

CURRENT TRENDS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES: ROADMAP TO EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education has been seen as a tool for attaining national growth and development. Hence, the role of libraries as a support service provider to educational institutions and realization of education for sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized. Specifically, this paper underscores the contributions of academic libraries and librarians towards achieving quality education for sustainable development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It traces old systems of information management with primary focus on the current trends in library and information services; innovative and creative services arising from the evolution of Information and communication technology, digitization and development of digital libraries. The opportunities inherent in access to digital information in support of learning, teaching and research are discussed. The paper also identifies challenges hindering effective digitisation services in the new library environment in Nigeria. It concludes that the future of today's information lies with the evolution of digital library and innovative services for sustainable development in higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Academic libraries; Education; Sustainable development; Trends in library services; Nigeria

Introduction

Education is the acquisition of intellectual and moral training or instructions given in a systematic way. It is the process of turning information received to knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills acquired from the process will lead to changes in behavior which in turn will improve individual's quality of life. Consequently, education can be regarded as a means of transforming and developing man economically, socially, mentally and technologically to function effectively in any environment (FGN, 2004). Education is fundamental to national growth and development because it is expected to transform lives and eradicate ignorance. To this end, the Nigerian government has, over the years, adopted education as an instrument 'par excellence' for implementing national development making adequate educational opportunities available at all levels as reiterated in the National Policy

on Education (FGN, 2004; Fischer, 2017). This accounts for the government's investments in the education sector with the aim of improving the quality of education and attaining the national policy on education.

Sustainable Development Goals 4 states that by 2030, members should work towards achieving quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2015), African nations including Nigeria are working assiduously towards achieving the quality education. The process to achieving qualitative education according to Tyonium & Ezeogun (2015), depends on the library and information resources for teaching, learning, research and expansion of knowledge. Library plays an invaluable role in education by providing access to up-to-date information resources. Information is a highly crucial and valuable resource to education, human survival and national development. It is an economic resource that improves national development and shapes critical sectors such as education, security, politics and businesses (Agboola, 2022). Information keeps individuals and scholars well informed and helps in making critical decisions. Library is the custodian and source of information resources; teachers, researchers and students need to have unfettered access to information without which there can be no effective teaching and learning. This is because the process of teaching, learning and research, the cardinal goals of tertiary institutions, demand timely and unfettered access to information that would be found in the libraries in print and non-print formats. The role of the library therefore becomes crucial as clearly stated by the International Federation Library Association (IFLA, 2012) that increased access to information and knowledge are essential pillars of library's contribution to education and sustainable development.

The primary task of all types of libraries is to acquire, organise, preserve, disseminate and ensure access to information. In the last couple of decades, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought a new dimension to information management. The development of ICT is transforming and shaping institutional environments with implication for academic libraries. The innovations arising from advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilitated by the Internet have resulted into creative services and digitization of resources. Digitisation, the process of converting print to digital format is becoming a popular concept in library services in the Digital Age. According to Chowdhury & Chowdhury (2021), digitisation facilitates development of digital library with provision of electronic resources and online information services thereby creating easy access to information. This development has not only transformed library and information services but refined the roles of library professionals in the emerging technology. This paper seeks to highlight the contributions of academic libraries to education for sustainable development with reference to current trends in innovation services, the challenges and future strategies for improved services in the digital revolution. The paper will focus on the following:

- Academic libraries in education and librarians' tasks.
- Current trends in library and information services.
- Challenges and future strategies for sustainable library services.

Academic Libraries in Education and Librarians' Tasks

It is a common knowledge that education is crucial to development and that the contributions of libraries to education cannot be overemphasised. Okiy in Itsekor (n.d) pointed out that “a nation conscious of the importance of libraries and information would thrive in the comity of nations in the information age.” Libraries are an integral part of education. This explains the reason for according assessment of library a place of significance during accreditation exercise in higher institutions of learning. This agrees with the truism that education and library are indivisible; the effort of one reinforces the other. No educational institution is complete without a well-established library, hence the saying “library is the heartbeat of education and research.” Academic libraries are found in tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other post-secondary institutions. Libraries are the hub of institutional intellectual repository of knowledge and information. They have long been associated with education because they contain various information resources. Information derived from all forms and sources and considered to be of value are acquired and preserved to satisfy the information needs and educational expectations of faculty members, students, researchers and other staff. The library tasks are derived from the mission of their institutions with a mandate to provide access to quality resources to complement academic programmes as well as facilitate research work (Garrido & Fellows, 2017; Chigbu & Uzoagba, 2011; Ogunlana & Amusa, 2008). In this connection, library resources and services greatly help to propagate new ideas and increase human knowledge that would facilitate political and socio-economic development. Nwokocho (2020) stressed that availability; accessibility and utilisation of information in libraries are making significant contributions to education and development.

