



COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS BETWEEN LIBRARIANS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN HEALTH IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explores the collaborative efforts between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to health in North-East Nigeria. With a focus on enhancing health literacy and access to healthcare information, the research assesses the current level of collaboration, contributions of library services, and prevailing challenges. A quantitative research design was adopted, targeting a population of 1,284 librarians and healthcare professionals, from which a sample of 305 was selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected through survey questionnaires and analysed using SPSS. Findings revealed a moderate level of collaboration, with participants acknowledging the importance of joint health literacy programs, though formal partnerships and active community engagements were still limited. Library services were found to contribute meaningfully to healthcare information access, especially in underserved communities, through resources, mobile libraries, and awareness programs. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, limited digital literacy, and poor communication between sectors hindered stronger partnerships. The study underscores the potential of integrating digital tools and training to enhance health education and outreach. Recommendations include fostering formalized partnerships, offering joint capacity-building initiatives, and improving infrastructure for both libraries and healthcare providers. This study contributes to the discourse on interprofessional collaboration in achieving SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and highlights the role of libraries in public health promotion. It advocates for strengthened librarian-healthcare professional alliances to advance sustainable healthcare practices in marginalized areas of North-East Nigeria.

Keywords: Health information collaboration, Sustainable development goals (SDGs), Interdisciplinary partnership, Healthcare access in North-East Nigeria, Health literacy promotion

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, represent a global commitment to address the most pressing issues facing humanity. Among the 17 SDGs, Goal 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, accessible, and sustainable healthcare systems. Achieving this goal requires not only the integration of various sectors but also the active involvement of all stakeholders in the healthcare system. As part of this collective effort, the role of librarians and healthcare professionals in advancing public health and well-being has garnered increasing attention in recent years. This collaboration is essential in promoting health literacy, enhancing information access, and improving the delivery of healthcare services.

At a global level, libraries and healthcare organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of cross-sector partnerships in advancing health outcomes. Libraries, traditionally viewed as centres of knowledge and information, have evolved into vital community hubs, providing access to healthcare resources, promoting health education, and supporting public health initiatives. Healthcare professionals, on the other hand, bring specialized medical knowledge, clinical expertise, and direct access to health services. Collaborative efforts between these two sectors help bridge the gap between healthcare knowledge and the communities that need it most. According to a study by Michael, Ikegwuro, Nyatse & Odoh (2022), librarians are instrumental in disseminating health-related information to underserved populations, thus playing a pivotal role in the achievement of SDG 3.

One of the primary ways libraries contribute to public health is through the promotion of health literacy. Health literacy involves the ability to access, understand, and use health-related information to make informed decisions about health and well-being. This is particularly important in low-resource settings where healthcare systems often face significant challenges. A report by the Van den Broucke (2014) highlights that improving health literacy can lead to better health outcomes, particularly in preventing disease, managing chronic conditions, and promoting healthy behaviours. Librarians, by providing easy access to accurate, relevant, and understandable health information, can empower individuals to make better health decisions. This is critical for communities in need, such as those in North-East Nigeria, where access to health services and information is often limited.

Healthcare professionals, with their expertise in clinical care, disease prevention, and health promotion, can work with librarians to address gaps in healthcare information. A study by Ukachi (2011) shows that collaborations between healthcare professionals and libraries have led to better health outcomes by ensuring that health information is not only accessible but also tailored to the needs of diverse populations. For instance, healthcare professionals can assist librarians in curating health-related content that aligns with current medical practices, while librarians can help healthcare organizations make this information available in formats that are easily understandable and accessible to the general public.

In North-East Nigeria, the need for such collaborations is particularly pressing. The region has been severely impacted by conflict, economic instability, and a lack of infrastructure, which have hindered access to healthcare services. According to the Nigerian Health Sector Annual Report (2022), many parts of the North-East are underserved in terms of both healthcare facilities and professional healthcare workers. Additionally, literacy rates and health literacy in the region are among the lowest in the country, making it difficult for individuals to navigate the complex healthcare system. This gap in healthcare access and health information is further exacerbated by the lack of efficient communication channels between healthcare professionals and the general public.

