



**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN POVERTY  
ALLEVIATION AMONG THE YOUTH IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*A survey of the historical and contemporary facts and figures presents Nigeria as a nation battling with poverty eradication. The situation is further compounded by the level of poverty and the attendant socio-economic milieu among economically active youth. The study was based on a review of relevant literature on the use of public libraries and their roles in government's commitment towards poverty alleviation among the youths in Lagos State, Nigeria. Employing a mixed methods approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained. Using a purposive sampling technique, quantitative data were obtained with the use of a questionnaire administered to 378 youths selected from a total population of 475 persons who attended the readership and entrepreneurship community engagement programmes held at the three remodeled public libraries in Lagos State. Qualitative data were gathered from library users and administrators using interviews, observation and document analysis. While quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentage, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that 58.5 percent of youths living in Lagos State, have low standard of living, and 80.7 percent are in need of information on survival and income generation to tackle poverty. Findings further revealed that three out of the eleven public libraries remodeled are providing free access to information resources, access to information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and community space for various programmes to help alleviate poverty among youths. The study concludes that public libraries play critical roles in poverty alleviation among youths, and recommends that management of public libraries should develop strategies for advocacy and sustainable information dissemination mechanism in line with the government's vision on poverty alleviation programmes in Lagos State.*

**Keywords:** Poverty alleviation, Youths, Empowerment, Public libraries, Lagos State, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Poverty has always been a major challenge facing Nigeria as a nation, and this phenomenon remains hugely problematic in the country. The last official estimates from 2009 – 2010 were that 53.5 percent of the Nigerian population live below the poverty line, as indicated by the transnational poverty line of US\$ 1.90 per person, per day. By 2016, the poverty rate was projected to have fallen to 48.4 percent or 90 million persons. However, due to current slow economic growth, the poverty rate will most likely have increased moderately in 2017 (World Bank, 2018). With an estimated population of 198 million, it is alarming to know that 87.52 million (44.2 percent) are still living below the poverty line of US\$ 1.90 (six hundred and eighty-four naira) per person per day (Ndujihe, 2018; Omoniyi, 2018, Abdullahi, 2019).

The high poverty rate in Nigeria is associated with unemployment and under-employment. The evidence for this can be seen in the statistics provided by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2016), which indicate that Nigeria's unemployment rate rose from 12.1% to 13.3% in the first and second quarters of 2016, or from 24.4 million to 26.06 million people respectively during the period. The convergence in poverty and unemployment trends shows large regional disparities in living standards due to a number of factors ranging from availability of jobs to returns on human capital. Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, during her visit to Nigeria on the 29th of August 2018, reaffirmed that Nigeria is home to the highest number of poor people in the world (Ndujihe, 2018). Yet, Nigeria has abundant human and financial resources, but these have not translated into meaningful improvement in the lives of the citizens, especially the youth who are still fighting for mere survival. Today, millions of the citizens live in critical economic conditions as poverty continues to bite harder and the unemployment rate increases on a daily basis.

As youth unemployment in particular continues to rise, Anyebe (2014) notes that the Federal government has purposively initiated programmes such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001. The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) replaced the Poverty Alleviation Programme and coordinated other sub- programmes which were established in its wake. These include the Youth Employment Scheme (YES) and Social Welfare Scheme among others (Odey & Okoye, 2014). The initiation of other sub-programmes such as the Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP), Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) and Micro Credit Programme (MCP) emerged from the Youth Employment Programme (YES). Prior to the foregoing initiatives, similar policies on skills acquisition to address youth poverty had been in place in the 1980s. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) programmes had been established to tackle skills development and job creation in areas of agricultural development, vocational skills development, small-scale industries and graduate programmes Umoh (2012) as cited by Odey & Okoye, (2014). The programme could however, not be sustained due to factors mainly related to inadequate funding, policy distortion and corruption (Umoh, 2012).

