

**ACCOMPLISHING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION THROUGH LIBRARY AND  
INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIA**

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***Abstract***

*This paper explored the diversity and inclusion initiatives in library and information services and their contributions to the management of Nigeria's diversity issues. Nigeria is a country that comprises of people with diverse age groups, diverse tribes, diverse ethnics groups and diverse cultures. How to ensure peaceful co-existence and unity among Nigeria's conglomeration of people has been a concern to all the governments of Nigeria. Libraries have played positive effects on this peaceful co-existence and unity by offering various services that showcase or encourage every cultural heritage, through the provision of; diverse library collections of different authors, diverse digital services, and information services to the disabled or physically challenged people in the communities amongst others. Diversity and inclusion initiatives in libraries are important because they facilitate a greater ability to understand and provide service to diverse communities of patrons, organisations that embrace diversity and inclusion are ultimately more successful because greater numbers of people are represented and they*

*ensure that they are no discriminations of any sort. Libraries aim to ensure the full representation of all of Nigeria's diverse populations in the provision of information resources and services that would meet their heterogeneous information needs. The paper also highlights some impediments to these services as insufficient funding, unskilled staff, and a host of others. The paper proffered some suggestions for the challenges identified; the government should increase the library's budget allocation, training of the staff and others. This paper is an opinion paper. The author reviewed hardcopies and online databases literature on diversity and inclusiveness of library services the process of writing this work.*

**Keywords:** Diversity, Inclusion, Library, Information services, Unity, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting. it could be in the workplace, school communities, and other social places. This can mean differences in race, ethnicity, age, gender, identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class. It can also be referred to as differences in physical ability, either physically challenged or not, veteran status, and whether or not you have children. (Heinz, 2024). Diversity is beneficial because it facilitates a greater ability to understand and provide service to diverse communities of patrons. Diversity and inclusion are interconnected concepts that refer to the variety of unique individuals that make up a group of people and the environment that allows them to work together as equally valued contributors. Workplaces that prioritise diversity and inclusion efforts have been statistically proven to be safer, happier and a more productive work environment. "Diversity" can also be defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. When we recognise, value, and embrace diversity, we are recognising, valuing, and embracing the uniqueness of each individual. (American Library Association Council [ALA], 2019).

Similarly, the Association of Library and Information Science Education's Diversity Taskforce characterised diversity as "the representation of a wide variety of backgrounds (including racial, cultural, linguistic, gender, religious,

international, socio-economic, sexual orientation, differently-abled, age among others) that people possess and is often used to address quantitative requirements/agendas/ goals” (Nigerian Association of Library and Information Science Educators 2013). also brought into the conversation the notion of inclusion “what happens to people once they are in an organisation, institution or social context.” Complementing diversity, and inclusion constituted full representation, participation, and empowerment; it also implied combating all types of discrimination (NALISE, 2013 and ALA (2016) through its Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion characterised inclusion as constituting “an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully; are valued for their distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives; have equal access to resources and opportunities; and can contribute fully to the organisation’s success”. Additionally, the ALA Task Force posited that some groups had been systemically disadvantaged in accessing both education and employment. These groups therefore remained organisationally and institutionally underrepresented or marginalised. Given this legacy, a commitment to equity ensured fair policies, practices, processes, and outcomes.

“Inclusion” the primary objective of a library is to provide the right information at the right format to its users ( Agboke, Soyoye and David- West 2024). This means an inclusive environment should be provided for every one to be treated fairly and respectfully in the library despite their physical disabilities Diversity, equity, and inclusion are often grouped together because they are interconnected and it is only in combination that their true impact emerges (Mckinsey and Company, 2022). As used in the library and information sciences context, diversity is defined as “inclusiveness with regard to differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, and ethnic, racial, or cultural background within a given population (Larsen, 2017).