Librarians and or informational professionals are human resources that determine effectiveness in service delivery as well as responsible for the provision and development of educational resources in support of learning, teaching and research activities. To achieve effective digital service, librarians in Nigerian academic libraries particularly in universities are conscious of the relevance of new technology and ICT in information management and are therefore upgrading their educational and professional skills through acquisition of higher education and continuous retraining to enhance their role in the emerging new technology. More importantly, they empower users to use, access and to navigate online information. In the changing library environment, professional librarians are making concerted efforts to maximise the available opportunity to improve their Internet and digitization skills in order to survive the challenge of the digital era. For effective library service delivery, Batool and Ameen (2010) averred that professional librarians must be digitally literate and proficient with ICT to fulfill information needs of their clientele. A good communication skill, keeping in touch with professional colleagues and constant development in the profession are desirable in the new age (Anyaoaku, 2012; Osinulu & Amusa, 2010).

Current Trend in Library and Information Services

The universe of knowledge in Nigerian academic libraries between 1980 and 1990s was the print format, and information processing and retrieval services were basically traditional in nature. The

method was with time, considered ineffective and frustrating to both information providers and users. The limitations in information processing paved the way for automation in academic libraries. Automation is the application of computers and other technological tools to perform library house-keeping activities followed by digitization and virtual information services. Most university libraries employed open source and or commercial Library management systems software: TINLIB, GLAS, X-LIB, KOHA, CDSIS, ALICE for WINDOW to automate their operations for improved library performance in acquisition, circulation system, cataloguing and reference as well as serial control. The application and process which has significantly eliminated routine and repetitive library tasks, enhances speedy retrieval of information through OPAC facilities, thus saving the time of users and making library operations cost efficient (Yakubu, 2021; Osinulu, 2020).

Today, digitization constitutes one of the main trends in information services in academic libraries. Digitization and electronic services are associated with digital library providing access to digital contents better and faster services using technological devices such as computers, smart phones and i-pads to access information promptly. These devices help individuals develop knowledge and technological skill that drive socio-economic development of the society. Digitisation is also capable of enhancing learning, teaching and research, the reputation and visibility of institutions resulting in increased access and improved preservation of age long materials (Ogbonna & Anunobi, 2013; Ogbomo & Muokebe, 2013; Imo & Igbo, 2011; Asogwa & Onwubiko, 2010). Commenting further on the benefits of digitisation in academic libraries, Oni et al. (2019) stated that wider accessibility to public records and creation of unified access to documentation from different institutions were made possible. Digitisation has made easy, the way users seek and access information.

A digital library consists of electronic resources and the services are electronically driven. The development of digital libraries has bridged the knowledge gap and digital divide between developed and developing nations (Anyim, 2018). The growth in electronic resources: journals and books, newspapers and magazines, e-research reports and e-lecture notes, online and offline databases (IFLA, 2012) has brought about a new information carrier format such as CD-Rom, DVD, CD, floppy disk and hard disks. Interestingly, Nigerian academic libraries especially university libraries are embracing and subscribing to electronic resources and various databases in line with their programmes to supplement their print collections because of its high impact on quality education, learning and research work. Tiwari in Ogbonna (2014) noted that integration of electronic and print resources referred to as hybrid is becoming the new trend in most academic libraries in both developed and developing countries. Hybrid library run in parallel in academic libraries in Nigeria because of slow rate of adoption and adaption of new technology (Akintunde, 2023).

The emerging electronic systems and digital resources have engendered innovative services such as CD-ROM searching service, databases searching, electronic document delivery services, and internet browsing and information alert services. Others include digital reference services: library chat rooms and web-based user education through video (Jharotia, 2017; Gavitt, 2019). The service provides faster access and saves time. It is important to note that library is adding value to research

activities, education and national development. Zaid and Oyelude (2011) in their study recount that many academic libraries in Nigeria have creatively and innovatively improved upon their service delivery. The duo highlights the success story of innovative and creative services provided by Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan and University of Lagos Library. The services include electronic reservation, E-resources management, as well as Virtual learning, laptop loan, provision of research tools, 24 hours library service, and Instant Messaging (IM) to improve services to their users. They posited that innovative service will boost staff morale and bring positive changes to the library and the users.

Another major shift in modern libraries services that has brought about new opportunities is the advent of computer and network. Computer network provides users with the opportunity of communicating and transferring information electronically and sharing data files and programmes (Rahman, 2002). The World Wide Web (WWW) is the most popular part of the Internet that provides wide links to information and a platform for users to exchange knowledge. Library network plays a major role in information resource sharing because network technology is the backbone of data and communication as well as information dissemination in academic libraries. Resource sharing and Networking is thriving among libraries and Nigerian university libraries are catching on the opportunities because it provides global access to information and facilitate sharing among cooperative libraries eliminating duplication of efforts and enhancing better library services (Ibegwam et al., 2019). Resource sharing is however laden with problems of irregular subscriptions, lack of policy among others. This notwithstanding, Nwalo (2008) stressed that resource sharing is a critical success factor in the sustainability of academic libraries services.