Various studies elucidate that these innumerable programmes put in place to eradicate poverty among the youth did not yield significant results at the national level, hence each state government established various structures to further develop poverty elimination mechanisms among their youth population. Lagos State, being the former



federal capital and the commercial heart of the country is said to have more job creation opportunities than other states. For this reason, youth from all over the country migrate to Lagos State in search of white-collar jobs and sustainable livelihoods (Fapohunda, 2012). The influx of youth into Lagos State, has informed the development of systemic approaches and initiatives in response to the need for sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation. First, is the Youth Employment Scheme (YES), which aimed to reduce poverty in the State to its barest minimum by November 2019 (LASG 2018), and second, the establishment of 17 vocational/skill acquisition centers across twenty local government areas. This initiative was designed to train youth in as many vocations as possible, e.g. ICTs, catering and hotel management, refrigeration and air-conditioning, aluminum fabrication, textile design, hair dressing/barbing and cosmetology among others. (Fapohunda, 2012, LASG, 2018).

Other initiatives introduced in Lagos State to reduce poverty alleviation as reported by Kellog (2018) included investment of twenty- five billion Naira towards the creation of 300,000 direct and 600,000 indirect jobs by 2019 under the auspices of the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF). Of particular interest is the remodeling of three out of 12 public libraries under a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with Lagos State which was accomplished in 2017 with the aim of giving the libraries a new look to reflect global standards in library services (Omisore, 2017). Further initiatives included maintaining existing partnership programmes to support poverty alleviation among the youth as reported by Oduwole (2016), along with Lagos State employment generation initiatives aimed at providing free skills training and re-training and provision of soft loans for the youth to establish businesses (Musbau,2018. Lastly, the creation of more employment opportunities such as the Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corps, established in 2016 was designed to assist the state police and other security agencies to maintain law and order.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The youths living in Lagos State are assumed to be living in poverty as a result of high rate of unemployment and standard of living. The Lagos State government seems to be conscious of its responsibilities to its citizenry and put in place various intervention programmes to alleviate poverty among the youths. However, it was observed that despite efforts of the government, poverty is becoming more embedded and increasing among the populace, especially the youth. This could be attributed to lack of a robust information framework to promote government's laudable commitment towards poverty alleviation in all forms.

For youths to benefit from government's poverty alleviation programmes, they would need general and specific information to connect to new markets, find capital to start businesses, and search for relevant vocational skills acquisition opportunities. With the increasing need for such information, public libraries which are vital sources of information provision have critical role to play in providing timely and appropriate information. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of public libraries in alleviating poverty among the youth in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study was premised on the following research questions:

1. What is the role of the public library in alleviating poverty among the youth in Lagos State, Nigeria?
2. How has public library development impacted on the current use of their facilities in an effort to alleviate poverty among the youth in Lagos State, Nigeria?

## **Review of Related Literature**

Poverty is not just reflective of lack of income and resources and is a factor mitigating against a sustainable livelihood. Its indicators comprise hunger, malnutrition, inadequate access to education and other basic services such as good health care services, social discrimination and marginalization and minimal involvement in decision-making. To provide sustainable jobs and promote equality, economic growth must be all inclusive (United Nations, 2018). In the words of Smith (1776) as cited in Adofu, Ocheja and Abula, (2013: 2), "no society can be flourishing and happy, of which by far the greater part of the members are poor, unemployed, and miserable". From the viewpoint of Smith, it can then be said that there is an emergent awareness and universal consensus that poverty constitutes the greatest risk to peace, stability and the survival of the entire human race.

In Nigeria, the effect of poverty on society is indeed dehumanizing. Specifically, Emeh (2012) argues that the consequences of poverty on the youth are disturbing as a majority are faced with unemployment, lack of capacity and relevant and appropriate skills needed to overcome poverty. It then becomes imperative that energy spent towards ensuring that the youth can provide the basic needs for themselves and family will help break the vicious cycle of poverty and liberate society from the deadly monster (Okafor, 2013).