Libraries are organised information resources managed for easy accessibility and utilisation by information users. Libraries are different in size and resources according to the type of people they serve. School libraries are found in primary and secondary schools, and academic libraries are

established in tertiary institutions like universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Public libraries are the libraries that are situated within a community to meet the information needs of such communities both old and young. While special libraries are found in private establishments. According to Ntui and Edam – Agbor (2015) a library is an organised collection of information resources made available to a defined community for reading, reference or borrowing. It is organised to provide physical or digital access to information resources such as books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, maps, prints, documents, microform, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, e-books, audiobooks, and other formats. Libraries differ in size from a few shelves of books to several million items. It may be a physical building or virtual or both for use and maintained by a public body, an institution, a corporation, or a private individual. Libraries today serve as dynamic community hubs. Where every information service is geared towards the needs of the host community either in academic libraries, school libraries for primary and secondary schools, public libraries meet the needs of both adults and children of various ages and challenged people in the community.

Nigeria is a country that is made up of different people, states, tribes, ethnic groups, different cultures. To ensure that every tribe and every ethnic group is represented and no discrimination of any kind, the federal government instituted a policy called 'Federal Character' to ensure the even distribution of all the available resources in Nigeria. For example, public education admission is done by quota system, 30% of less educationally disadvantaged people must be admitted. (Adeleye, Atewologu and Matanmi, 2014). Diversity is beneficial not only because it facilitates a greater ability to understand and provide service to diverse communities of patrons, but because organisations that embrace diversity are ultimately more successful. Libraries aim to ensure the full representation of all of Nigeria's diverse populations in the provision of information resources and services that would meet their heterogeneous information needs. According to ALA, (2023), libraries are ideal places to celebrate the diversity of a community or a nation. Inclusion sometimes means being able to rally around something that makes the library community special. Each community has unique qualities that deserve

celebrating; these qualities become opportunities to inspire everyone in the community. The future for the libraries is where they develop and sustain a culture that welcomes and includes everyone, and a Library in which all feel they belong, and all see the need to pursue and create knowledge. It is against this backdrop therefore, this paper examines the management of Nigeria's diversity and inclusion issues, the effects of libraries' services diversity and inclusion initiatives in the management of Nigeria's diversity, challenges encountered by the libraries in managing Nigeria's diversity and inclusion. It also proffers some solutions and recommendations to the challenges identified.

**Management of Nigeria's Diversity and Inclusion Issues** Managing Nigeria's diversity has been the focus of every succeeding government so that there can be peaceful co-existence among the various ethnic groups. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a population of about 230,842,743 (2023 est.) (CIA World Factbook, 2024). It is a federation of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, broadly grouped into six geopolitical zones (north-west, north-central, north-east, south-west, south-east, and south-south) and two regions (the north and the south). The political system is fashioned after that of the United States of America (USA), with a federal government at the centre and 36 federating states. There is also separation of powers between the executive (the Presidency) and the legislature (the Senate and the House of Representatives). Adeleye, Atewologu and Matanmi (2014). The diverse population of Nigeria is so complex that it has many different tribes, ethnicities, cultures, ages, and genders with these complexities, it is difficult to ensure a satisfactory inclusion of all. Onyejeli, (2010) reported that Nigeria provides an interesting context in which to explore the concepts of equality and workplace diversity, with its unusually high levels of diversity across ethnic/cultural, racial, religious, linguistic, age and socio-economic dimensions. Nigeria's people belong to 250–400 different ethno-linguistic groups, with three major ethnic groups. Nigerians belong to several different religions as well, with Islam and Christianity

accounting for approximately 50 and 40 percent of the population respectively. Islam is dominant in the northern region while Christianity is the major religion in the south; indigenous African religions are also commonly practiced around the country. In terms of age, 40.69 percent of the total population is in the 0–14 years bracket, 55.95 percent in the 15–64 range, and 3.6 percent are aged 65 and over. (CIA World Factbook, 2024).

As a multicultural country, Nigeria is overwhelmed by various issues that threaten its survival and its ongoing existence as a country. Even after decades of nationhood, diversity in language, tribe, religion, ethnicity and other social differences seems to have become a complicated problem for Nigeria. This has resulted in underdevelopment despite the country's enormous natural resources. Adeleye , Atewologun and Matanmi (2014) noted that the uneven socio-economic development poses an 'existential threat' to the somewhat divided country, and has brought to the fore the issue of managing diversity. At the national level, the slogan 'unity in diversity' has been popularised by successive governments for several decades in their quest to emphasised that diversity is positive for Nigeria and that there is an urgent need to foster inclusion in society and organisations. 'The Federal Character principle' was constituted to ensure the even distribution of the nation's resources and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of community, ethnicity, place of origin, gender, religion, or political opinion.

