

UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems (IRMS) for community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study, which adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 248 professional and para-professional librarians in public libraries across the five states of South-East Nigeria, and a census approach was adopted. Data were collected using the researcher-developed Information Resources Management Systems Utilization for Community Engagement Questionnaire (IRMSUCEQ), validated by experts in Library and Information Science and Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument had an overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Findings revealed that Integrated Library Systems (75.4%), Online Public Access Catalogues (65.7%), and electronic databases (64.5%) were the most widely utilized IRMS. Overall utilization for community engagement was high ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.92$). Major challenges included inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, insufficient staff training, weak administrative support, low digital literacy among users, and poor maintenance culture (Grand Mean = 2.98, $SD = 0.82$). Strategies identified for improving utilization were increased funding, staff capacity building, enhanced ICT infrastructure, stable electricity supply, stronger policy support, regular system maintenance, and public awareness programmes (Grand Mean = 3.26, $SD = 0.77$). The study concluded that sustained institutional support, improved infrastructure, and continuous capacity building are essential for maximizing the effectiveness of IRMS in promoting community engagement in public libraries.

Keywords: Information Resources Management Systems, public libraries, community engagement, information management, digital library services, South-East Nigeria.

Introduction

Public libraries are widely recognized as essential social institutions established to provide equitable access to information, support literacy development, promote lifelong learning, and strengthen community participation. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2022), public libraries function as local gateways to knowledge by ensuring unrestricted access to information resources for all categories of users, irrespective of socio-economic background. Beyond their traditional roles, public libraries also implement various community engagement programmes such as literacy campaigns, digital skills training, outreach services, cultural events, and information awareness initiatives, all of which are designed to foster inclusion and active participation. Community engagement is very necessary because it ensures that library services remain relevant, responsive, and aligned with the evolving needs of the population, thereby strengthening social cohesion and informed citizenship. As information needs become increasingly complex and technology-driven, public libraries are under growing pressure to adopt innovative systems capable of improving information service delivery and enhancing their engagement with users.

The transformation of the global information environment through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has significantly altered the mechanisms of information creation, organization, storage, retrieval, and dissemination. This shift has made the management of information resources more sophisticated and increasingly dependent on integrated technological systems. Information Resources Management Systems (IRMS) have therefore emerged as critical infrastructures for managing the entire information lifecycle in libraries. Rowley (2007) defines information resource management as the systematic coordination of information resources, technologies, and managerial processes to ensure efficient acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information for institutional effectiveness. In the context of public libraries, Information Resources Management Systems refer to the technological and organizational frameworks used for managing library resources, including integrated library systems, online public access catalogues (OPACs), electronic databases, institutional repositories, digital archives, and metadata management systems. These systems have the potential to facilitate community engagement by enabling wider access to information, supporting virtual interactions, and enhancing the delivery of community-oriented programmes.

Operationally, within this study, Information Resources Management Systems are conceived as the structured digital and administrative systems currently utilized by public libraries for acquiring, organizing, storing, retrieving, and disseminating information resources to support service delivery and community-oriented

programmes. This operationalization emphasizes four measurable dimensions: the systems currently in use, the extent of their utilization, the barriers affecting their utilization, and strategies for enhancing their effectiveness. Understanding the extent of utilization is particularly important because the mere availability of systems does not guarantee their effective contribution to community engagement.

The concept of community engagement has gained increasing relevance in library discourse because of its implications for service responsiveness, social inclusion, and user-centered programming. Community engagement refers to the active process through which institutions establish meaningful interactions, collaborations, and participatory relationships with members of their communities to address shared needs and improve service outcomes. Kranich (2018) conceptualizes community engagement in libraries as the process of building collaborative relationships with community members through information access, educational programmes, outreach activities, and participatory service delivery. In public libraries, community engagement reflects the degree to which users participate in library services, benefit from information programmes, and interact with the institution in ways that strengthen knowledge access and community development. Effective engagement is essential because it ensures that libraries remain dynamic spaces that respond to societal needs while promoting inclusive access to knowledge. Operationally, community engagement in this study refers to the extent to which public library users access, participate in, and benefit from library information services, outreach programmes, and technology-enabled resource

platforms facilitated through Information Resources Management Systems. This operational perspective situates community engagement as an outcome of effective information resource management and service accessibility, highlighting how well-utilized systems can enhance participation, improve service delivery, and strengthen the relationship between libraries and their communities.