Libraries in North-East Nigeria, despite facing their own set of challenges, hold significant potential in addressing these issues. Many public libraries and university libraries are located in key towns, providing a rare point of access to information for people in remote areas. However, these libraries often lack the resources, training, and infrastructure needed to fully realize their potential as health information hubs. According to Nkamnebe and Nkamnebe (2081), there is a growing need for libraries to collaborate with healthcare professionals to overcome these barriers and improve health information dissemination in the region. This partnership could provide a pathway for libraries to not only distribute printed health materials but also offer digital access to online health resources, conduct health-related information literacy programs, and support local health campaigns.

Several challenges to effective collaboration exist, including a lack of mutual understanding between librarians and healthcare professionals. A study by Hinrichs, Bakker, Brigham, Ginier, Stevens, and Alpi, (2020) underscores that librarians often lack the specialized training needed to understand complex medical terminology, while healthcare professionals may not fully appreciate the value of libraries as community health resources. Therefore, fostering these partnerships requires building trust, shared goals, and a common understanding of how each

sector can contribute to health promotion. Training programs for both librarians and healthcare professionals on health literacy, information access, and communication strategies could help address these issues and strengthen collaboration.

There is also the issue of limited funding and support for collaborative initiatives in North-East Nigeria. Many libraries and healthcare facilities operate with constrained budgets, making it difficult to invest in the necessary infrastructure, resources, and personnel to sustain such collaborations. Government support, as well as partnerships with non-governmental organizations and international agencies, is crucial for providing the necessary financial backing and policy framework to facilitate these efforts. A report by the Adepoju and Opele (2023) highlights the importance of government investment in information infrastructure to improve public health outcomes, particularly in underserved regions like the North-East.

Despite these challenges, there have been examples of successful collaborations between librarians and healthcare professionals in other parts of Nigeria that offer valuable lessons for the North-East region. For instance, the National Library of Nigeria's collaboration with the Ministry of Health in disseminating health information during the COVID-19 pandemic proved effective in reaching marginalized communities with crucial health messages. These initiatives demonstrate the potential for similar models to be implemented in the North-East to improve healthcare access and promote sustainable health practices.

The use of digital platforms for health communication is another area where librarians and healthcare professionals can collaborate effectively. The rise of mobile phones and internet access in Nigeria presents an opportunity to reach a larger population with healthcare information. Libraries can support these efforts by curating and disseminating health information through digital platforms, which can be particularly useful in rural areas where physical access to healthcare facilities is limited. A study by Balogun, Boateng, Adams, Ransome-Kuti, Sekoni & Adams (2020) found that digital health interventions have been successful in improving health outcomes in other parts of Nigeria, particularly in the areas of maternal and child health, disease prevention, and health awareness.

Furthermore, integrating indigenous knowledge systems into healthcare information services can enhance the effectiveness of health promotion efforts in the North-East. Many communities in the region rely on traditional healing practices and indigenous knowledge to manage their health. According to Adepoju and Onagun (2023), libraries can play a pivotal role in documenting and preserving this traditional knowledge while also promoting its integration with modern healthcare practices. By fostering a dialogue between traditional and conventional

health systems, librarians can help communities make informed choices about healthcare, thus promoting sustainable and culturally appropriate health practices.

In conclusion, the collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals holds great promise for advancing the SDGs in health in North-East Nigeria. However, for these efforts to be successful, it is crucial to address existing challenges, such as limited resources, lack of training, and inadequate infrastructure. By strengthening these partnerships and leveraging digital platforms, libraries can play a key role in promoting health literacy, improving healthcare access, and advancing sustainable healthcare practices in the region. This study aims to explore the potential for such collaborations and provide recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness in achieving the SDGs in health.

Statement of the Problem

In North-East Nigeria, the region's healthcare system faces numerous challenges, including limited access to healthcare services, inadequate health literacy, and insufficient collaboration between healthcare professionals and information providers, such as librarians. Despite the growing recognition of the critical role of health information in promoting well-being and sustainable healthcare practices, many communities in this region remain underserved in terms of healthcare access and knowledge. Libraries, which can serve as vital hubs for health information dissemination, often lack the resources, training, and infrastructure to effectively support healthcare initiatives. Furthermore, healthcare professionals and librarians often operate in silos, with little collaboration, leading to missed opportunities for improving health outcomes through integrated information services (Nkamnebe & Nkamnebe, 2081; Michael et al., 2022). This lack of synergy between the two sectors limits the region's ability to address health information gaps and promote sustainable healthcare practices, thus hindering progress toward achieving SDG 3 on health and well-being in the area.

