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Integrating Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Acquisition of Library Resources and Services for Sustainable Development of Public Libraries

Ngozi Njideka Okechukwu[1] iD **, Okafor Kelechi Charity[2]** iD **, Chinemerem Chika Jacinta[3]** iD

[1]Librarian, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Science Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State Nigeria.
[2]Librarian, Faculty of Education Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State Nigeria.
[3]Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State Nigeria.
Correspondence: nn.okechukwu@unizik.edu.ng[1]

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This study examines how integrating cultural diversity and inclusion in public library resources and services is crucial for their sustainable development. With diverse communities, libraries must ensure inclusivity.

Methodology: Through a literature review, it analyzes strategies for enhancing diversity, technology use, community engagement, and sustainable development.

Findings: Findings emphasize libraries' role in promoting equity, engagement, and cultural preservation. Strategies include inclusive policies, improved collections, staff cultural competence training, and tech use for diverse populations.

Conclusion: This research highlights the importance of inclusivity for libraries to support community development. It provides a framework for assessing current practices and offers recommendations to create inclusive environments. By embracing diversity, libraries can strengthen their role as community hubs fostering lifelong learning, cultural exchange, and social cohesion.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Cultural Inclusion, Library Resources, Library Services, Sustainable Development, Public Libraries.

Introduction

Integrating cultural diversity and inclusion in the acquisition of library resources and services is pivotal for the sustainable development of public libraries. This approach not only ensures that libraries serve as true reflections of the diverse communities they aim to serve but also positions them as key players in promoting social cohesion, educational equity, and lifelong learning. As society becomes increasingly multicultural, public libraries are challenged to reassess and expand their roles to accommodate the cultural diversity of their users, fostering an environment where all community members feel seen, heard, and valued (Kociubuk et al., 2023).

The concept of cultural diversity encompasses the variety of cultural expressions that exist within a society, including language, religion, ethnicity, and social practices, among others (Wang & Ruan, 2024). Inclusion, on the other hand, refers to the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with

which individuals might connect—in ways that increase one's awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions (Shultz, 2023; Lynch, 2022). Integrating these principles into the acquisition of library resources and services involves a deliberate effort to ensure that library collections, programs, and services reflect the diverse perspectives and experiences of the community it serves for sustainable development.

The sustainable development of public libraries, as defined by the United Nations, includes meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Elsawy & Youssef, 2023). This includes ensuring equitable access to information and knowledge for all community members, regardless of their cultural background or socioeconomic status (Islam et al., 2024; Skøtt, 2023). Public libraries, by adopting a framework of cultural diversity and inclusion, can significantly contribute to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to quality education (SDG 4), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11).

The link between sustainable development and public libraries is profound, as libraries serve as catalysts for social, economic, and environmental progress within communities (Onwubiko, E. C. (2022). Sustainable development, aimed at meeting present needs without compromising the future, aligns closely with the mission of public libraries to provide equitable access to information, education, and resources for all (Agbedahin, 2019). Libraries can contribute to the development of informed and empowered citizens by promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and cultural understanding (Loach et al., 2017). Additionally, libraries play a role in promoting environmental awareness through programs and resources. Thus, public libraries are integral to fostering sustainable development by empowering individuals and communities to thrive both now and in the future (Onwubiko, 2022).

Furthermore, libraries can leverage technology to enhance access to diverse resources and services. Digital platforms can be used to host virtual exhibitions, storytelling sessions, and cultural celebrations that showcase the richness of different cultures, thereby reaching a wider audience and facilitating engagement with library users who may not be able to physically visit the library (Samuel, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2023). Additionally, online resources such as eBooks, audiobooks, and databases can be curated to include a broad spectrum of cultural perspectives, ensuring that users have access to a diverse range of information and knowledge sources (Wordu & Nwaizugbu, 2021).

Community engagement is another critical aspect of integrating cultural diversity and inclusion in public libraries. Libraries can host cultural events, workshops, and dialogues that encourage community members to share their own cultural experiences and learn from others (Abdullah et al., 2015). Such programs not only celebrate cultural diversity but also foster a sense of belonging and community cohesion (Okonmah & Arimie, 2023). Schools, and other institutions, libraries can amplify their impact and reach diverse audiences by partnering with local cultural organizations.