The growing adoption of Information Resources Management Systems in libraries is consistent with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which explains how organizations adopt innovations to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance in response to changing environmental demands (Rogers, 2003). Within public libraries, the adoption and utilization of IRMS represent strategic institutional responses to the increasing digitization of information and evolving user expectations. Through these systems, libraries can improve information accessibility, facilitate real-time interaction, expand digital outreach, and strengthen their capacity for community-centered service delivery, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of community engagement programmes.

Globally, the integration of Information Resources Management Systems has transformed public library operations by improving resource visibility, enhancing retrieval efficiency, expanding service accessibility, and supporting broader community participation. Digital catalogues, virtual reference systems, e-lending services, and online community information platforms have redefined the ways libraries engage users and deliver services (Bertot et al., 2015). These systems have strengthened institutional efficiency and increased opportunities for inclusive participation by enabling libraries to

reach wider audiences and support diverse community needs. However, the benefits of IRMS remain unevenly distributed, particularly in developing countries where infrastructural and institutional limitations constrain effective implementation and utilization.

In Nigeria, public libraries continue to serve as important centers for information dissemination, literacy promotion, and educational support. However, evidence suggests that many public libraries still struggle with poor automation, weak digital infrastructures, inadequate professional training, unstable electricity supply, and insufficient funding for information systems development (Aina, 2004; Igbinovia, & Adetimirin, 2023). In South-East Nigeria, these challenges may significantly affect the ability of public libraries to effectively utilize Information Resources Management Systems for community-centered services. Consequently, many public libraries may be unable to optimize digital platforms for information access, user participation, outreach activities, and service responsiveness, thereby weakening their relevance in an increasingly digital information society and limiting the effectiveness of their community engagement programmes.

This situation presents a serious and pressing problem that requires systematic investigation. Despite the recognized importance of IRMS in enhancing library services, there is growing concern that public libraries in South-East Nigeria may possess limited or underutilized systems that fail to translate into meaningful community engagement. The problem is not merely the presence or absence of technology, but the ineffective

utilization of available systems, the persistence of operational barriers, and the lack of strategic frameworks for maximizing their potential. If these issues remain unexamined, public libraries risk becoming increasingly disconnected from the communities they are meant to serve, leading to declining patronage, reduced public trust, and diminished institutional relevance.

Furthermore, ignoring this problem could have far-reaching consequences. Ineffective utilization of IRMS may widen the digital divide, particularly for underserved populations who rely heavily on public libraries for access to information and digital resources. It may also hinder literacy development, limit access to educational opportunities, and weaken community participation in knowledge-based activities. At a broader level, failure to address these challenges could undermine national and regional development efforts that depend on informed and engaged citizenry. Therefore, there is an urgent need to critically examine how Information Resources Management Systems are being utilized in public libraries, determine the extent of their utilization, understand how such utilization can enhance community engagement, identify the barriers limiting their effectiveness, and propose actionable strategies for improvement.

Although extant studies have extensively examined library automation, ICT adoption, and digital service delivery in academic and special libraries, there remains a notable paucity of empirical studies specifically focusing on the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems as strategic mechanisms for driving community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria. More critically, existing

studies have largely concentrated on the availability of digital systems or general automation practices, with limited attention to how these systems are actively utilized, the operational barriers constraining their effectiveness, and the practical strategies required to optimize them for community-centered service delivery. This constitutes a critical knowledge gap because the effectiveness of public libraries in contemporary society increasingly depends not merely on the presence of information systems, but on the extent to which such systems are functionally deployed to enhance community access, participation, and engagement.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems for community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria, with a view to identifying the systems currently in use, determining the extent of their utilization, examining how such utilization can facilitate community engagement, identifying the challenges affecting their effective deployment, and ascertaining strategies for enhancing their contribution to community engagement.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems for community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. assess the information resources management systems currently in use in public libraries in South-East Nigeria.

2. determine the extent to which public libraries utilize information resources management systems in promoting community engagement in South-East Nigeria.
3. identify the challenges affecting the utilization of information resources management systems in public libraries in South-East Nigeria.
4. ascertain strategies for enhancing the utilization of information resources management systems for improved community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria.

Literature Review

Empirical evidence has consistently shown that the integration and utilization of information resource management systems significantly improve library service delivery, accessibility, and user engagement. Jatto and Tunmibi (2024) observed that institutional support, technological infrastructure, and staff competence are critical determinants of effective system utilization in library environments. According to the study, when these factors are adequately provided, libraries tend to achieve greater efficiency in resource organization, retrieval, and dissemination, thereby improving the overall quality of service delivery.