Equally important, interactive and collaborative platform such as Web 2.0 an upgraded version of WWW facilitates online collaboration, exchange of information and knowledge among users (Rahman, 2002). Web 2.0 includes social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Instant Message (IM) and blogs providing avenues for creating and sharing information. Social media are Internet based form of technology that allows users to interact, share information and create web content (JISC in Osinulu, 2018). To Ezeani (2012), social media is online communication used to encourage patrons to use library products and services. With the advent of social media, institutions now offer virtual learning thus removing geographical barriers to quality education as well as providing easy access to information. In the same vein, social media utilisation in library services increase users' patronage of library resources, facilitates communication and enhance collaboration among librarians and library clienteles (Bakare, Haliso & Umar, 2018). However, adoption of social networking tools as promotional tools is not yet fully explored and exploited as a platform to create adequate awareness for services in many Nigerian libraries. On the contrary, adoption rate of utilization is high in developed countries such as UK, USA and Asia while a growing number of American academic libraries are using social Twitter, Blogs, Flickr, Podcasts, Online videos and Facebook to promote services (Aiyebilehin & Omekwu, 2019).

Another recent innovation in academic library service is the development of the Institutional Repositories (IR) and creation of Open Access Initiative (OAI). Lynch (2003) defines IR as a

“collection of services that a university offers to members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institutions and community members” They are digitally formatted publications to solve the problem of inaccessibility to information occasioned by high cost of scholarly publications (Asubiojo, 2018). Institutional Repositories provide access to university publications such as conference proceedings, seminar papers, magazines, abstracts, dissertation/theses of postgraduate students and publications from faculty members. IR and OA have potential benefits for research and learning anywhere in the world. They create visibility for scholarly researches, take little space and remove barrier to access. In view of these benefits, Librarians are in the vanguard of the support for open access by sensitising authors to submit their publications to be archived in library repositories.

Issues and Challenges and Future Strategies for the Sustainability of Academic Libraries

Technological revolution and global access to electronic information resources are no doubt a great turning point in library information service delivery. Despite the incredible feat of digital revolution, there are factors limiting effective services delivery in the new library environment in Africa. The recurring issues facing academic libraries in Nigerian public institutions in particular are poor funding, inadequate ICT infrastructure including computer hard/software, dearth of telecommunication facilities, unreliable internet connection, low bandwidth and irregular power supply. Other problems include management attitude, lack of maintenance culture, absence of strategic planning as well as ICT policy (Ani & Edem, 2012; Oni et al., 2019; Folorunso, 2018).

It is a common knowledge that the dwindling budgetary allocation to tertiary institutions is in contrast to 26% UNESCO recommendation on education in Nigeria. For instance, budgetary provision for education in 2019 was between 15 and 20 percent lower; while budget share for 2021 is 5.6 percent, the lowest allocation since 2011 (www.premiumtimesng.com). Folorunso averred that poor funding is responsible for lack of effective ICT deployment, technological development and sustainability in Nigerian public universities and by extension slow digitisation in academic libraries.

For Nigerian tertiary educational institutions to be out of the woods various intervention programmes were employed to ease the poor funding and strengthen library collections development. Consequently, Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) Intervention established by the Education Tax Act is mandated to disburse the 2% Education Tax for the purpose of supporting public Tertiary institutions. The aim is to serve as a respite and improve the quality of tertiary education: universities, polytechnic and colleges of education and in particular to stimulate support for library development in the ratio of 70:30 percent for books/electronic resources and library furniture. The intervention was laudable and in the words of Oni et al, (2021) TETFUND intervention “indeed revamped and rescued Nigerian polytechnics libraries from the shambles.”

The government’s intervention has a major impact on technological development and towards in the march towards sustainability of digital libraries. However, non-existence of an ICT policy and lack of adequate stakeholders support as well as strategic planning remain a great concern. The

development of long-term strategies will provide direction, facilitate decision making in establishing effective and efficient future innovative services which, in turn, will enhance a sustainable plan for digitization in academic libraries in developing countries.

Conclusion

The world is no doubt, experiencing transformation in all spheres of human endeavours. The contribution of libraries and librarians in the attainment of education for sustainable development is significant to the realisation of qualitative and sustainable education development. This paper highlights the current trends in libraries services; innovative and creative services arising from digital revolution. Consequently, aligning with the demands of digitisation and digital libraries are the sure path towards meeting the future information needs of scholars, researchers and students for education for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. For academic libraries in Nigeria to be at par with their counterpart in developed countries in information services, efforts should be made by all stakeholders to support effective implementation of digital libraries in all tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria;
2. Funding is non-negotiable to the establishment of functional digital libraries; so the current intervention should be sustained and possibly improved upon
3. Deployment of high-grade ICT infrastructure should be aggressively pursued; and
4. Management in the Higher Educational Institutions should give maximum support to library growth and development.

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