However, integrating cultural diversity and inclusion in public libraries is not without challenges. These include budgetary constraints, resistance to change, and the need for ongoing staff training and development (Jacob et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a strategic and committed approach, including securing funding for diversity initiatives, fostering a culture of inclusivity within the library workforce, and continuously evaluating and adapting library services to meet the evolving needs of the community (Nwankwo et al., 2020). The motivation for the present study stems from several compelling reasons. First, public libraries are institutions deeply rooted in serving diverse communities, yet research suggests that there are significant gaps in the representation of diverse voices and perspectives within library collections (Lynch et al., 2021). This lack of inclusivity can lead to marginalized communities feeling underrepresented and underserved (Pride et al., 2024).

Second, there is a growing recognition of the importance of cultural competence in library services. Library professionals must understand the diverse needs and backgrounds of their patrons to provide

effective and equitable services (Cooke, 2016). Without this understanding, libraries may inadvertently perpetuate cultural biases and barriers to access. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations emphasize the role of libraries in achieving social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Abata-Ebire et al., 2018). To fulfill these goals, libraries must actively engage with diverse communities and provide resources that reflect their needs and experiences. Additionally, technological advancements offer new opportunities for libraries to expand their collections and services to be more inclusive (Mansour, 2020). However, without intentional efforts to prioritize diverse materials and perspectives, these technologies may further exacerbate existing inequalities. In essence, the study is motivated by the recognition of gaps in representation, the imperative for cultural competence in library services, the alignment with global sustainability goals, and the potential of technology to either enhance or hinder inclusivity in library collections.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of integrating cultural diversity and inclusion within public libraries, and its significance in fostering sustainable development and community development, is multifaceted. Cultural diversity encompasses the myriad cultural expressions that communities and individuals manifest, recognizing the value of cultural differences and the need for inclusivity (Szelei et al., 2024). Inclusion within this context implies creating environments where any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive culture embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people (Nauman et al., 2024). It's about ensuring that library services, resources, and programming reflect the diversity of the community it serves, facilitating access to a wide array of perspectives and experiences.

Sustainable development in public libraries extends beyond environmental sustainability to encompass social and economic dimensions, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Islam et al., 2024). Public libraries contribute to sustainable development by providing universal access to information and knowledge, thus supporting education, reducing inequalities, and fostering community well-being (Khalid et al., 2021). They are vital in promoting literacy and lifelong learning, offering access to digital technologies, and serving as inclusive spaces that support social inclusion and cohesion.

Public libraries are central to community development, acting as community hubs that offer access to information, technology, and spaces for cultural expression and social interaction. They are democratic spaces where community members, regardless of their background, can access resources and opportunities that promote personal and community development (Ngo-Kobhio-Balôck, 2020). Libraries play a critical role in empowering communities by supporting education and literacy, enabling access to information technology, and providing programs and services that reflect and celebrate community diversity (Edwards et al., 2013).

Assessment of Current Library Resources and Services

The assessment of current library resources and services regarding cultural diversity and inclusion is a critical step in understanding how well public libraries are meeting the needs of their diverse communities. This assessment involves evaluating the diversity of existing collections and services, identifying gaps, and recognizing opportunities for greater inclusion. An essential aspect of assessing library resources is evaluating the diversity of materials available to patrons. This includes examining the representation of various cultural backgrounds, languages, perspectives, and experiences within the library's collections. An analysis might look at the range of fiction and non-fiction books, films, music, and other materials to ensure they reflect the diverse demographics of the community (Green et al., 2021). For example, a study by Syed (2014) found that many public libraries lacked sufficient materials representing minority groups, leading to gaps in the availability of culturally diverse content. Such assessments are crucial to understanding whether library collections are inclusive and whether they effectively serve the needs and interests of all patrons, regardless of their background.

Through the evaluation process, libraries can identify gaps in their collections and services, highlighting areas where there is a lack of representation or insufficient resources to meet the needs of diverse communities. These gaps might include limited materials in languages spoken by minority groups, insufficient cultural materials representing various ethnicities, or a lack of accessibility features for individuals with disabilities (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Identifying these gaps presents an opportunity for libraries to take proactive steps towards greater inclusion. This might involve acquiring materials that fill these gaps, collaborating with community organizations to co-create relevant programs, or implementing initiatives to promote diverse voices and perspectives. For instance, a study by Grossman et al., (2022) demonstrated how library outreach programs to immigrant communities led to increased usage of library services among these populations.