Further empirical findings indicate that the presence of digital information systems alone does not necessarily translate into effective service delivery. Subaveerapandiyan et al. (2022) reported that many libraries experience underutilization of available systems due to inadequate professional competencies,

weak administrative support, and infrastructural limitations. Their findings suggest that the effectiveness of information resource management systems depends not only on their availability but also on the extent to which they are actively and strategically utilized to support library functions and user needs.

Studies on digital inclusion in public libraries have also demonstrated that technology-driven information systems improve access to digital resources, increase user participation, and strengthen outreach services. Bertot et al. (2015) found that libraries with well-developed digital infrastructures recorded higher levels of public interaction and broader community participation. This indicates that effective information resource management systems can significantly enhance the community-centered functions of public libraries. In addition, recent empirical evidence highlights that structured digital platforms and interactive information systems improve users' learning experiences, facilitate information-sharing behaviors, and strengthen institutional relevance in modern library settings. Paul et al. (2024) emphasized that the adoption of innovative information management systems plays a strategic role in sustaining library-user relationships and increasing public participation in library programmes. A critical synthesis of these findings shows that information resource management systems contribute significantly to operational efficiency, service accessibility, and user participation. However, existing empirical evidence is largely concentrated in academic library settings and broader digital service environments, with limited specific attention to public libraries. More importantly, while previous

studies have established the relevance of digital systems in enhancing access and participation, they have paid insufficient attention to the specific systems currently utilized in public libraries, the extent of their utilization for community-centered service delivery, the operational challenges affecting their effectiveness, and the practical strategies required for optimizing them.

This gap is particularly evident in South-East Nigeria, where public libraries operate within unique infrastructural, administrative, and socio-technological realities. The absence of context-specific empirical evidence on how Information Resources Management Systems are being utilized to drive community engagement creates a significant knowledge gap. It is this gap that the present study seeks to fill by examining the systems currently in use, determining the extent of their utilization in promoting community engagement, identifying the challenges affecting their utilization, and ascertaining strategies for enhancing their effectiveness in public libraries in South-East Nigeria.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the utilization of IRMS for community engagement in public libraries. The study was conducted in South-East Nigeria, comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States. The region was selected because it has an established network of public libraries serving diverse communities and implementing varying levels of information and communication technology, making it suitable for investigating IRMS utilization. The

population comprised all 248 professional and para-professional librarians in public libraries across the five states, based on official records obtained from the respective State Library Boards. A census approach was adopted because of the manageable population size.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Information Resources Management Systems Utilization for Community Engagement Questionnaire (IRMSUCEQ). The questionnaire comprised four clusters aligned with the study objectives. Cluster 1 was a checklist of IRMS currently utilized, coded as Utilized (1) and Not Utilized (0). Cluster 2 measured the extent of IRMS utilization using a four-point scale: Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2), and Very Low Extent (1). Clusters 3 and 4 assessed the challenges affecting IRMS utilization and strategies for enhancing its effectiveness using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

The instrument was validated by one expert in Library and Information Science and two experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A pilot study involving 30 librarians from public libraries in South-South Nigeria established the reliability of Clusters 2, 3, and 4 using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.85, 0.79, and 0.88, respectively, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.84. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of two trained research assistants. All 248 questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a 100% response rate. Data were analyzed using

frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Frequencies and percentages were used to answer Research Question 1, while mean and standard deviation were used to answer Research Questions 2–4. For Research Question 2, mean ratings were interpreted as follows: 3.50–4.00 = Very High Extent; 2.50–3.49 = High Extent; 1.50–2.49 = Low Extent; and 0.50–1.49 = Very Low Extent. For Research Questions 3 and 4, a criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted; mean scores ≥ 2.50 indicated agreement, whereas mean scores < 2.50 indicated disagreement.

Results

Research Questions One: What are the Information Resources Management Systems currently in use in public libraries in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Information Resources Management Systems Currently Utilized in Public Libraries in South-East Nigeria (N = 248)

S/N	Information Resources Management Systems	Utilized (%)	f Not Utilized (%)
1	Integrated Library Systems (ILS)	187 (75.4)	61 (24.6)
2	Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	163 (65.7)	85 (34.3)
3	Electronic Databases	160 (64.5)	88 (35.5)
4	Institutional Repositories	109 (44.0)	139 (56.0)
5	Digital Archives	117 (47.2)	131 (52.8)
6	Metadata Management Systems	126 (50.8)	122 (49.2)
7	Resource Sharing Platforms	87 (35.1)	161 (64.9)

Table 1 shows the Information Resources Management Systems currently utilized in public libraries in South-East Nigeria. The findings indicate that Integrated Library Systems (75.4%), Online Public Access Catalogue (65.7%), and Electronic Databases (64.5%) were the most widely utilized systems. In contrast, Resource Sharing

Platforms (35.1%) recorded the lowest level of utilization, while Institutional Repositories and Digital Archives were utilized by fewer than half of the respondents. Overall, the findings suggest that public libraries rely more on core library management and information retrieval systems than on collaborative and digital preservation platforms.

