

ANAMBRA STATE JUDICIAL LIBRARIES: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

The study and practice of law is essentially library based. This paper discussed services the judicial library in Anambra State render to members of the Bar and the Bench. It also x-rayed most of the challenges these libraries in Anambra State face. Based on the issues raised, recommendations were made aimed at improving judicial library services in Anambra State.

Keywords: *Law library Services, Judicial Libraries, Anambra State, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Law libraries are special libraries that provide legal information through relevant law books and periodicals for their clientele most of who are law students, law teachers legal practitioners, and others in related disciplines. Anaeme in Akinyemi (2017) described judicial libraries as libraries usually found within the court premises. They are often referred to as court libraries. They are primarily established to serve judges, magistrates and lawyers in the preparation of their case files and dispensation of justice.

The law library is a service department in the judiciary. It plays major role in the administration of justice, promotion of legal education and in the functioning of a social system which adheres to the rule; and also by judicial officers who have little or no time to search exhaustively to access relevant reports, Acts from numerous information resources in the law library. These law library users rely on the law libraries and professional skills of law library staff to access the relevant information resource needed. Uwaechina, (2020) opined that the judiciary mostly depends on the law library to enhance quick and easy access to legal information resources for effective administration of justice. The vision of judiciary library is to provide prompt and professional guidance to information resources in law to legal practitioners and to assist them in the speedy administration of justice. Judicial libraries also have the mission to provide the courts and the public with access to comprehensive and current legal resources in an efficient and timely manner and to provide bibliographic assistance, educational programs, legal reference and research guidance to all patrons (State of Connecticut, Judicial Branch Law library Services, 2017).

Jegade in Dada, (2011) classifies law libraries into seven categories namely, federal court, state court, law school, practitioners, federal and state departments, faculty libraries and libraries of legislature house. The judiciary library is considered an essential ingredient for effective dispensation of justice in any democratic society. Legal issues have become part and parcel of our environment and timely access to the right legal information determines the performance of any legal officer in any judicial process. That is why judicial libraries are principal providers of legal information and key contributors to ensuring access to justice delivery. According to American Association of Law Libraries (2015), law libraries have an

interest in and duty to promote the effective functioning of the legal system by providing citizens with the resources needed to preserve their legal rights.undoubtedly, lawyers operate in information intensive environment whether providing legal advice, representing a client in court, or drafting a legal document (Otike & Mathew, 2000).

In the words of Uloko in Owushi, & Emasealu, (2016) the court library is a specialized library because of its unique place as tool in the teaching of legal research and its valuable contribution to the maintaince of peace and stability in the country. Accordingly, court libraries function as a reservoir that keep up to date records of the numerous laws,law decrees, edicts, constitutions, court proceedings. and amendments as they are passed. Given that a well-stocked judicial library is indispensable to the legal practitioner as well as judges in the administration of justice.

Brief History of AnambraState Jidiciary Library

Judicial library as a specialised library has its historical background from 1900 with the establishment of the high court library in Lagos. The Anambra State judicial library is a library with an objective to make informaiton resources accessible to its usersmainly lawyers and judicial officers. judicial libraries are established and found within various court premises in the state. They serve judges, magistrates and practising lawyers in the preparation of cases and justice dispensation. These court libraries include the already defunct Customary Court of Appeal, the federal and states High courts, the National Industrial Court and customary courts in Anambra State. They function to acquire and provide basic law materials in print and non-print formats for research and to enhance quick and efficient justice administration by courts in Anambra state.

The Anambra State judicial library was built from the stock of books in the Awka judiciary division prior to the creation of the new state. The volume of books acquired during the assest sharing exercise of books between Enugu and Anambra State was small compared to its present status. Currently, there are judicial libraries located in various judicial division in Anambra State. They are in Awka, Onitsha, Otuocha, Nnewi, Aguata, Idemili, Ogbaru, Orumba South, and Anaocha. Most of the above Judicial Division have a library attached to it but the Awka judicial Division houses the central judicial library being the headquarters of the state judiciary. Those court libraries are open to members of the legal profession and persons interested in legal research. Administratively, the judicial central library is located at judiciary headquarters which houses the highcourt. It is a division of its own and directly under the Chief Registrar’s administrative umbrell (Eze–Onwuzulike, 2020).

Function of Judicial Libraries

Patrons of judicial libraries are usually judges, law officers of the state with different ranks, practising lawyers and those who needs informaiton on legal issues. Therefore, judicial libraries function in the following ways speciafically to meet the purpose and information needs of their parent organisation (Khan, & Bhatti. 2012).