Moreover, the assessment should extend beyond the physical collection to include services and programs offered by the library. This includes evaluating the accessibility of library facilities, the inclusivity of programming, and the availability of resources for underrepresented groups (Poole et al., 2021). Libraries can use surveys, focus groups, and community consultations to gather feedback and insights from patrons to inform these assessments.

Strategies for Integrating Diversity and Inclusion

Integrating diversity and inclusion into public libraries is a multifaceted endeavor that requires strategic planning and execution across various domains, including policy development, collection enhancement, partnerships, and staff training. These strategies are crucial for creating library environments that are welcoming, inclusive, and representative of the diverse communities they serve. Developing policies that explicitly promote inclusivity and diversity within library services is foundational. These policies should outline the library's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), setting clear objectives for inclusive collections, services, and programming (Wells et al., 2023). Policies must also address accessibility, ensuring that physical and digital library spaces are accessible to individuals with disabilities (Igwebuike & Agbo, 2015). Effective policy development involves community stakeholders, including library users from diverse backgrounds, to ensure that policies are reflective of the community's needs and aspirations.

To create collections that reflect the diversity of the community, libraries must adopt intentional and proactive collection development practices. This includes conducting regular audits of existing collections to identify gaps in representation and diversity (Raji et al., 2020). Libraries should strive to include materials that cover a wide range of perspectives, including those of marginalized and underrepresented groups. This can be achieved by diversifying sources for book reviews and vendor lists, as well as incorporating user suggestions into collection development processes. Libraries can also explore subscription services and digital resources that offer a wider array of diverse materials.

Partnerships with local community organizations, schools, and other libraries can significantly enhance a library's ability to acquire diverse resources. These partnerships can provide insights into the community's needs and preferences, facilitating the acquisition of materials that reflect the community's cultural and linguistic diversity (Edwards & White, 2018). Collaborations with cultural institutions and minority-owned businesses can also introduce libraries to new resources and materials that may not be available through traditional channels. Additionally, grant funding from governmental and non-governmental organizations can support special initiatives aimed at increasing the diversity of library collections and programs.
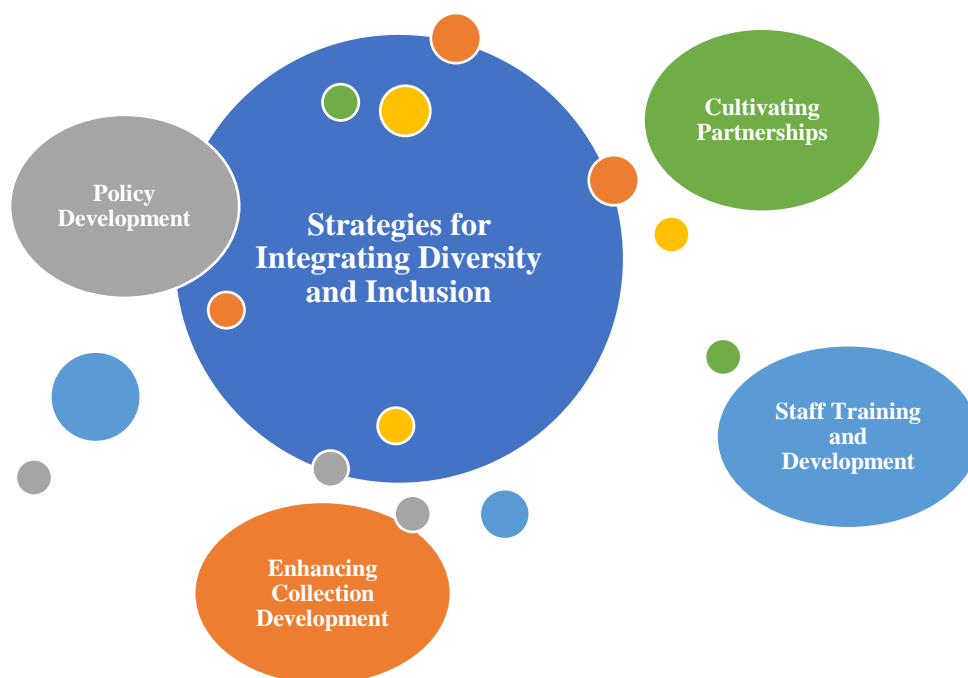
Figure 1: *Strategies for Integrating Diversity and Inclusion*

