


Chapter 21


Promoting Library Services in a Digital Environment in Zimbabwe

Blessing Chiparausha

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0583-6945>

Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

Josiline Phiri Chigwada

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0964-3582>

Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

This chapter documents the strategies that are employed by librarians in promoting library and information services in Zimbabwe. The study also sought to ascertain the perceptions of librarians towards promoting library service in Zimbabwe in a digital environment and assess the challenges faced by librarians when promoting library and information services in Zimbabwe in a digital environment. A study was done, and the participants were drawn from academics, the public, schools, and special libraries. An online questionnaire was posted on Survey Monkey and librarians were invited to participate from the Zimbabwe Library Association social media platforms. Data was analysed thematically using the objectives of the study. It was discovered that despite facing a number of challenges when promoting library and information services, participants were using various strategies to promote their services. The authors recommend continuing professional development of librarians to effectively deliver their services in a digital environment.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter demonstrates how library professionals in Zimbabwe are promoting library and information services in a digital environment. The digital age has a lot of opportunities for an individual to access information and entertainment. In view of this, librarians have to find innovative ways of justifying

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their existence and promote their services effectively in order to remain relevant in the ever-changing technological environment. This is particularly important considering that individuals can easily access information and get entertained on the Internet using search engines and social media. Despite such a scenario, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2013) underscores the importance of libraries in building a culture. Therefore, librarians should justify their existence and provide services that entice library users to continue using library products and services.

BACKGROUND

Reading comes in two ways: it can be for a purpose or for leisure. Reading for a purpose relates well to the utilitarian model. Utilitarianism is premised on the notion that an individual takes an action with the hope of ultimately benefiting thereafter; actions that result in pain or loss are avoided (Cavalier, 2014; Mill, 1863). Based on this theory, it implies that individuals are motivated to read because they wanted to achieve something. Typical examples of reading that falls within utilitarianism include reading for examinations and reading to carry out a task. Leisure reading is self-directed reading for personal and social purposes; it is also known as recreational reading, pleasure reading or independent reading (International Reading Association, 2014). Leisure reading can take place anywhere such as at school, at home or in the library. Fiction, nonfiction, picture books, e-books, magazines, social media, websites, newspapers, comic books, graphic novels, etc. can be read for leisure (International Reading Association 2014). Leisure reading which is intrinsically and socially motivated and a pleasure to the reader is highly dependent on the environment; families and teachers should support leisure reading by providing students with reading materials and freeing up time for reading. According to the International Reading Association (2014) designating school leisure reading times through initiatives such as sustained silent reading (SSR), drop everything and read (DEAR), love to read (LTR) and providing opportunities with everyday reading (POWER) are very important as they promote leisure reading. Zimbabwean citizens' reading culture, just like that of any country, is on the spotlight on whether it is driven by utilitarianism or socially motivated as propounded in the two theories just described here.

IFLA (2017) notes that: "promoting reading and literacy as an essential requirement for active participation in society, through access to information in any format". Farmer and Stricevic (2011) and IFLA (2015) acknowledge that several stakeholders who include library staff, potential readers, teachers, publishers, media, cultural and educational groups, government representatives and other community members are involved in promoting reading and literacy. Promoting library and information services is therefore important considering the waning reading culture in the country (Mushava, 2015). There is competition for the attention of the citizen who has social media, television, social life, work, family life, education, etc. before them. Finding time to attend to all these may be difficult or impossible. As a result of this, library and information services are often experiencing low usage. Parents, teachers and library users themselves have an important role to play to ensure that the catch them young concept is implemented.

Upon attaining majority rule in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe embarked on a number of programmes to empower the majority. One of the programmes was improving education and literacy for all citizens. In 1983, functional literacy of Zimbabwe's adult population stood at 40% (Nyangoni, 1981). Chisita (2012) reports that Zimbabwe rolled out a massive literacy programmes that included the launch of Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe (ALoz) in 1983. These efforts saw the country's

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