Over the last three decades, various studies have reported on how the Nigerian government has made various efforts to eradicate poverty among the youth (Jacintha, 2013, Odeh & Okoye, 2014). Different policies have been developed and implemented at different times with this aim. Among the various poverty alleviation programmes, Uddin

(2013), in his findings, states that skills acquisition programmes have proved to be a critical tool used by the Nigerian government in the fight against poverty. Previous studies stressed that youths with an income yielding skill, irrespective of their gender, will never be a victim of poverty (Adeleke, Okusaga & Lateef, 2002) or can be completely free from the menace of poverty (Dada, 2016, Yusuf et al., 2019). The authors encouraged government at both federal and state levels to embrace skills acquisition programmes with vigor.

Despite the many successful skills acquisition programmes targeted at creating opportunities for youth, unemployment increases and the poverty situation remains problematic. Asaju, Arome and Anyio (2014) opine that this may be connected to a deficiency of good administration and implementation, lack of finance, uninspiring responses from would-be beneficiaries, inconsistent policies and lack of awareness of the various programmes. Akpan (2011) had earlier observed that a majority of the youth are not aware of various government policies to eradicate poverty, so they are not able to derive the benefit of them.

Zaid, Egberongbe and Adekanye (2014) note that awareness is the first step in the battle against any scourge including poverty. The authors explained that awareness is increased through the provision of timely and appropriate information and that information awareness, access and use play a vital role in modern socio-economic development. This is consistent with Strand's (2016) observation showing that over the last several decades, information has formed the basis of a new global era and knowledge societies, and the criteria of knowledge societies include adequate Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and support.

The youths are able to make informed decision where there is access to information, which often times leads to improvement in quality of life. When the youth have access to timely and relevant information, there is a greater likelihood of poverty and inequality reduction. (IFLA, 2014). This submission is in agreement with target 16.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a well-informed society contributes significantly to the development of the nation as the availability of information resources would promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Bradley, 2014; Dada, 2016). Moreover, access to information is associated with information literacy among poor youth, enabling them to have access to their rights that may improve their living standards. They will also be able to access the details of government initiatives for their welfare, thereby enjoying the benefits of government policies through which they will become well-informed citizens.

The information needs of the youths may vary, so it is essential to identify their core or specific needs. Literature reveals that each community has its own unique information needs, which must be filled in ways that make sense to members of the community (Strand, 2016). This implies that the youths must have access to information appropriate to their lives and needs. The library and information science literature discuss the need for libraries to interact with their youth, and to encourage their regular use of library facilities. In essence, the goal is that the library as an institution should take a distinct interest in those facilities and services that can most broadly and efficiently support and serve the information needs of the youth.



Young people need relevant information for self-development and development of their environment and society at large. Scholars have observed that a majority of young people only use whatever information they may stumble upon accidentally as opposed to credible sources. It is also clear that online technologies and the Internet have become more and more prevalent and integral to the everyday lives of the youth, thereby allowing them to participate more fully in the information age. This shows that there are opportunities and channels through which the youth have access to information which they think is relevant to their needs. Libraries can exploit these opportunities and channels and thus provide a stable and relevant information environment for young people.

Libraries can create the right environment for information literacy among poor youth, allowing them to have access to their rights, and improve their standard of living. However, library services for youth living in poverty might be a tough task. It is worth noting that a person suffering from poverty is not necessarily mentally ready to obtain information from a formal structure like the library. Mchombu and Mchombu (2014) and Dada (2016) underscored the critical role of the library in the socio-economic landscape, and reported how libraries are evolving to embrace their communities' adversities. According to these authors, information derived from libraries can change the lives of poor people and turn them into well-informed citizens.

According to Habibu and Babayi (2017), libraries provide access to information that could help improve communities, civil societies, organizations and governance, thereby setting a platform for the fight to end extreme poverty in all nations of the world. In light of this, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has charged libraries to contribute to sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing public access to information and "ensuring that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, including youth, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance".

Worldwide, public libraries ensure that their resources and services are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, political views, or religion, and other distinguishing characteristics (Beth, Charnney & Smith, 2017). A Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study, 2010-2011, as cited in Uddin (2013), indicates that public libraries "serve as 'first responders' for people in need of technology training and online resources for employment, continuing education and access to online government services. Thus, libraries serve as a 'toll free' bridge over the great divide" (Hoffman et al. 2011).