The success of diversity and inclusion initiatives in public libraries is heavily dependent on the cultural competence of library staff. Continuous training and professional development opportunities can equip library staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to serve diverse communities effectively. This includes training on implicit bias, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive communication practices (Corte, 2022). Workshops and seminars led by experts in DEI can provide staff with deeper insights into the challenges faced by marginalized communities and strategies for addressing these challenges within library services. Furthermore, fostering a workplace culture that values diversity and encourages ongoing learning about cultural competence can enhance the library's capacity to serve its community inclusively.

Leveraging Technology for Inclusive Library Services

Leveraging technology is pivotal for public libraries aiming to enhance inclusivity and accessibility in their services. Digital platforms, social media, and innovative technological solutions offer unique opportunities to engage diverse communities, distribute accessible content, and improve the overall user experience. As shown in Figure 2, these tools not only expand the reach of library services but also cater to the varied needs of a diverse user base.

Digital Platforms for Accessible Content Distribution

Using Social Media to Engage Diverse Communities

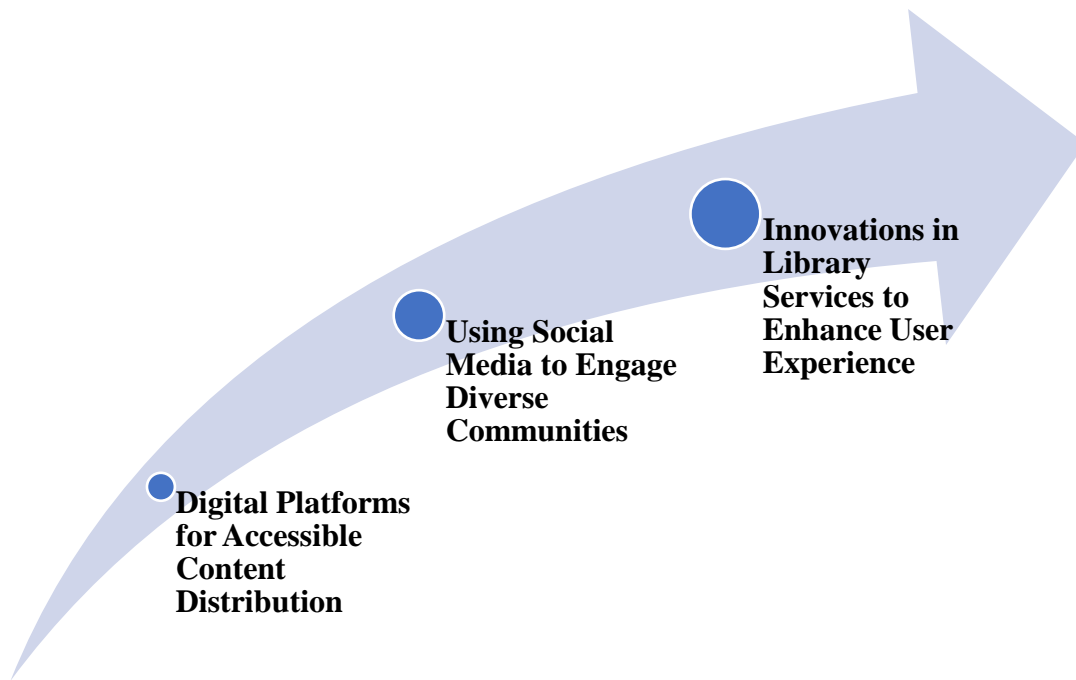**Innovations in Library Services to Enhance User Experience**

Figure 2: *Leveraging Technology for Inclusive Library Services*

Digital platforms play a crucial role in making library resources more accessible to individuals with disabilities, as well as to those who cannot physically visit the library. E-books, audiobooks, and online databases can be accessed from the comfort of one's home, providing equal access to information for all users (Khan & Shahzad, 2024). For instance, platforms like OverDrive and Hoopla offer vast collections of digital resources that libraries can incorporate, significantly enhancing their offerings (Keathley et al., 2023). Additionally, libraries can adopt technologies such as text-to-speech and adjustable text sizes to make digital content more accessible to users with visual impairments, thereby adhering to the principles of universal design (Alajarmeh, 2022).