Research Questions Two: To what extent do public libraries utilize Information Resources Management Systems in promoting community engagement in South-East Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent to which Public Libraries Utilize Information Resources Management Systems in Promoting Community Engagement (N = 248)

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	IRMS improve access to information resources.	2.99	0.915	High Extent
2	IRMS support community outreach programmes.	2.99	0.918	High Extent
3	IRMS facilitate information literacy programmes.	2.92	0.892	High Extent
4	IRMS improve communication between librarians and users.	2.98	0.952	High Extent
5	IRMS support dissemination of community information.	3.01	0.948	High Extent
6	IRMS facilitate virtual library services.	2.95	0.914	High Extent
7	IRMS improve user participation in library programmes.	2.96	0.932	High Extent
8	IRMS strengthen access to digital learning resources.	2.94	0.902	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.97	0.92	High Extent

Table 2 shows that public libraries in South-East Nigeria utilize Information Resources Management Systems (IRMS) to a high extent in promoting community engagement (Grand Mean = 2.97, SD = 0.92). The highest-rated areas of utilization were supporting the dissemination of community information (M = 3.01, SD = 0.95), improving access to information resources (M = 2.99, SD = 0.92), and supporting

community outreach programmes ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.92$). Overall, the findings indicate that IRMS play a significant role in facilitating community engagement in public libraries.

Research Questions Three: What challenges affect the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems in public libraries in South-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Challenges Affecting the Utilization of Information Resources Management Systems in Public Libraries (N = 248)

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate funding affects the utilization of IRMS.	2.96	0.841	Agree
2	Poor ICT infrastructure limits effective use of IRMS.	2.96	0.801	Agree
3	Unstable electricity supply affects IRMS operations.	2.95	0.801	Agree
4	Insufficient staff training affects IRMS utilization.	3.05	0.798	Agree
5	Weak administrative support limits IRMS effectiveness.	2.97	0.860	Agree
6	Low digital literacy among users affects IRMS utilization.	3.01	0.834	Agree
7	Poor maintenance culture affects IRMS sustainability.	2.98	0.807	Agree
Grand Mean		2.98	0.82	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean score of 2.50 and above = Agree; Mean score below 2.50 = Disagree.

Table 3 shows that respondents agreed that several factors affect the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems (IRMS) in public libraries in South-East Nigeria (Grand Mean = 2.98, $SD = 0.82$). The major challenges identified were insufficient staff training ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.80$), low digital literacy among users ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.83$), and poor maintenance culture ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.81$). Overall, the findings indicate that human capacity and institutional factors constitute the major constraints to the effective utilization of IRMS in public libraries.

Research Questions Four: What strategies can enhance the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems for improved community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Strategies for Enhancing the Utilization of Information Resources Management Systems in Public Libraries (N = 248)

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Increased funding will improve IRMS utilization.	3.29	0.778	Agree
2	Regular staff training will enhance IRMS effectiveness.	3.28	0.790	Agree
3	Improved ICT infrastructure will strengthen IRMS functionality.	3.19	0.807	Agree
4	Stable electricity supply will improve IRMS operations.	3.30	0.736	Agree
5	Strong policy support will improve IRMS implementation.	3.25	0.805	Agree
6	Regular system maintenance will improve IRMS sustainability.	3.25	0.742	Agree
7	Public awareness programmes will improve community engagement.	3.29	0.765	Agree
Grand Mean		3.26	0.77	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean score of 2.50 and above = Agree; Mean score below 2.50 = Disagree.

