

PROVIDING LIBRARY SERVICES TO THE DISADVANTAGED GROUP, A STUDY OF FARMERS IN PAIKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA), NIGER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study investigates the provision of library services to disadvantaged farmers in Paiko Local Government Area (LGA), Niger State, Nigeria. It aims to identify the specific information needs of these farmers, explore the barriers they face in accessing and utilizing library services, and assess the potential roles of libraries in supporting agricultural development. Utilizing a quantitative research methodology, a structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 50 respondents. The findings reveal that farmers prioritize basic agricultural education, local language resources, literacy and numeracy materials, and health and nutrition information. However, barriers such as language difficulties, financial constraints, and geographic isolation hinder effective access to library services. The study also highlights key strategies for improving service delivery, including practical demonstrations, public awareness campaigns, and the expansion of mobile library services. The research underscores the critical role of libraries in enhancing agricultural productivity and recommends targeted interventions to address identified challenges and optimize the impact of library services on disadvantaged farming communities.

Keywords: Library; Services; Disadvantaged group; Farmers; Paiko LGA

Introduction

Libraries in Nigeria and around the world serve as engines of growth and development (Aaron Cohen Association, 2023). They are increasingly recognized for their extensive roles in the intellectual, social, economic, technological, and human resource development of a nation. Libraries are fundamental in providing skilled labour required in various sectors. Their primary aim of library is to collect, organize, preserve, and provide access to knowledge and information, ensuring that valuable records are maintained for future generations. Libraries are a crucial link between the past, present, and future, preserving information in both books and electronic formats and making it accessible for later use. They enable individuals to access the information they need for work, recreation, education, and governance.

Disadvantaged groups such as farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State, libraries are essential in improving agricultural production through the provision of relevant information. The agricultural sector significantly contributes to the economic well-being of many Nigerians (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial for libraries to support agricultural policy research in Nigeria by utilizing globally available information resources. Libraries can convey announcements about resources, training, and other pertinent information directly to farmers using free databases like Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) and The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL), web-based software programs such as wikis and blogs, or posters.

Effective provision of information to farmers requires that it be repackaged in formats that are easily understood. Given that a large number of farmers in Paiko LGA are not literate, information must be presented in a comprehensible manner (Adomi, Ogbomo, & Inoni, 2003).

Timely delivery of agricultural information empowers farmers, enabling them to better manage their farming activities (Aina, 2021). Access to high-quality, relevant, and timely agricultural information is crucial for farmers to make strategic and important decisions (Zhou & Bowers, 2018).

Adeniyi and Ojo (2015) observed that libraries worldwide are undergoing rapid changes due to the explosion of knowledge and literature, emergence of new subjects, and advancements in ICTs. Consequently, Nigerian libraries must also evolve to enhance their agricultural information services. Improved library roles in agriculture are necessary to support farmers effectively (Aina, 2011). Farmers' information needs are diverse and involve various actions and evaluations to meet those needs (Oladele, 2011). Libraries play a vital role in providing essential information to disadvantaged farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State. By supporting agricultural policy research and utilizing global information resources,

libraries can significantly enhance the agricultural productivity of these farmers, contributing to the overall economic development of the region (Fombad & Jiyane, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The provision of library services to disadvantaged groups, specifically farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State, is critically inadequate. Farmers in this region face significant challenges, including limited access to essential agricultural information, low literacy levels, and insufficient support for adopting modern farming techniques. These barriers prevent them from improving their agricultural productivity, which is vital for their economic well-being and the overall development of the region. Libraries, recognized globally as engines of growth and development, have the potential to play a transformative role in this context by collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating valuable information that can be passed down through generations. However, the capacity of libraries to support agricultural development among these disadvantaged farmers remains largely underutilized (Obidike, 2011). Despite the availability of vast agricultural information resources, such as Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) and The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL), these resources are not effectively reaching the farmers due to a lack of awareness and appropriate dissemination strategies. Moreover, the rapid changes in the global knowledge economy, driven by the explosion of information and advancements in ICTs, have not been fully leveraged to benefit the agricultural sector in Paiko LGA.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the specific information needs of farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State.
2. To determine the barriers farmers face in accessing and utilizing library services.
3. To explore the potential role of libraries in supporting agricultural development.