Objective of the Study

1. To examine the current level of collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy and sustainable healthcare practices in North-East Nigeria.
2. To assess the contribution of library services in enhancing access to healthcare information in underserved communities in North-East Nigeria.
3. To identify the challenges faced by librarians and healthcare professionals in establishing effective partnerships to promote health and well-being in the region.

Research Questions

1. What is the current level of collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy and sustainable healthcare practices in North-East Nigeria?
2. How do library services contribute to enhancing access to healthcare information in underserved communities in North-East Nigeria?
3. What are the main challenges faced by librarians and healthcare professionals in establishing effective partnerships to promote health and well-being in North-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

The literature has been reviewed into the following subheadings:

Global Perspectives

Globally, the collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals is increasingly recognized as a pathway to advancing health literacy and improving public health outcomes. According to Hinrichs et al. (2020), interprofessional collaboration among health sciences librarians and healthcare workers enhances access to reliable health information and contributes to patient-centred care. These collaborations, when effectively implemented, have the potential to bridge information gaps and strengthen public health systems. Moreover, Van den Broucke (2014) emphasized that health literacy is a critical component of public health strategy and that information professionals have a vital role to play in promoting it.

Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, particularly in the North-East region, the collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals remains underdeveloped, with minimal documented initiatives aimed at improving health outcomes through joint efforts. Nkamnebe and Nkamnebe (2018) noted that although librarians are pivotal in disseminating health information, the absence of formal partnerships with health workers leads to fragmented and less impactful service delivery. Nonetheless, examples from other Nigerian regions during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the potential of such collaborations. Michael et al. (2022) observed that cooperation between health ministries and libraries helped disseminate vital health information, underscoring the feasibility and benefits of such partnerships.

Library services in the North-East also demonstrate potential in enhancing health literacy, especially in rural and underserved populations. As noted by Adepoju and Onagun (2023), libraries have contributed to raising awareness on topics such as maternal health, disease

prevention, and nutrition. However, they often face significant limitations in resources, including the lack of specialized health information materials. Nkamnebe and Nkamnebe (2018) emphasized that improving the quality and accessibility of health-related content within libraries could empower communities and foster informed health decisions.

Despite the promise, several barriers inhibit effective partnerships between librarians and healthcare professionals in the region. These include a lack of understanding of each sector's contributions, insufficient funding, and limited training opportunities. Librarians may not possess the specialized knowledge required to curate health-related content, while healthcare professionals might overlook the library's role in health education (Hinrichs et al., 2020). Ukachi (2011) advocates for building mutual trust, facilitating joint training programs, and fostering open communication channels as strategies to overcome these challenges.

Digital Solutions

Digital tools and platforms are increasingly important in promoting health literacy and extending healthcare information to hard-to-reach communities in North-East Nigeria. Technologies such as mobile phones, websites, and social media have expanded the reach of health messaging. Balogun et al. (2020) reported that mobile health (mHealth) initiatives have successfully promoted maternal care, immunization, and disease prevention across several regions in Nigeria, showing potential for similar outcomes in the North-East.

Libraries, by adopting and utilizing digital platforms, can play a more proactive role in public health outreach. Collaborations between librarians and healthcare providers through digital means can significantly amplify health education efforts. However, the full benefits of such digital interventions remain constrained by challenges such as limited internet connectivity, low digital literacy levels, and inadequate infrastructure. As Adepoju and Onagun (2023) observed, addressing these digital barriers is crucial to unlocking the full potential of technology-driven health education in the region.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research design to explore the collaborative efforts between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy and sustainable healthcare practices in North-East Nigeria. The population comprised of 1,284 healthcare professionals and librarians. The sampling technique adopted for the study is a simple random sampling. The sample size for the study is 305 healthcare professionals and librarians. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane sampling formula. A survey questionnaire was administered

to healthcare professionals and librarians in selected hospitals, clinics, and public libraries across the region to gather the data. The data was analysed using descriptive statistic such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The analysis was done with the aid of statistical software (SPSS).