Lagos State, located in south-west Nigeria, was created on May 27, 1967 by the Decree No. 14 of 1967, which reorganized Nigeria's Federation into 12 states. It is surrounded by the Republic of Benin in the West, and the Atlantic Ocean in the South. With a total population of 9,113,605 million, it is described as the second most populated state in Nigeria after Kano (National Population Commission and National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The Lagos State government estimates that its population is increasing at a rate of 600,000 per year. Metropolitan Lagos, which occupies an area covering 37 percent of the total land area of Lagos State, has a very varied population, and it is home to more than 85 percent of the State's overall population. Lagos is Nigeria's commercial and industrial and financial hub, and home to over 2,000 manufacturing industries and 200 financial institutions, including the Nigeria Stock Exchange. Up to 60 percent of the



Federation's industries' investment and foreign trade, and 65 percent of its commercial activities are located in Lagos State. It would be the fifth largest economy in Africa if it were a country (Ekundayo, 2013, Kellogg, 2018; Lagos State Government, 2018). Moreover, Lagos State is considered to be one of the most expensive cities in the world, living costs are high, making life particularly difficult for poor families living in the State (Harma, 2013).

Public libraries in Nigeria and elsewhere are distinct in the types of communities they serve. These libraries help to promote literacy and enjoyment of reading. Many individuals use the public library to find information for leisure, study or for work. As hubs of information, public libraries offer a collaboration of space, resources and services that enable and promote vibrant learning environments while free public access to information resources is often considered a core service. However, the rate of development, maintenance of facilities and infrastructure, type of services rendered, and level of funding for libraries differ from state to state. While free public access to information resources is considered a core service in public libraries. In a related study, Salman, Mugwisi and Mostert (2017) opine that for public libraries in Nigeria to remain relevant in a fast-changing world, there is also a need to offer services that reflect the real "concerns, needs, and realities of their communities. Such services should stimulate inquiry, innovative opportunities, and serve as a stronghold of free knowledge and lifelong learning".

In Lagos State, public libraries have come a long way in the past years in terms of providing access to information resources for youth. However, studies have shown that public libraries in the State are faced with challenges which include limited budgets, little support from the state government, and lack of access to ICT appliances and other infrastructure (Jacintha, 2013, Habibu & Babay, 2017; Haruna, Madu & Awurdi, 2018). Lately, the strong advocacy for increased access to knowledge is reflected in the transformation of the public library's agenda of the Lagos State government. As the State government is renovating and transforming libraries into community hubs, and establishing skills acquisition centers as poverty survival schemes, economic growth is seen as a nonnegotiable for sustained improvement in poverty alleviation and unemployment decline.

## **Methodology**

Employing a mixed method approach, this study examined the role of public libraries in alleviating poverty among the youth living in Lagos State, Nigeria. The total population of this study was four hundred and seventy-five (475) persons, who attended the youth readership promotion and entrepreneurial community engagement programmes between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April, and 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2018 at the three remodeled public libraries (Herbert Macaulay, Ilupeju and Isolo) in Lagos State. Three hundred and seventy-eight (378) young males and females aged between 18 - 35 who agreed to participate in the survey were purposively selected as sample. The choice of the age category was based on the categorization of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who considered this age group as youth (National Youth Policy of Nigeria, 2001).

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used because an in-depth understanding of the role of public libraries in alleviating poverty from the perspective of the youth is vital to this study. Questionnaire was the research instrument used to collect



quantitative data. The first section of the questionnaire focused on the socio-demographic characteristic such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications, household size, number of children, employment status and income of the respondents. Questions on access to, and use of library were presented in the second section of the questionnaire while the third section contained questions on information needs and the role of library in poverty alleviation. Copies of the questionnaires were administered with the help of two research assistants.