Literature Review

Libraries are pivotal in the intellectual, social, economic, and technological development of nations. They serve as critical institutions for the collection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge and information. According to Aina (2021), libraries are integral to human resource development, serving as a primary source of skilled labor across various sectors. Libraries contribute to societal growth by preserving valuable records of information that link the past, present, and future, ensuring that knowledge is accessible to future generations (Kargbo, 2020). The transformative role of libraries extends beyond mere repositories of books to being dynamic agents of change and development, providing resources that empower individuals and communities.

The agricultural sector is a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, contributing significantly to the nation's GDP and employing a substantial portion of the population (Oladele, 2021). Libraries have the potential to support agricultural development by providing farmers with access to relevant and timely information. Fombad and Jiyane (2019) highlight that libraries can disseminate agricultural information through various channels, including free databases like Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) and The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL). These resources can provide farmers with valuable insights into modern farming techniques, pest control, and market trends. However, for libraries to be effective in this role, the information must be repackaged in formats that are easily understandable to farmers, many of whom may have low literacy levels (Adomi, Ogbomo, & Inoni, 2023).

Despite the potential benefits, farmers in disadvantaged regions often face significant barriers to accessing library services. These barriers include low literacy levels, lack of awareness about available resources, and limited infrastructure to support modern library services (Kamba, 2021). Rural farmers, in particular, may find it challenging to access libraries due to geographical isolation and inadequate transportation networks. Libraries must address these challenges by developing targeted strategies to improve access and utilization. For instance, information can be delivered in oral formats or through visual aids to cater to the needs of illiterate farmers (Oladele, 2021). Additionally, libraries need to engage in active community outreach to raise awareness and promote the use of library resources among farmers.

The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has transformed library services worldwide. ICT tools have revolutionized how information is accessed, processed, and disseminated. Adeniyi and Ojo (2015) note that libraries are undergoing rapid changes due to the explosion of knowledge and the introduction of new subjects and technologies. Digital libraries and ICT tools can significantly improve the dissemination of information by making it more accessible and user-friendly (Zhou & Bowers, 2018). In Nigeria, libraries have the opportunity to leverage ICT to enhance their agricultural information services. For example, digital platforms can facilitate the quick dissemination of information about new agricultural practices, weather forecasts, and market prices, which are crucial for farmers. However, the adoption of ICT in Nigerian libraries has been slow, and there is a need for strategic investments to modernize library services and ensure they meet the needs of disadvantaged farmers.

To effectively support farmers, libraries must adopt a multifaceted approach that includes the use of ICT, community engagement, and the development of tailored information resources. Fombad and Jiyane (2019) suggest that libraries should collaborate with agricultural extension services and research institutions to create comprehensive

information packages that address the specific needs of farmers. This collaboration can also facilitate the dissemination of information through multiple channels, ensuring it reaches a broader audience. Libraries should provide training and capacity-building programs to help farmers utilize available resources effectively. Additionally, libraries can implement mobile library services to reach remote areas and ensure that farmers have access to essential information regardless of their location (Stilwell, 2021).

Several case studies illustrate the successful implementation of library services aimed at supporting agricultural development. For instance, the Rural Knowledge Centers in India have demonstrated how libraries can bridge the information gap for farmers by providing access to digital resources and training programs (Senthilkumaran & Sriganesh, 2015). These centers offer a model for how libraries in Nigeria can adopt similar strategies to support local farmers. Another example is the Farmer Information Service in Kenya, which utilizes mobile technology to deliver timely agricultural information to farmers, thereby enhancing their productivity and decision-making capabilities (Odini, 2024). These case studies underscore the importance of adapting library services to meet the unique needs of farmers and leveraging technology to overcome barriers to access.

Libraries have a crucial role in supporting the agricultural development of disadvantaged groups, such as farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State. By addressing barriers to access, leveraging ICT, and engaging with the community, libraries can provide farmers with the information they need to improve their agricultural practices and enhance their economic well-being. This underscores the importance of a strategic and inclusive approach to library services, ensuring they are accessible, relevant, and beneficial to all community members.

Research Methodology

This study employ a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate the provision of library services to disadvantaged farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State. The population consists of all farmers in the region, with a sample of 50 farmers selected through stratified random sampling. Structured questionnaire, which includes sections on information needs, library services and barriers to access were administered in person by trained research assistants to ensure a high response rate. SPSS was used through descriptive statistics to analyse the data collected from the respondents. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the information needs of farmers and the role of library services in addressing these needs.