Since the civil war of the late 1960s, several attempts have been made to promote the spirit of 'unity in diversity', culminating in the establishment of the 'Federal Character Principle'. The principle was embodied in the 1979 constitution and was inscribed into the 1999 constitution which prescribed that a Federal Character Commission (FCC) be established to monitor and enforce compliance with the principle (Overseas Development Institute, 2006, p. 3 in Adeleye, Atewologu and Matanmi (2014). The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no

predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.

Eniekebi, (2021) asserted that as the nation seeks ways out of the predicament, many alternatives have been offered. Bello (2012) claims that the appropriate use of the 'Federal Character Principle' will guarantee that the various ethnic groups at the core of authority are represented fairly and equitably, giving each group a feeling of belonging and potentially quash disputes. Falade and Falade (2013), suggest transforming attitudes through social mobilization and adopting and imbibing key principles of unity and trust to achieve national integration. Sifawa and Kurah (2016), believe that education is a true instrument for fostering unity and peaceful coexistence in the nation, particularly the inclusion of history in the curricula at all stages of schooling. The Federal Character Principle was extended to public education (secondary, tertiary, and higher educational institutions established by the federal government) to address the educational inequalities among the states and regions. In most institutions, at least 30 percent of admissions are based on quotas, with candidates from states recognised as 'educationally disadvantaged' having considerably lower entrance scores or 'cut-off marks. Each state is assigned cut-off marks based on the percentile distribution scores of its indigenes in the nationwide entrance examinations.

Nigeria exhibits unusually high levels of diversity, as indicated in the global diversity survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), USA, and the Economist Intelligence Unit (SHRM, 2009). People with disability or physically challenged people are parts of Nigeria's citizens and they should be given equal treatment like every other Nigerians. According to Lang and Upah, (2008), an estimated 19 million people are living with disabilities in Nigeria, and they are one of the poorest and most socially excluded groups in the country. In the last six years or so, a right-based agenda has started emerging as several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international developmental agencies collaborated with the major disabled people's organizations – the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAWPD) and the Association for Comprehensive

Empowerment of Nigerians with Disabilities (ASCEND) – to advocate for equal treatment of people living with disabilities. (Adeleye, Atewologun and Matanmi 2014).

Managing Nigeria's diversity is a crucial issue that must be put into consideration by any organisation in Nigeria to ensure that no one is marginalised based on, origin, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, physically challenged, and sociolinguistics to maintain her peaceful co-existence.

### **Library and Information Services Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives in the Management of Nigeria's Diversity**

Libraries diversity initiatives helps to accomplished unity in the Nigeria's diversity through the provision of information services for all without background, ages, gender, origin, ethnic and language discrimination. Library and information services are key players in providing unhindered access to essential resources for economic and cultural growth of an individual and a nation. In doing so, they contribute effectively to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom, safeguarding democratic values and universal civil rights. They encourage social inclusion, by striving to serve all those in their user communities regardless of age, gender, economic or employment status, literacy or technical skills, cultural or ethnic origin, Agboke, (2019). ALA council core value, (2024) agrees that free access provides opportunities for everyone in the community to obtain library resources and services with minimal disruption. Library workers create systems that ensure members of their community can freely access the information they need for learning, growth, and empowerment regardless of technology, format, or delivery methods. Libraries are organised information resources managed for easy accessibility and utilisation of information users. Libraries are different in size and resources according to the type of people they serve. School libraries are found in primary and secondary schools, and academic libraries are established in tertiary institutions like Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education, Public libraries are the libraries that are situated within a community to meet the information needs of such communities both old and young. While special libraries are found in private



establishments. The International Federation of Library Association's IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto recognizes that cultural and linguistic diversity is the common heritage of mankind and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all. Therefore, libraries of all types should reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity at the international, national, and local levels, and thus work for cross-cultural dialogue and active citizenship." (<http://www.ifla.org/node/8976>). Libraries ensure that people of different origin, social backgrounds, gender, ethnic groups are brought together by rendering information services that unified them.