To supplement the quantitative data, qualitative data were generated using observation, interviews, and document analysis. Through direct observation while spending time at the three remodeled public libraries, the researchers were able to witness a first-hand use pattern of the public libraries by youths. To ascertain the views of the respondents as regards the specific role of libraries in poverty alleviation, interviews were conducted with twelve youths identified as regular users of the libraries. Three library administrators were also interviewed to gain a more complete insight into the role of public libraries in Lagos State. Each interview session lasted for an average of 30 minutes. An interview guide was used to ensure uniformity of questions and responses from the interviewees. Based on consent of the interviewees, a voice recorder was used to record each interview. Also, notes were taken during each interview to complement recorded messages and to capture non-verbal messages from interviewees.

To enrich the researchers understanding of the role of libraries in poverty alleviation among the youth, websites and documents were consulted to gain more insight. Documentary evidence on circulation, collection, and usage data since the completion and use of the three remodeled public libraries were consulted. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively.

## **Results**

### *Demographic data*

The demographic characteristics presented in Table 1 show that 32.3 percent and 29.9 percent of respondents were within the age ranges of 28-31 and 32-35 years, respectively. Only 11.1 percent were between 18 – 22 years of age. This is an indication that a majority of those who took part in this study constitute economically active persons. Findings showed that the highest proportion of the respondents (65.3 percent) were male, while 34.7 percent were female. Regarding the educational qualifications of respondents, 38.9 percent had tertiary education, while 10.8 percent and 28.3 percent had primary and secondary education respectively. Only 13.5 percent had a vocational training certificate.





**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics (N=378)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
18-22 years	42	11.1
23-27 years	101	26.7
28-31 years	122	32.3
32-35 years	113	29.9
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	201	53.2
Female	177	46.8
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	201	53.2
Married	177	46.8
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
Primary school certificate	32	8.5
Junior secondary school	41	10.8
Senior secondary certificate	107	28.3
Vocational training certificate	51	13.5
Tertiary certificate	147	38.9

The findings presented in Table 2 shows that 59.5 percent of respondents were household heads with 48.9 percent being part of households comprising 5 – 10 members. A smaller percentage, 39.7 percent, were part of households of 1-4 persons in size and 11.4 percent reported they had more than 10 members in their households. This shows that majority of the youth who participated in the study were from smaller households (under 10 members). The result also shows that 25.9 percent of the respondents do not have children. A total of 52.7 percent of respondents earned between 31,000 – 70, 000 Naira as estimated income per month Naira per month, while only 11.6 percent earn more than 100,000 Naira. This is considered a poor wage, especially in Lagos State where cost of living is very high.

**Table 2: Socio-Economic Characteristics (N=378)**

<b>Household size</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 4	150	39.7
5-10	185	48.9
More than 10	43	11.4
<b>Number of Children</b>		
1-2	124	32.8
3-4	105	27.8
More than 4	51	13.5
No children	98	25.9
<b>Estimated income per month</b>		
Less than 10,000 Naira	25	6.6



10,000 - 30,000 Naira	64	16.9
31,000 - 50,000 Naira	111	29.4
51,000 - 70,000 Naira	88	23.3
71,000 - 100,000 Naira	46	12.2
More than 100,000 Naira	44	11.6
<b>Are you the household head?</b>		
Yes	225	59.5
No	153	40.5

Results presented in Table 3 show the standard of living of respondents. As regards the type of housing inhabited by the respondents, the findings revealed that 46.6 percent were living in one room apartment, and a room and parlour. A total of 14.2 percent indicated living in a wing bungalow, 13 percent were living in a flat, and 8.2 percent were living with family/friends. This implies the level of poverty of the respondents. Among the respondents, a total of 38.6 percent spent 500 Naira, 31.7 spent 1000 Naira while 8.5 percent could only afford to spend more than 1000 Naira on food per day. This is an indication that majority of the respondents cannot afford good meal or balanced diet. The employment status of respondents shows that 35.7 percent were unemployed, while 24.3 percent were self-employed. Only 18.8 percent were working in the public sector.