Social media is an effective tool for libraries to engage with diverse communities. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow libraries to communicate with patrons in real-time, providing updates on new resources, events, and services. Social media can also be used to showcase library initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion, thereby reaching a wider audience. For example, libraries can highlight multicultural events, book clubs focused on authors from marginalized communities, and resources in various languages. By actively engaging with users on these platforms, libraries can foster a sense of community and belonging among diverse user groups (Alqahtani, 2023).

Technological innovations offer libraries new ways to enhance the user experience and make services more inclusive. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies can be used to create immersive learning experiences for users, making education more engaging and accessible. For instance, VR can transport users to different cultures and historical periods, providing a rich, experiential understanding of diverse perspectives (Hannah et al., 019). Similarly, libraries can implement artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms to personalize the user experience, recommending resources and services based on individual preferences and needs. This personalization can help ensure that users from all backgrounds find materials and programs that resonate with their interests and cultural experiences.

Community Engagement and Participation

Community engagement and participation are essential components of creating vibrant and inclusive public libraries. By involving the community in library development, creating inclusive spaces for interaction, and highlighting successful community-driven programs, libraries can build strong connections, address community needs, and foster a sense of ownership among patrons. To ensure that libraries meet the specific needs and interests of their diverse communities, it is crucial to involve community members in the development process. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as community surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings. These methods allow library staff to gather input, feedback, and suggestions directly from the people they serve (Ippoliti et al., 2017). For example, a library in a multicultural neighborhood might host community dialogues to understand the cultural preferences of its patrons, informing its collection development and programming.

Furthermore, libraries can establish advisory boards or committees composed of community representatives. These groups can provide valuable insights into local demographics, interests, and needs, guiding library policies and decision-making processes (O-Nyumba et al., 2018). By involving the community in library development, libraries ensure that their services and programs are relevant, responsive, and reflective of the community's diversity. Creating inclusive spaces within the library encourages diverse community members to engage and interact comfortably. This involves not only physical spaces but also the atmosphere and culture cultivated within the library. Libraries can design flexible spaces that accommodate various activities, such as group meetings, quiet study, and cultural events (Babapour et al., 2018). For instance, a library might offer multipurpose rooms that can be used for community gatherings, language classes, or art exhibits.

In addition to physical spaces, libraries can promote inclusivity through their policies and practices. This includes offering multilingual signage and materials, providing accessible technology and resources, and ensuring staff members receive training on diversity and inclusion (De-Souza & Gama, 2020). By creating welcoming and inclusive environments, libraries become more than just repositories of knowledge—they become community hubs where people feel valued and respected.

Sustainable Development through Inclusive Library Services

Sustainable development, a holistic approach that encompasses economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection, aligns closely with the mission and capabilities of modern public libraries. Through inclusive library services, libraries can act as catalysts for educational and cultural development, promote environmental awareness, and contribute to economic development and empowerment (Figure 3). These roles not only extend the impact of libraries beyond their traditional boundaries but also embed them deeply within the fabric of sustainable community development.