Results

Research Questions One: What is the current level of collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy and sustainable healthcare practices in North-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Level of collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy and sustainable healthcare

S/N	Statement	SA	A	DA	SDA	Mean	SD
1	Librarians and healthcare professionals frequently collaborate on health literacy programs.	102 (33.4)	140 (45.9)	36 (11.6)	27 (8.9)	3.04	.899
2	There are formal partnerships between libraries and healthcare institutions.	88 (28.9)	61 (20)	129 (42.3)	27 (8.9)	2.69	.986
3	Librarians participate in community health awareness campaigns.	36 (11.8)	99 (32.5)	130 (42.6)	40 (13.1)	2.43	.864
4	Healthcare professionals provide health information for library programs.	36 (11.8)	99 (32.5)	130 (42.6)	40 (13.1)	2.43	.864
5	Librarians are trained to collaborate with healthcare professionals on health projects.	102 (33.4)	140 (45.9)	36 (11.6)	27 (8.9)	3.04	.899
6	Collaboration improves health outcomes in North-East Nigeria.	87 (28.5)	158 (51.8)	29 (9.5)	31 (10.2)	2.99	.888
7	There is good communication between libraries and healthcare institutions.	80 (26.2)	151 (49.5)	46 (15.1)	28 (9.2)	2.93	.882
8	Librarians and healthcare professionals co-organize health events for the public.	74 (24.3)	157 (51.5)	36 (11.8)	38 (12.5)	2.88	.920
9	Librarians get support from healthcare professionals to promote healthcare practices.	66 (21.6)	103 (33.8)	78 (25.6)	58 (19)	2.58	1.030
10	Collaboration is hindered by funding and resource challenges.	99 (32.5)	157 (51.5)	49 (16.1)		3.16	.678

The findings indicate a moderate level of collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy in North-East Nigeria. While librarians and

healthcare professionals acknowledge the benefits of collaboration (mean = 3.16), formal partnerships (mean = 2.69) and community engagement (mean = 2.43) remain weak. Limited support and funding constraints (mean = 2.58) further hinder effective teamwork. Implication: Strengthening formal partnerships, increasing funding, and providing training opportunities can enhance collaboration and improve health literacy outcomes.

Research Questions Two: How do library services contribute to enhancing access to healthcare information in underserved communities in North-East Nigeria?

Table 2: Library services Contribution to enhancing access to healthcare information

S/N	Statement	SA	A	DA	SDA	Mean	SD
1	Libraries improve healthcare information access.	102 (33.4)	146 (47.9)	54 (17.7)	3(1)	3.14	.730
2	Libraries provide relevant healthcare materials.	90 (29.5)	156 (51.1)	50 (16.4)	9(3)	3.07	.757
3	Mobile libraries improve healthcare access in remote areas.	77 (25.2)	144 (47.2)	79 (25.9)	5 (1.6)	2.96	.760
4	Librarians conduct health literacy programs.	79 (25.9)	143 (46.9)	73 (23.9)	10 (3.3)	2.95	.793
5	Libraries collaborate with health organizations.	74 (24.3)	170 (55.7)	48 (15.7)	13 (4.3)	3.00	.757
6	Libraries are accessible to marginalized communities.	98 (32.1)	109 (35.7)	87 (28.5)	11 (3.6)	2.96	.867
7	Libraries raise health awareness in rural areas.	89 (29.2)	123 (40.3)	76 (24.9)	17 (5.6)	2.93	.873
8	Libraries increase knowledge of preventive healthcare.	80 (26.2)	114 (37.4)	84 (27.5)	27 (8.9)	2.81	.927
9	Libraries teach how to access reliable health information online.	71 (23.3)	123 (40.3)	79 (25.9)	32 (10.5)	2.76	.927
10	Libraries reduce healthcare information gaps.	51 (16.7)	131 (43)	96 (31.5)	27 (8.9)	2.68	.856

Library services significantly contribute to healthcare information access in underserved communities, with libraries being key sources of health materials (mean = 3.07) and collaborating with health organizations (mean = 3.00). Mobile libraries (mean = 2.96) and health literacy programs (mean = 2.95) support rural outreach, but gaps remain in digital literacy (mean = 2.76) and reducing information disparities (mean = 2.68). **Implication:** Expanding mobile libraries, improving digital literacy programs, and increasing collaboration with healthcare organizations can enhance healthcare access.