**Table 3:** Standard of Living of the Respondents (N= 378)

<b>Type of Housing</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
A room apartment	91	24.1
A room and parlour	85	22.5
Self-contained/A room and parlour with toilet & bathroom	62	16.4
Wing bungalow	56	14.8
Flat	49	13.0
Duplex/house	4	1.1
Living with family/friends	31	8.2
<b>Employment status</b>		
Public sector job	71	18.8
Private-sector job	80	21.2
Self-employed	92	24.3
Unemployed	135	35.7
<b>Average spending on food per day</b>		
200 Naira	80	21.2
500 Naira	146	38.6
1000 Naira	120	31.7
More than 1000 Naira	32	8.5

<b>Standard of living</b>		
High income	45	11.9
Average income	112	29.6
Low income	221	58.5

***Information needs***

Findings show that majority of respondents have information needs in ten specific areas as shown in Table 4. The specific areas of needs include: information on survival and income generation, (80.7 percent), entrepreneurship (71.4 percent), studying abroad (69.6 percent), international work permit (58.7 percent), career development (65.1 percent), marketing of goods and services (56.9 percent), job application and CV writing (56.3 percent), skills acquisition (52.6 percent), loans (51.9 percent) and small scale business management (53.2 percent). While 44.7 percent claimed to need information about politics and government, only 27.2 percent need information about health.

**Table 4:** Information Needs of Respondents

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Needed</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Not Needed</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Survival and income generation	305	80.7	73	19.3
2	Entrepreneurship	270	71.4	108	28.6
3	Study abroad	263	69.6	115	30.4
4	Career development	246	65.1	132	34.9
5	International work permit	222	58.7	156	41.3
6	Job application and CVs writing	213	56.3	165	43.7
7	Small scale business management	201	53.2	177	46.8
8	Skills acquisition	199	52.6	179	47.4
9	Loans	196	51.9	182	48.1
10	Politics and Government	169	44.7	209	55.3
11	Non-governmental agencies for youth Development	162	42.9	216	57.1
12	ICT training/skills	144	38.1	234	61.9
13	Health	103	27.2	275	72.8
14	Foreign or Second Language acquisition	95	25.1	283	74.9
16	Recreational information	53	14.0	325	86.0

***Use of public libraries***

On the use of public libraries as to meet their information needs, findings show that only 56.3 percent responded positively to the question, while 43.7 percent responded negatively as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Use of Public Libraries

	<b>Use</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	213	56.3
No	165	43.7
Total	378	100

Concerning the frequency of use of library which ranged from daily to once a year as shown in table 6, 43.7 percent of the respondents were using the library for the very first time. Apart from first time users, 15.1 percent and 10 percent were using the library daily and once a month, respectively.

**Table 6:** Frequency of Use of Public Libraries

S/N	Item	Frequency	%
1	This is my first visit	165	43.7
2	Daily	57	15.1
3	Once per week	47	12.4
4	Once a month	38	10.0
5	About once a year	30	8.0
6	2-3 times per week	22	5.8
7	2 – 3 times a month	19	5.0
	Total	378	100

As shown in Table 7, those who responded positively claimed to be using public libraries for the following purposes: in search of job information (69.6 percent), attend community outreach programmes (68.8 percent), use the Internet (55.8 percent), read newspapers (53.7 percent), use government information (53.2 percent), study in the library in preparation for certification examination (52.6 percent), conduct research on how to write a CV (52.4 percent) and get information for school projects (51.9). Only 22.2 percent are using the library just to use the commercial photocopy machines. Collectively, majority are using the library for computer related activities. While 40.1 percent of the respondents are using the library computers for non-Internet purposes, 45.2 percent are using same to learn computer skills. Only 16.9 percent go to the library to borrow videos, CDs or audiotapes.