Libraries play a pivotal role in promoting education and cultural development, offering access to a wealth of knowledge and resources that span the globe's diverse cultures and perspectives. By providing inclusive and equitable access to educational materials, libraries support lifelong learning and literacy, fundamental components of sustainable development (Bortolotto & Skounti, 2023). For example, initiatives like digital literacy workshops and multilingual story times not only foster a culture of learning but also celebrate cultural diversity, strengthening community ties and understanding (Daheri et al., 2023). Moreover, libraries act as communal spaces where cultural exchanges can occur, hosting events such as art exhibitions, cultural festivals, and lectures that showcase the richness of the world's cultures. These programs not only enrich the community's cultural landscape but also promote mutual respect and understanding among its diverse members (Bielaczyc & Collins, 2013).
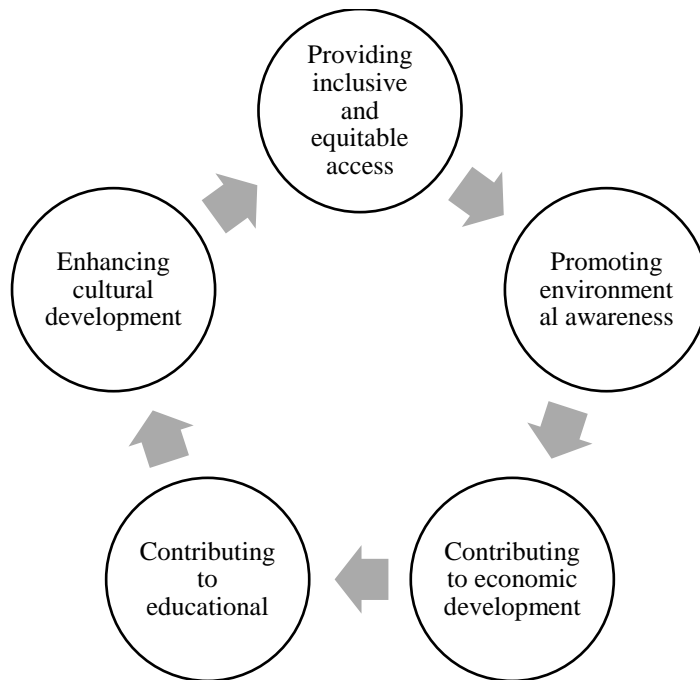
Figure 3: *How Inclusive Library Services can drive Sustainable Development*

Public libraries are uniquely positioned to promote environmental awareness and education, crucial for achieving sustainable development goals. By curating collections and programming focused on environmental science, sustainability practices, and conservation efforts, libraries can raise public consciousness about environmental issues and inspire community action (McKinley et al., 2017). Libraries can also lead by example, implementing sustainable practices within their operations, such as reducing energy consumption, recycling, and supporting local biodiversity projects. Additionally, libraries often partner with environmental organizations to offer programs and resources that encourage practical engagement with sustainability efforts, such as community gardens, recycling workshops, and citizen science projects. These initiatives not only educate the public about environmental stewardship but also empower individuals to contribute to the sustainability of their communities (Bennett et al., 2018).

Libraries contribute to economic development and empowerment by providing resources and programs that enhance skills, promote entrepreneurship, and support job seekers. Access to business databases, career counseling, resume workshops, and technology training can significantly impact individuals' economic opportunities and, by extension, the economic health of the community (Valle et al., 2022). For instance, libraries have launched makerspaces equipped with tools and technology (e.g., 3D printers, software, sewing machines) that foster innovation and entrepreneurship, offering community members the chance to learn new skills and bring their ideas to life. These spaces can be instrumental in driving local economic development by supporting startups and small businesses (Feldman, 2014). Furthermore, by partnering with local businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies, libraries can play an active role in workforce development initiatives, ensuring that community members have the skills needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Such collaborations not only enhance the library's capacity to support economic empowerment but also strengthen the overall resilience and sustainability of the community.

Challenges and Solutions in Integrating Diversity and Inclusion

Integrating diversity and inclusion into the fabric of library services presents numerous challenges, ranging from institutional and budgetary constraints to the digital divide and the need for effective

evaluation mechanisms. Despite these hurdles, libraries are finding innovative solutions to embrace diversity and create inclusive environments that serve the needs of all community members. One of the primary challenges in promoting diversity and inclusion within libraries is overcoming institutional barriers and budgetary constraints. Libraries often operate within tight fiscal environments, making it difficult to allocate resources toward expanding collections, technology, and programs that reflect diverse perspectives and needs (Linden et al., 2018). Furthermore, institutional resistance can sometimes hinder efforts to prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Solutions to these challenges include seeking alternative funding sources, such as grants, donations, and partnerships with community organizations and businesses. For example, the American Library Association (ALA) offers grants specifically for libraries to diversify their collections and services, providing financial support to overcome budgetary limitations (Wheeler, 2021). Additionally, libraries can leverage volunteer support and in-kind donations to extend their resources. Building a strong case for the value of diversity and inclusion initiatives, supported by data and community feedback, can also help to overcome institutional resistance. Demonstrating the positive impact of these initiatives on community engagement and library usage can persuade stakeholders of their importance. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, as it can exclude members of the community who lack access to digital resources and technology. This issue is particularly pressing given the increasing reliance on digital platforms for library services. Accessibility issues further exacerbate disparities, making it difficult for individuals with disabilities to fully utilize library resources (Chadwick et al., 2013).