Result and Discussion of findings

Table 1: The specific information needs of the disadvantaged farmers.

S/N	Items	Total No.	SA	A	TOTAL Agreement	D	SD	TOTAL Disagreement
1.	Basic Agricultural Education:		32	18	50	0	0	0
			64%	36%	100%	0%	0%	0%
2.	Affordable Farming Solutions:		25	15	40	7	3	10
			50%	30%	80%	14%	6%	20%
3.	Literacy and Numeracy Resources:	50	39	9	48	0	2	2
		100%	78%	18%	96%	0%	4%	4%
4.	Local Language Resources		40	10	50	0	0	0
			80%	20%	100%	0%	0%	0%
5.	Health and Nutrition Information		22	25	47	2	1	3
			44%	50%	94%	4%	2%	6%
6.	Market Access and Cooperative Information		26	20	46	4	0	4
			52%	40%	92%	8%	0%	8%
7.	Mobile and Digital Libraries:		5	27	32	10	9	19
			10%	54%	64%	20%	18%	38%

The Table 1 data reveals that there is a unanimous agreement among disadvantaged farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State, on the necessity of basic agricultural education and local language resources, with 100% of respondents recognizing their importance. A substantial majority also acknowledges the need for literacy and numeracy resources (96%), health and nutrition information (94%), and market access and cooperative information (92%). However, there is less consensus on the need for mobile and digital libraries, with only 64% in agreement and a notable 38% expressing disagreement. Additionally, while 80% of the farmers agree on the importance of affordable farming solutions, 20% do not, indicating some concerns or barriers that need addressing.

Table 2: The barriers respondents face in accessing and utilizing library services

S/ N	Items	Total No.	SA	A	TOTAL Agreement	D	SD	TOTAL Disagreement
1	Language Barriers		38	9	47	2	1	3
			76%	18%	94%	4%	2%	6%
2	Illiteracy and Low Education Levels:		10	17	27	18	5	23
			20%	34%	54%	36%	10%	46%
3	Financial Constraints		29	16	45	3	2	5
			58%	32%	90%	6%	4%	10%
4	Geographic Isolation of the library	50	24	16	40	8	2	10
		100%	48%	32%	80%	16%	4%	20%
5	Lack of Awareness of library existences		22	19	41	5	4	9
			44%	38%	82%	10%	8%	18%
6	Limited Transportation		6	20	26	14	10	24
			12%	40%	52%	28%	20%	48%

The data indicates that language barriers are the most significant obstacle, with 94% of respondents acknowledging this issue. This is followed by financial constraints, which are a problem for 90% of the respondents. Geographic isolation of the library affects 80% of the respondents, making it a substantial barrier. A lack of awareness of the library's existence is reported by 82% of the respondents, showing that many are not even aware of the available resources. Illiteracy and low education levels are identified as barriers by 54% of the respondents, while 46% disagree, indicating a split in the population's educational background. Limited transportation is the least significant barrier, with only 52% of respondents agreeing, but a significant 48% disagreeing, highlighting the mixed impact of this factor.

Table 3: The potential role of libraries in supporting agricultural development.

S/ N	Items	Total No.	SA	A	TOTAL Agree- ment	D	SD	TOTAL Disagre e-ment
1.	Information Hub		40	10	50	0	0	0
			80%	20%	100%	0%	0%	0%
2.	Training and Education		37	11	48	2	0	2
			74%	22%	96%	4%	0%	4%
3.	Health and Safety Information	50	38	10	48	2	0	2
		100%	76%	20%	96%	4%	0%	4%
4.	Local Language Materials		10	30	40	9	1	10
			20%	60%	80%	18%	2%	20%
5.	Access to Digital Resources		6	20	26	14	10	24
			12%	40%	52%	28%	20%	48%