**Table 7:** Purpose for Using Public Libraries

S/N	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1	To study in the library in preparation for certification examination	199	52.6	179	47.4
2	To conduct research on how to write CVS	198	52.4	180	47.6
3	To learn computer skills	171	45.2	207	54.8
4	To use the computers (non-internet)	159	40.1	219	57.9
5	To attend outreach programmes	260	68.8	118	31.2
6	To borrow videos, CD or audiotapes	64	16.9	314	83.1
7	To use the commercial photocopy machine	84	22.2	294	77.8
8	To read Newspaper/ magazine	203	53.7	175	46.3
9	To use the Internet	211	55.8	167	44.2
10	To get information for school project	196	51.9	182	48.1
11	To use government publication	201	53.2	177	46.8
12	In search of job information	263	69.6	115	30.4
13	For leisure reading	193	51.1	185	48.9
14	To meet up with a friend for a chat	81	21.4	297	78.6



15 To speak with a librarian

199 52.6

179 47.4

When asked if libraries were important in their search for information to alleviate poverty, the findings presented in Table 8 shows that the vast majority considered the library importance in varying degrees. Only 5.8 percent responded negatively.

**Table 8:** Importance of Public Library in Search for Information

S/ N	Item	Frequenc y	%
1	Not important	22	5.8
2	Somewhat important	65	17.2
3	Important	97	25.7
4	Very important	194	51.3
	Total	378	100

### **Role of Public Libraries in Alleviating Poverty among Youths in Lagos State**

A selection of in-depth interviews was subsequently conducted to supplement the quantitative data collected for the study. The interviews with library users revealed that the three public libraries are playing multiple roles in alleviating poverty among the youths in Lagos State. Such roles as reported by participants include:

- i. provision of free access to information resources, Internet access, computers, and other information resources;
- ii. stimulating literacy, including media and information literacy;
- iii. Promoting access to information and helping the youth to better understand general and specific information needs;
- iv. Advancing sustainable livelihood and empowerment through access to (ICTs); and
- v. providing access to community space where both government and non-governmental organizations organize outreach programmes.

Findings from the interview further reflect the influence of the remodeling of the three public libraries on the current use of the facilities in an effort to alleviate poverty among the youths in Lagos State. The library administrators interviewed mentioned that the remodeling of the public libraries was not a conscious priority of the state but rather an initiative by private institutions who indicated interest in partnering with the state government under the “Private- Public Partnership New Library Look Initiative”. The Library administrators interviewed explained their roles in providing information and services that could alleviate poverty among youths in Lagos States. Some of their responses include:

*User statistics have increased because the library is assisting users in meeting their information needs, especially in finding and using appropriate resources, and providing information literacy education (Library Administrator, Herbert Macaulay Library, Yaba)*



*This library strives to meet the information needs of our users. Acquisitions of library resources, promotion of educational materials, responding to inter-library loan requests for materials on job related information, creating meeting rooms and spaces for programmes to promote entrepreneurship, skill acquisition and other livelihood opportunities are currently part of the library efforts to alleviate poverty among the youth in Lagos state (Library Administrator, Lagos State Public Library, Ilupeju).*

*There is no doubt that investment in public library development is helping in alleviating poverty among youths in Lagos state. However, increased investment and information service delivery policy framework are necessary to adequately play more roles as support agencies (Library Administrators, Herbert Macaulay Library and Isolo).*

*As lofty and laudable as the government plans to increase the knowledge base of the youth in Lagos state seems, library administrators were sometimes involved at the planning stages but have been left out of the implementation, decision-making, and monitoring process (Library Administrator, Herbert Macaulay Library, Yaba).*

### **Discussion of Findings**

As regards the demographic characteristics of the respondents, majority of those who participated in the study and within age brackets of 23 – 35 years are expected to be economically active since studies have shown that age bracket of 18 - 22 years reflects those who are enrolled in tertiary education institutions (World Bank, 2014). In terms educational qualification of respondents, Lagos State is in tandem with the indicators of the National Bureau of Statistics which shows that 35.5 percent have tertiary education, 16.6 percent have secondary education, 18.1 percent have primary education, and 20.7 percent have never been to school (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Tertiary qualifications do not necessarily ensure employment opportunities and studies have reported that a majority of youths with tertiary education are unemployed and living in poverty (Bamiro, 2015).