Table 4 shows that respondents agreed on the strategies for enhancing the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems (IRMS) in public libraries in South-East Nigeria (Grand Mean = 3.26, SD = 0.77). The highest-rated strategies were stable electricity supply (M = 3.30, SD = 0.74), increased funding (M = 3.29, SD = 0.78), and public awareness programmes (M = 3.29, SD = 0.77). Overall, the findings indicate that improving infrastructure, funding, and public awareness are critical to enhancing the effective utilization of IRMS for community engagement.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that public libraries in South-East Nigeria currently utilize various Information Resources Management Systems such as Integrated Library Systems (ILS), Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs), electronic databases, metadata management systems, institutional repositories, digital archives, and resource-sharing platforms, although the level of utilization varied across the systems. This finding agrees with Rowley (2007), who emphasized that structured information systems are fundamental for effective information organization, storage, and retrieval. It also aligns with Bertot et al. (2015), who found that digital infrastructures have become central to modern library service delivery and access enhancement. Similarly, Jatto and Tunmibi (2024) reported that integrated library systems have become increasingly essential in improving operational efficiency in libraries. The implication is that public libraries in South-East Nigeria are progressively adopting and utilizing technological systems for effective information management, although the utilization of more advanced collaborative systems remains relatively low.

The study further found that the extent to which Information Resources Management Systems are utilized for promoting community engagement in public libraries was high. This finding is consistent with Bertot et al. (2015), who found that digital infrastructures significantly improve public participation and broaden access to library services. Kranich (2005) also observed that digital information systems strengthen civic participation by facilitating broader access to information and increasing community involvement in library programmes. In addition, Tunmibi (2024)

noted that effective system utilization improves responsiveness and service accessibility, thereby strengthening user engagement. This suggests that the utilization of IRMS has become an important mechanism for promoting community-centered library services.

The findings also revealed that inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, insufficient staff training, weak administrative support, and low digital literacy among users were major challenges affecting the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems in public libraries. This finding corroborates Subaveerapandiyan et al. (2022), who found that technological limitations, weak professional capacity, and poor institutional support hinder effective electronic resource management. Ocholla (2009) similarly reported that infrastructural deficits and inadequate digital competencies remain major barriers to effective information systems management in African libraries. Jatto and Tunmibi (2024) further established that organizational support and technological readiness significantly determine the success of library systems utilization. These findings validate the present study by showing that structural and institutional barriers remain persistent obstacles to effective IRMS utilization.

Finally, the study found that increased funding, staff capacity building, improved ICT infrastructure, regular system maintenance, stronger policy support, and public awareness initiatives were effective strategies for enhancing the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems for improved community engagement. This finding agrees with Subaveerapandiyan et al. (2022), who emphasized the

importance of continuous professional development and administrative support for effective resource management. Ocholla (2009) also highlighted the importance of strengthening technological infrastructure and institutional commitment in improving information systems management in African libraries. Bertot et al. (2015) further stressed that libraries that invest in digital inclusion strategies and infrastructure demonstrate stronger service efficiency and broader user participation. This implies that strengthening institutional support mechanisms remains fundamental to maximizing the effectiveness of Information Resources Management Systems for community-centered service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Public library authorities and government agencies should provide adequate funding for the acquisition, maintenance, and upgrading of Information Resources Management Systems to improve service efficiency and community engagement.
2. Public libraries should strengthen ICT infrastructure, including internet connectivity and alternative power supply systems, to ensure the effective utilization and sustainability of Information Resources Management Systems.
3. Continuous training and capacity-building programmes should be organized for librarians to improve their technological competencies and enhance their ability to effectively utilize Information Resources Management Systems.

4. Public library management should develop and implement strategic policies that support the effective utilization of Information Resources Management Systems for community-centered services.
5. Awareness programmes and digital literacy initiatives should be organized for library users to improve their ability to access and utilize technology-driven information services and participate more actively in library programmes.
6. Public libraries should establish regular maintenance schedules for Information Resources Management Systems to ensure their sustainability and long-term effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study examined the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems for community engagement in public libraries in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that public libraries utilize various Information Resources Management Systems, although the level of utilization varies across systems. The study further showed that the extent of utilization of these systems for community engagement was generally high, indicating their important role in improving access to information, supporting outreach services, facilitating information literacy programmes, and strengthening communication with users. However, major challenges such as inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, insufficient staff training, weak administrative support, low digital literacy among users, and poor maintenance culture were identified as factors limiting effective utilization. The study

also established that increased funding, improved infrastructure, staff capacity building, policy support, regular system maintenance, and public awareness initiatives are critical for enhancing the utilization of Information Resources Management Systems. The study concludes that although public libraries in South-East Nigeria have made considerable progress in utilizing Information Resources Management Systems, sustained institutional support and strategic interventions remain necessary to optimize their effectiveness for community-centered service delivery.

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