Libraries can address these challenges by providing digital literacy programs and technology training to improve digital skills across all age groups. Offering loaner programs for laptops, tablets, and Wi-Fi hotspots can also help bridge the digital divide by ensuring community members have the necessary tools to access digital resources (Salsbury & Hansen, 2022). To improve accessibility, libraries can implement assistive technologies and design their websites and digital resources to be fully accessible, following guidelines such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Providing alternative formats for materials, such as audiobooks and large print, ensures that resources are accessible to individuals with visual impairments (Panda & Chakravarty, 2020).

Effectively evaluating diversity and inclusion efforts and integrating community feedback into library services can be challenging. Libraries may struggle to develop metrics that accurately reflect the impact of these initiatives or to gather comprehensive feedback from diverse community segments. Implementing regular surveys, focus groups, and community forums can help libraries gather detailed feedback from a wide range of community members. Libraries can also utilize tools like the Inclusive Library Framework to evaluate their services and identify areas for improvement (Jamison, 2023). Building a culture of continuous improvement and openness to change is crucial. By actively seeking and responding to community input, libraries can adapt their services to meet evolving needs and ensure that their diversity and inclusion efforts are effective and meaningful.

Future Directions for Public Libraries

The future of public libraries is shaped by societal changes, technological progress, and sustainability goals. They are evolving beyond traditional roles to embrace innovations that promote sustainable development and social equity, becoming vital agents for an inclusive and sustainable future. Libraries are integrating green technologies and sustainable practices, like using energy-efficient designs and materials, to become "green libraries." They're leveraging digital innovations, including virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), for immersive learning experiences that highlight sustainability issues.

Digital platforms are expanding access to resources, reducing the environmental impact of physical materials. Libraries are also focusing on sustainability topics in their digital collections, encouraging community engagement with environmental efforts. Additionally, public libraries play a crucial role in promoting social equity and preserving cultural heritage. They offer targeted outreach and programming to ensure equitable access for all community members, including those marginalized or underserved.

Libraries facilitate discussions on social justice and equity, amplify marginalized voices, and preserve cultural heritage through digitization efforts. This commitment extends to collaborations with cultural institutions, ensuring preservation efforts are inclusive and diverse.

Conclusion

The exploration of integrating cultural diversity and inclusion in the acquisition of library resources and services underscores the pivotal role public libraries play in fostering sustainable development within communities. This study has illuminated the multifaceted approaches libraries can employ to ensure their collections and services are reflective of the diverse populations they serve, thereby enhancing access, equity, and participation for all community members. Through the implementation of targeted strategies, including policy development, enhancing collection practices, staff training, and leveraging technology, libraries can become beacons of diversity and inclusion. Crucially, libraries face institutional, budgetary, and technological barriers. However, by embracing innovative solutions and engaging in continuous dialogue with the communities they serve, libraries can overcome these obstacles. The adoption of inclusive policies, the pursuit of external funding, the strategic use of technology, and the commitment to staff training in cultural competence are key strategies that have been identified to address these challenges effectively.

Furthermore, the active engagement of community members in the development of library services and resources is essential for ensuring that libraries remain relevant and responsive to the needs of diverse populations. This participatory approach not only enriches the library's offerings but also strengthens the library's role as a community hub for learning, cultural exchange, and social cohesion. As libraries continue to evolve, their commitment to sustainable development through the lens of cultural diversity and inclusion will undoubtedly require ongoing reflection, adaptation, and innovation. Future directions for public libraries, as outlined in this study, emphasize the importance of innovations in library science, the promotion of social equity, and the preservation of cultural heritage. These elements are integral to realizing the full potential of libraries in contributing to the educational, cultural, and economic vitality of communities.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the essential role of public libraries in promoting cultural diversity and inclusion as a cornerstone for sustainable development. It calls for a concerted effort among library professionals, policymakers, and community stakeholders to invest in and advocate for libraries as inclusive spaces that reflect and celebrate the diversity of human experience. Through such collaborative and forward-thinking approaches, public libraries can continue to play a crucial role in building more inclusive, informed, and resilient communities.

ORCID's

Ngozi Njideka Okechukwu [1] https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8977-3127
Okafor Kelechi Charity [2] https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7687-9914
Chinemerem Chika Jacinta [3] https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8219-4265

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