Just above 50 percent of the respondents were single while 46.8 percent were married. As regards the standard of living of respondents, a majority came from small households (1-10 persons) a quarter of the respondents had no children whilst more than 60 percent had between one and four children. The implications of findings on why some respondents do not have children could be intentional because of the belief that children attract more responsibility. The decision of how many children to have is a private decision of the household. This was so because in Nigerian setting, especially within low-income earners, the number of children in a household has major role to play in farming, trading and other wage-labour activities (Yusuf et al., 2019). This is because the children's need for food, basic education and shelter must be met. What the result on youths who had more than 4 children suggests is the fear of survival prospects for the children as opined by McHale and Grolmik (2002); and USAID (2002)

The results showed that a majority of the respondents live in one room and a room and parlour apartment while a minority live in duplex/house, despite the fact that only a few do not have children. The type of residence inhabited by respondents in this study is an indication of the level of poverty. This could be due to the fact that the respondents cannot afford the cost of living in a more spacious and convenient housing such as a two-

or three-bedroom apartment that is more appropriate for someone who is married and have children. This finding is an indication that the level of income affects the type of residence affordability among individuals. Findings also indicated that a majority of the respondents were unemployed, while many of those who were employed earned between 31,000 – 70, 000 Naira as estimated income per month and just a few could afford to spend more than 1000 naira on food per day. This underscores why most youth are trapped in the poverty cycle as 58.5 percent described themselves as low- income earners. This result is consistent with some studies that have reported that the majority of Nigerians live below the poverty rate of \$1. 90 per-day (Ndujihe, 2018; Abdullahi, 2019).

Youths who participated in the study have information needs in ten specific areas, which include: information on survival and income generation, entrepreneurship, study abroad, international work permit, career development, marketing of goods and services, job application and CVs writing, skills acquisition, loans and small-scale business management. This shows that the information the respondents needed is varied and specific in nature. This finding strengthens the findings of Stilwell (1989) who noted that survival and citizen action information were two areas of information needed by individuals. Information needs that span across health, housing, employment and socio-economic conditions could be classified as survival information. In terms of importance and relevance, the role of public libraries in meeting the information needs of the citizens, regardless of age and status cannot be overemphasized. The findings on the importance of the libraries investigated in this study is in tandem with the study of Davis (2009), who recommended that public libraries should render services that would lead to the improvement in quality of life of the citizenry in terms of eradication of illiteracy and poverty.

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the library is important and are heavily used. This may be associated with the fact that the libraries investigated were three out of the eleven public libraries remodeled under the Lagos State public-private new library look initiative. The project may have created a welcoming and conducive library environment, thereby increasing the usage statistics as a result of availability of free access to information resources and improved infrastructure and facilities. This finding is in tandem with Jain and Saraf (2013); who reiterated that libraries are considered very important in the information landscape. Specifically, the authors state that libraries are upskilling the users with information provision, and playing a vital role in modern socio-economic developments.

## **Conclusion**

The effect of poverty on the youths is greatly dehumanizing. Every effort on the part of the government and society at large to alleviate poverty is a welcome development. This study assessed one of the efforts of the Lagos State government at alleviating poverty among the youth living in the state. The findings of the study revealed that the use of public libraries where youths can find free information resources on survival and income generation is a veritable tool in the fight against poverty.

## **Recommendations**

This study recommends that Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals must ponder on how public libraries have been left out of the national planning,



implementation, decision-making and monitoring processes, and develop approaches towards supporting government objectives in poverty eradication programmes. Specifically, workers in public libraries across Lagos State should be proactive in supporting government objectives in poverty eradication programs, including formulation of information delivery policies, improving ICT access and computer skills of library users, and providing information on educational and employment opportunities. Moreover, management of public libraries should develop strategies for advocacy and ensuring sustainable information dissemination mechanism in line with the government's vision and poverty alleviation programmes. Furthermore, management of public libraries should also implement initiatives that would lead to seamless access to research, information, and data to support literacy, sustainable livelihoods, quality education, and vocational skills acquisition. Finally, the importance and the role that public libraries could play in poverty eradication in Lagos State should be publicized through programmes such as seminars, conferences, workshops and other community outreach events.

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