Research Questions Three: What are the main challenges faced by librarians and healthcare professionals in establishing effective partnerships to promote health and well-being in North-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Challenges faced by librarians and healthcare professionals in establishing effective partnerships

S/N	Statement	SA	A	DA	SDA	Mean	SD
1	Lack of funding hinders collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals.	40 (13.1)	141 (46.2)	91 (29.8)	33 (10.8)	2.62	.847
2	Poor communication limits partnership effectiveness.	39 (12.8)	141 (46.2)	92 (30.2)	33 (10.8)	2.61	.844
3	Inadequate training affects collaboration.	27 (8.9)	132 (43.3)	116 (38)	30 (9.8)	2.51	.791
4	Cultural differences create barriers to partnership.	55 (18)	93 (30.5)	103 (33.8)	54 (17.7)	2.49	.984
5	Limited technology access hampers collaboration.	67 (22)	145 (47.5)	67 (22)	26 (8.5)	2.83	.868
6	Time and resource constraints affect partnership success.	57 (18.7)	160 (52.5)	64 (21)	24 (7.9)	2.82	.825
7	Organizational priorities conflict with partnership goals.	65 (21.3)	146 (47.9)	69 (22.6)	25 (8.2)	2.82	.859
8	Lack of public awareness limits collaboration impact.	38 (12.5)	173 (56.7)	85 (27.9)	9(3)	2.79	.691
9	Political instability affects partnership formation.	42 (13.8)	157 (51.5)	91 (29.8)	15 (4.9)	2.74	.753
10	Insufficient support from organizations impacts collaboration.	63 (20.7)	154 (50.5)	60 (19.7)	28 (9.2)	2.83	.862

Key challenges to effective partnerships include lack of funding (mean = 2.62), poor communication (mean = 2.61), inadequate training (mean = 2.51), and resource constraints (mean = 2.82). Cultural barriers (mean = 2.49) and political instability (mean = 2.74) further limit collaboration. Addressing funding issues, improving communication, and implementing capacity-building programs can strengthen partnerships and enhance healthcare outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

The results from the study indicate that while collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in North-East Nigeria exists, it remains moderate, with significant limitations in formal partnerships and community engagement. The findings align with the literature by Nkamnebe and Nkamnebe (2081), which suggests that the lack of structured collaborations between libraries and healthcare institutions leads to fragmented health literacy efforts. Additionally, the study's results highlight that while some collaboration exists—such as the

provision of health information for library programs and participation in community health awareness campaigns—these efforts are not widespread or well-structured. This supports previous studies that emphasize the need for strengthening partnerships to maximize the role of libraries in improving health literacy and sustainable healthcare practices. The implication is that addressing funding challenges, formalizing partnerships, and enhancing training opportunities can improve collaboration effectiveness.

On the role of library services in enhancing healthcare information access, the study's results demonstrate that libraries contribute significantly by providing health-related materials and collaborating with health organizations. This aligns with Adepoju and Onagun (2023), who argue that libraries play a critical role in disseminating healthcare information, particularly in underserved communities. The study also reveals that mobile libraries and health literacy programs contribute to rural outreach, reinforcing the potential of libraries as health information hubs. However, challenges such as digital illiteracy and information gaps persist, echoing concerns raised in previous studies regarding limited access to specialized health information. Therefore, the findings suggest that expanding mobile library services, improving digital literacy programs, and increasing collaboration with healthcare professionals can further enhance healthcare information accessibility.

Regarding the challenges faced in establishing effective partnerships, the study identifies funding constraints, poor communication, inadequate training, and resource limitations as major barriers. These findings are consistent with Hinrichs et al (2020), who highlight that the lack of mutual understanding between librarians and healthcare professionals, alongside logistical and infrastructural challenges, limits the effectiveness of such collaborations. The study also identifies cultural and political barriers as additional challenges, which aligns with Ukachi (2011), who emphasize the need for trust-building, joint training, and improved communication to foster stronger partnerships. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, such as capacity-building programs and increased institutional support, could lead to more effective collaborations and improved health literacy outcomes in North-East Nigeria.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that while there is a moderate level of collaboration between librarians and healthcare professionals in promoting health literacy and sustainable healthcare in North-East Nigeria, significant gaps remain in formal partnerships, community engagement, and resource availability. Library services play a crucial role in enhancing access to healthcare information,

particularly in underserved communities, through the provision of health materials, mobile libraries, and health literacy programs. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor communication, limited training, and cultural barriers hinder the establishment of effective partnerships. Addressing these challenges through strengthened collaborations, increased funding, and capacity-building initiatives can enhance health literacy efforts and improve healthcare outcomes in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made:

1. Libraries and healthcare professionals should work together to share health information through workshops, digital resources, and community programs.
2. Librarians training should include health information, and healthcare workers should learn how to use library resources for better patient care.
3. Libraries should have updated health materials and digital platforms, with support from the government to improve access, especially in rural areas.

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