respondents use the library sparingly
5. The prison libraries stock are inadequate
6. The prison libraries are managed by non librarians
7. Suggestions and recommendations

## Conclusion & Recommendations

### (a) Library Associations' visit to Prison Libraries

The National and various bodies/organs of the Nigerian Library association (NLA) should as a matter of urgency commence library visits and career talks for the prisoners and the warders. The NLA being a professional information body should take its services to the less privileged like the prisons inmates. The inmates should be enlightened on the benefits of information and the importance of using the library for self development and knowledge acquisition. This is with the intention of developing the individuals towards re-integration into the free society. The warders/officers will also benefit from such visits, as they will be enlightened on the benefits of library/information use; and they will also know the



consequences of depriving the prisoners of information. Prison officials should be encouraged to obtain training in Librarianship.

### **(b) Outreach Services by Public Libraries.**

The Nigerian constitution recognizes citizens' entitlement to 'due process of law' i.e. rule of law. However, in circumstances when inmates are unduly detained due to avoidable slow litigation process such inmates are wrongly denied their rights and freedom. Apart from legal information, prisoners deserve other developmental information to ensure their readiness for re-absorption into the community. Public libraries should create outreach programme for the prisoners within their covered area. Librarians in charge of the outreach services will need to liaise with the prison officials and familiarize themselves with the prisons operations; so that they will not go beyond their 'legal' bounds in the provision of this service. In developed countries, such librarians do download information for inmates use Thorson and Dixen (2001).

### **(c) Provision of Adequate Training Library Personnel.**

The study found that the prison libraries are managed by prison officials who are not trained librarians. Librarianship, whether academic, public or prison is a profession and as such requires expertise in its operations. It is therefore recommended that prison libraries should be managed by professionals or prison officers who would have gone through training in librarianship.

### **(d) Toward improved collections.**

The library association should positively impact better funding of prison libraries by soliciting for the inclusion of library development in the prison's annual budget. This will enhance the desired improvement in the collection.

Collections are developed by purchase, gifts and donations. Prison libraries should exploit the gifts and donations opportunity by soliciting for gifts and donations from philanthropic organizations and individuals, as well as libraries and information centres that weed their collections frequently.

### **(e) Readership Promotion Campaign**

The library association and the public libraries should engage in readership promotion campaigns in prisons. The majority of the respondents are school certificate holders and as such are products of schools with inadequate library collections or without a library or reading room. Adetoro (2005) confirmed this when he submits that the problem facing school libraries include "inadequate facilities and equipment, inadequate and outdated materials, poor funding and poor accommodation. It is expected that readership promotions will arouse positive reading habits in the prisoners. Special programmes like story reading, radio and television hours, literacy training should be provided for non-literate interns. Efforts can as well be directed at identifying interns who have age and ability on their side to get educated; and adequate arrangements put in place to educate them.

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