The data shows that there is unanimous agreement (100%) on the role of libraries as an information hub, highlighting their critical importance in providing essential agricultural information. Training and education are also highly valued, with 96% agreement, indicating that most respondents see libraries as pivotal in improving agricultural skills. Similarly, 96% agree on the importance of libraries providing health and safety information, emphasizing the role of libraries in promoting overall well-being. Local language materials are considered important by 80% of respondents, though 20% disagree, suggesting some variability in language needs. Access to digital resources has the least consensus, with only 52% agreement and a significant 48% disagreement, indicating mixed views on the necessity or accessibility of digital resources.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 highlights the critical needs and priorities of disadvantaged farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State. All respondents unanimously agree on the necessity of basic agricultural education and local language resources, emphasizing the importance of accessible information for effective communication and agricultural productivity. Additionally, a

significant majority acknowledges the need for literacy and numeracy resources (96%), health and nutrition information (94%), and market access and cooperative information (92%). These findings align with previous research indicating that access to varied information resources is crucial for informed decision-making in agriculture (Aina, 2007; Ajayi et al., 2023). However, there are areas where consensus is lacking. Only 64% of respondents see the need for mobile and digital libraries, with 38% expressing disagreement, suggesting potential barriers like technological literacy or infrastructure challenges (Richardson, 2016). Moreover, while 80% agree on the importance of affordable farming solutions, 20% do not, indicating economic constraints or scepticism about the provided solutions.

Table 2 indicates that language barriers are the most significant obstacle, with 94% of respondents acknowledging this issue. This highlights the critical need for libraries to provide resources in local languages to improve accessibility for farmers (IFLA, 2015). Financial constraints are the second major barrier, affecting 90% of respondents. This suggests that many farmers may struggle with the costs associated with accessing library services, underscoring the importance of affordable or free resources (Rao & Babu, 2021). Geographic isolation impacts 80% of respondents, indicating that the physical distance from libraries significantly hinders their ability to utilize these services.

A lack of awareness about the library's existence is another substantial barrier, reported by 82% of respondents. This highlights the necessity for effective awareness campaigns to inform farmers about available library resources (Harris & Dewdney, 2024). Illiteracy and low education levels are identified as barriers by 54% of respondents, though 46% disagree, indicating a diverse range of educational backgrounds among the population. Lastly, limited transportation is the least significant barrier, with 52% of respondents agreeing and 48% disagreeing, showing that transportation issues affect some farmers more than others, possibly due to varying levels of access to transportation options (Sturges & Neill, 2018).

Table 3 highlights unanimous agreement (100%) on the role of libraries as essential information hubs for agricultural information, emphasizing their critical function in underserved areas (IFLA, 2015). Training and education are also highly valued (96%), showcasing libraries' role in enhancing agricultural skills and community education (Tedd, 2015). Similarly, 96% agree on the importance of libraries providing health and safety information, reflecting their role in public health education (Gorman, 2015). While 80% view local language materials as important, there is some disagreement (20%), indicating varying needs (Rao & Babu, 2021). Access to digital resources is less agreed upon (52%), revealing mixed opinions on the necessity of digital access and ongoing debates about the digital divide (Cox & Green, 2021).

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the provision of library services to disadvantaged farmers in Paiko LGA, Niger State, focusing on their specific information needs, barriers to accessing library resources, and strategies for enhancing service effectiveness. The findings underscore the essential role of libraries as information hubs, particularly in providing basic agricultural education, literacy resources, and local language materials. However, significant barriers persist, including language issues, financial constraints, and geographic isolation, which impede farmers' full utilization of library services.

The research also highlights the need for targeted strategies to improve accessibility and relevance, such as practical demonstrations, language and literacy support, and comprehensive needs assessments. While there is strong support for these strategies, with the majority of respondents endorsing practical demonstrations and language support, there remains some variability in perceptions regarding public awareness campaigns and mobile library services. Overall, the study suggests that addressing these barriers and implementing effective strategies will significantly enhance the support libraries provide to farmers, ultimately contributing to improved agricultural outcomes and community development.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

- Enhance language and literacy support by providing materials in local languages and offering literacy programs tailored to farmers' needs and increase public awareness and outreach through targeted campaigns using local media, community events, and partnerships with agricultural organizations.
- Implement practical demonstrations and hands-on workshops to showcase agricultural techniques and technologies as well as develop mobile library services to reach farmers in remote and geographically isolated areas.
- Strengthen collaborations and partnerships with agricultural organizations, local governments, and community groups.
- Address financial and geographic barriers by seeking funding, improving transportation options, and investing in infrastructure.

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