In order to attain diversity and inclusivity in our communities, the following are the diverse services initiatives rendered by the libraries in support of Nigeria's unity in diversity:

- **Provision of Diverse Culturally Resources Initiatives:** Nigeria is rich in cultures. Libraries store some of these rich cultural heritage resources for information, recreational and educational purposes. Libraries know the importance of representing their collections' in rich diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and perspectives. This involves actively seeking out materials authored by individuals from various cultural backgrounds and communities. By offering books, articles, films, and other resources that reflect diverse experiences. This includes acquiring materials in various languages, offering programming and events that celebrate different cultures and religions, and providing access to resources that support the spiritual and cultural needs of library users. By promoting cultural and religious pluralism, libraries help to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures and religions. Libraries also allows students to explore different cultures, traditions, and worldviews. Moreover, exposure to culturally diverse materials fosters empathy, understanding, and appreciation for the Nigeria's cultural diversity this create unity in diversity of culture
- **Provision of Diverse Library Collections and Provision of an Environment that is free of Bias and Discriminations Initiatives :**

Libraries provides diverse collections of information resources to ensure equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Diverse library collections are collections that provide good representation of the topics, perspectives, authors, characters, and narratives associated with underrepresented or marginalised groups. The focus on adequacy of representation is really more about equity than diversity, and the literature of library and information science does not always distinguish among the three components of DEI – diversity, equity, and inclusion (Lawrence, 2020, 2021). Diverse library collections are important because, they can facilitate the kind of discussion and understanding that informs and promotes social inclusion. Libraries go beyond traditional print materials to offer a variety of formats, including audiobooks, e-books, digital databases, and multimedia resources. For instance, audiobooks cater for auditory learners, while digital resources provide flexibility and convenience for those who prefer accessing information online. Moreover, libraries ensure that materials are available in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, and translated languages to accommodate individuals with visual or linguistic impairments. This commitment to diverse formats ensures that all citizens can engage with information effectively, regardless of their learning preferences or abilities. When a library's collections reflect the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of its patrons, it can make those patrons feel seen, valued, and represented. This can lead to a more positive and inclusive experience for patrons who may have previously felt marginalised or underrepresented. In addition to representation and equity, libraries also actively work towards creating an inclusive environment where all individuals feel welcome and respected. This means actively promoting an environment that is free from discrimination and bias, as well as providing training and education for staff on how to interact with and serve diverse populations. Collections diversity will mean little to patrons who are members of minority groups who do not feel welcome in that space. (Hepler and Horalek, 2023).

- Provision of Diverse Digital Services Initiatives:** Libraries make provision for diverse digital resources and services available to Nigerians in this era where digital literacy is increasingly essential. Libraries provides free access to computer and internet services to ensure equitable access to technology and by providing free access to computers and internet services, libraries bridge the digital divide, particularly for individuals who may not have access to such resources at home due to financial constraints. This promotes the unity of Nigerian citizens. Public access computers in libraries allows users to conduct research, access online educational materials, complete assignments, and communicate with peers and instructors. Moreover, libraries often provide essential software programs and applications on these computers, enhancing students' ability to engage with information and develop essential digital skills. By offering public access to computers, libraries promote digital inclusion and provide equal opportunities for learning and academic success to all community members. (Ashikuzzaman, 2024). National Digital Inclusion Alliance in Frank, et al., (2021) posited that digital services inclusion encompasses the activities required to ensure the access and use of ICTs by all and sundry (individuals and communities). It is targeted towards the attainment of digital equality, which is the state where everyone has access and possesses the capacity to fully utilise Information and Communication Technologies. (ICTs) for socioeconomic gains. The goal of digital inclusion is to ensure that no one is left out in the access and use of ICTs.
- Provision of Services to the Physically Challenged People or Disability Initiatives:** Libraries in Nigeria empower users with disabilities to overcome barriers and participate fully in academic activities by providing assistive technologies, libraries recognise the importance of technology in facilitating access to individuals with disabilities. To this end, they invest in assistive technologies such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and magnification tools. These tools enable library users with visual impairments to access and navigate information

independently. For example, screen readers convert text into speech, allowing visually impaired individuals to listen to the content of a webpage or document. Similarly, text-to-speech software reads aloud text-based materials, while magnification tools enlarge text and images for individuals with low vision. The provision of these service has contributed to the literacy, enlightenment of physically impaired citizens and making them useful to themselves and the society also, discouraged social discrimination of the physically challenged citizens.