1. **Selection and Acquisition of** law resources for the parents organisation.
2. **Organisation of Materials.** They organize and process acquired informaiton resources so that the users can locate and use them with ease.
3. **Charging and Discharging.**Making the resources accessible to users and loaning out for home use.
4. **Readership Services.**Judicial libraries provide readership services to their users.
5. **Reference Services.**They provide reference services which are used for specific informaiton needs. It is an organised efforts on the part of libraries to aid their readers. Shores as cited in Opara (2006) believed that the reference unit is to library service

what intelligence unit is to the military. He categorised the functions of the reference service under the following sub-headings. Supervision, information, guidance and Bibliography. Therefore, for reference librarian to achieve the above he/she ought to be versed with intimate knowledge of the type of materials stocked in his library, as well as having the ability to retrieve them on demand.

6. **Indexing Services.** An index is a systematic guide to the text of any reading material or to the contents of other documents. Judicial libraries index informative items scattered in wide range of primary information sources. For instance, edicts are by laws of a state, which can be assembled chronologically as a reference guide. An example is drawn from old Anambra State.
7. **Gazette Filing:** Gazettes are government publications which are indispensable primary sources of law in the court or judicial libraries. They carry information about government activities such as staff appointments, promotion, retirement, notices, laws enacted, among others. Gazette filing allows such information to be separated according to some order either alphabetically or chronologically. The main supplement of a gazette range from sections B to D with varying information content.
8. **Law Amendment:** It is an important and professional aspect of the work of a judicial law library. It involves continuous up-dating of all the out-dated laws which are either repealed or amended. Any mistake in amendment defaces the law and of course misinforms the court and the lawyers which leads to miscarriage of justice. Amendment requires, a responsible and intelligent librarian who will painstakingly effect the changes.
9. **Current Awareness Service:** This service is designed to keep the readers abreast of latest developments in the library. It furnishes the reader with current information in his research interest by providing him with either photocopies of new journal contents, as well as through the library bulletin which carry information on newly accessioned books in the judicial library.
10. **Legal Research:** Judicial libraries function to serve the research needs of the legal profession. As this exercise is purely on historical law research, training on event in the law with a view to finding out facts. In this regard, the reference librarian should have good memory and be familiar with reference materials so as to support the reader's research activities.
11. **Inter-Library Loan Service:** Judicial libraries function to provide resource sharing to satisfy users information needs of its clientele, because no library is self sufficient in meeting users needs. This can be done through consulting union catalogues in libraries; working in co-operation to request for materials located in other libraries. This materials can be arranged and be borrowed through the help of the librarians. Information resource can be made available and accessible on-line with the advent of ICT. The librarian can only educate the users on how to source for information on-line and same from other libraries. ICT innovation in law libraries have made it easier and faster for users to get the information they need at a shortest possible time.
12. **Provision of User Education:** Law library users are educated on how to trace books of their choice through the use of catalogue cards or through surfing the software available in the library. It is the role of law librarian to educate the user on how to structure their information needs and on how to locate them on the shelves with minimal assistance from the librarians.
13. **Provision of Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI):** The service is rendered where a library decides to organize a databank of information on readers and serve them on a selective basis. This can be done when a law librarian demand the profile of individual library users to ascertain their interest area in law, in order to enable the library assemble related materials on such subject area for the users.

Through this service, there will be distribution of new information to individual or groups according to their research interest.

14. **Provision of ICT Services:** ICT and internet services is important function of judicial libraries which make information resources to be readily available to the users. It provides information resources for learning and research. It helps in quick resource sharing through inter-library co-operation, formation of consortia, inter-library loans and delivery systems to facilitate and provide convenient access to information. Alemike, (2004) refer to information technology as method or device for collecting organizing, storing, analysing, retrieving and communicating knowledge.

Problems Confronting Anambra State Judicial Libraries

Scholars (Ziogas, (2020): Uwaechina, (2020): & Okoye, Mbagwu, Abanum, & Nwohiri, (2019) have identified various problems confronting judicial libraries as follows:

1. **Lack of Functional Library Building:** From the researchers' experience, the sordial situation within which some of Anambra state judicial libraries operate leaves much to be desired. The reading rooms are poorly lit while the reading tables and chairs provided are not suitable for library use. Functional library building long awaited should be designed, budgetted and constructed to accommodate the ever growing law collections as well as adequate reading rooms for library users. special carrels for personalised research use as well as comfortable lighting for reading and other services of the library should be pursued. Non existence of these facilities hinder effective use of judicial library in Anambra State.
2. **Law Library Collection:** Collection is the sum total of the materials a library has at a particular time. According to Duru and Onwuama in Abo, and Abu, (2019) collection involves discovering weak areas of the collection that need to be evaluated with a view of reaffirming their relevance in satisfying users demands. In the light of the above, Anambra State judicial libraries are fraught with the problem of inadequate law books such as text books, laws and statute, law reports, law journals, reference tools, non legal materials, non-book materials- computer facilities, Internet facilities among others. The highcosts of these books have become prohibitive in face of the high exchange rate of the naira and this has brought about scarcity of books in the Anambra State judicial library. Besides, lack of current law books is a bye product of poor funding. This problem of course has become a clog in the wheel of smooth dispensation of cases in Anambra State judiciary. Advocating for improved funding of the judiciary libraries in the state is a step in the right direction. Equally, public spirited individuals should support these libraries through grant, gifts and bequeaths. Allowance and adequate provision must be made for constant expansion in the field of prices.
3. **Staffing:** As more judicial divisions are being created in Anambra State, there is need for recruitment of well trained librarians and staff to man these libraries and to meet the increasing demand for services from users. The above situation have been the problem facing Anambra State judicial libraries as they lack of qualified personnel and this has jeopardised the development of judicial libraries in Anambra state. Besides, it has not been possible to find the right calibre of librarian due to poor condition of service and remuneration of librarians. As a result, qualified libraiains leave for jobs with better conditions of service. Upward review of Anambra State condition of service will help to attract and retain competent and skilled workers in the state civil service.
4. **Inadequate Training and Retraining of Existing Library Personnel.** Most library staff working in the judicial libraries lack skills and competencies especially in the area of ICT, cataloguing and classification of law books. Therefore, training and re-

skilling of law library manpower is a *sine qua non* for an up-dated staff if new soft/hard wares are to be effectively utilized. This can be achieved through organising regular workshop, in-service training, seminars and conference (Okoye, Mbagwu, Abanum, & Nwohiri, 2019).

5. **Absence of ICT and Internet facilities.** There is outright absence of ICT and Internet facilities in the Anambra State judicial libraries. This has made informiton service delivery to be slow and ineffective. There is therefore urgent need to computerize Anambra State judicial libraries in order to take advantage of this new innovation. This is because ICT facilitates access to legal materials in a most speedy way to the judges, lawyers, law students and members of the public online. Moreover, ICT enhances the performance of routine processes such as law amendments, (Noters up), indexing and abstracting services.
6. **Low Patronage:** Anambra State judicial libraries often have low patronage of lawyers and judges due to poor collection, non-conducive environment, apathy of the lawyers and judges, lack of marketing skills to attract clientele to the library. To increase patronage, those in authority should provide adequate law collection that is up- to – date, conducive enviroment should be provided, strategies for marketing resoures should be sustained for users access to relevant and current information for maximum satisfaction.

The way forward

In the light of the issues mentioned above, the following recommendations were made: Government must develop a more pro-active and progressive attitude to ensuring that grants for the judiciary are speedily released and autonomy should be given to judicial libraries in Anambra state Budget of the judicial libraries should be separated and disitinct from the budgets of other operations of the judiciary. The funding should be robust enough for equipping and maintenance of court libraries, and to procure adequate law collections. Besides, concerted efforts should be made by the appropriate supervisory authorities to monitor effective utilization of funds allocated to the Anambra State judicial libraries.

A vote directly from the state government for the judiciary libraries is advocated to ensure regular supply of current law books and maintenance of already existing ones.

There should be training and retraining of librarians and other category of library staff in the knowledge of ICT and competencies required for them to effectively manage the resources in judicial libraries for effective information delivery. ICT infrastruture should be installed in all judicial libraries in Anambra state.

Anambra State judicial libraries should market themselves and their services in order to attract high patronage to their libraries. Innovative library services aimed at increasing readership should be vigorously pursued. Effort should be made to provide current and updated information service delivery in the judicial libraries in Anambra State.

There must be provision of electronic access to global legal/literature through consortia building so that users can connect to information resources and databases in richer libraries across the globe.

This is made possible by the migration of legal knowledge to the electronic environment. Library automation and computerization is imperative to enhance availability of knowledge based economy. Besides, mass digitization of law materials is also necessary.

There should be open access legislation through persuasion of the state and national assembly to make enabling laws geared towards making online services free of charge or at subsidized rate. Impeccable record keeping at the circulation desk should be maintained and proper records of loans and returned should be also maintained to regulate accessibility of legal information.

Inter library loan and co-operation should be encouraged for easy accessibility of unavailable information because no law library is self-sufficient.

Consortia arrangement should be ideal practice in law libraries in the judiciary. The consortium models for judicial libraries adhere to for optimum utilization of their resources and services. This will make judicial libraries more productive and effective to their user community and progressively save cost and make their resource global. consortium of libraries is well known for resource sharing all over the world.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that judicial libraries contribute positively to the law profession by providing relevant information resources and services to legal practitioners in Anambra State. It has been stated that in order to discharge their traditional roles, Anambra State judicial libraries are fraught with problems and challenges which hinder them from performing as expected. In the light of these challenges, recommendations aimed at improving judicial library services in Anambra State were made. These recommendations when implemented will boost judicial library patronage and user satisfaction.

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