- **Provision of Diverse Library Outreach Programs Initiatives:** Libraries extend their services beyond their physical walls through proactive outreach programs targeting underserved communities. By forging partnerships with schools, community centers, and other organisations, libraries ensure that all individuals can access information resources and support services regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location. Libraries provides services to the grassroots through outreach programs which include bookmobile services, where libraries directly bring books and educational materials to communities lacking traditional library facilities. Additionally, libraries may collaborate with local schools to provide orientation sessions or literacy programs for students and educators. By engaging with underserved communities and addressing their unique needs, libraries play a vital role in promoting equity and inclusion, ensuring that everyone can benefit from the wealth of knowledge and resources available through the library. According to Eniekebi, (2021) other services offered by Nigerian' libraries to support the unity in diversity include organising programmes in recognition of various national and international remarkable events such as World Literacy Day, World Book Day, World Poetry Day, National Democracy Day, Nigerian Independency Day etc. These programmes in one way or the other inculcate the spirit of unity in the minds of children at young stage.

### **Challenges Encountered by Libraries in the Provision of Diverse Services in**

## Nigeria

- **Inadequate Funding:** One of the major problems facing Libraries in Nigeria is poor funding. The budget allotted for Libraries; be it academic, school and public are considerably low to acquire the needed resource of the libraries. Inadequate funding is a big barrier for Librarians and information Professionals in Nigeria, when it comes to Library and information services. Nigerian Libraries are suffering from a severe financial crisis as a result of dwindling funding and competition from other information service providers.
- **Untrained Library Staff and Unskilled Library Users:** Some library staff are not ICT compliant. They do not have skills in managing the electronic resources and are not willing to adapt to what is trending in the field of Librarianship. Even some of the library users are not digital literate.
- **Inadequate Power Supply:** Nigeria libraries are faced with epileptic power supply and most electronic facilities rely on power supply to function. This becomes a problem and affects the use of these libraries.
- **Poor Internet connectivity/ High Cost of Data Subscribing:** Poor internet connectivity and high cost of subscribing to data are impediments to libraries services in Nigeria. In most of the local communities in Nigeria, service providers' network is very poor and most libraries cannot afford the annual data subscriptions. This has prevented adequate utilisation of digital facilities in the libraries.
- **Poor Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure has been a challenge to libraries in Nigeria. Most of the public library building facilities in local communities are old and dilapidated.

## Conclusion

Libraries diversity initiatives and inclusion recognise the uniqueness of people's race, gender, ethnics, social economic background and cultures.

Nigeria is a country that is made up of different people, states, tribes, ethnic groups and different cultures. To accomplish unity in diversity has been the focus of every existing government. Library and Information services has contributed immensely to the accomplishment of this unity through the provision of information resources and services to the various ethnic groups, genders and different age groups. This paper enumerates the services rendered by library in accomplishing Nigeria's unity in diversity as: provision of diverse cultural resources initiatives, provision of diverse library collections, provision of an environment that is free of bias and discriminations initiatives; provision of services to the physically challenged people or disability initiatives amongst others

### **The Way Forward**

The following are the way forward proffered to enhance the development of libraries in Nigeria for unity in diversity.

1. Government should increase Libraries financial allocations to ensure effective running of the libraries in Nigeria.
2. Libraries should organise various workshops and ICT training for their staff where they would be trained and re- trained.
3. Library users must have affordable access to the Internet in order to eliminate the digital divide. Governments must support universal access to ICT infrastructures, develop digital literacy and skills, and increase the relevance and understanding of the advantages of using the internet.
4. Library Management should make proper arrangement to provide complementary public power supply. Solar power technology can

- be explored as an alternative.
5. Government should make provision for new libraries buildings to replace the old building facilities and they should be equipped with the new and trending technological facilities.

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