



Current Trends and Emerging Issues in Academic and Research Libraries for Information Service Delivery

By

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PREAMBLE

Globally, the rapid and far-reaching developments that have occurred in the last two decades in terms of the development of technological innovations, the creation of vast amounts of freely available digital information and the adoption of new service delivery formats have resulted in dramatic changes in the character and the organization of academic and research libraries. Specifically, the current trends and the quick and easy access the advent of Internet provides to vast amounts of information sources have greatly affected the ways users in academic and research libraries interact with information resources and services. In Nigeria, the trends have prompted a radical change in library and information service delivery landscape that has shifted from a systems-oriented approach that focuses on how the systems work and get used to a user-centred approach that examines the system only as seen by the users. Basically, the trends have shifted the focus of service delivery mechanism from the systems to the users both in the development of information technologies and tools and in the organization and delivery of information services. Therefore, there is no better time to discuss on the dynamic world of academic and research libraries, where the landscape is continuously evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of information-seekers and knowledge creators.

Introduction

Academic and research libraries are service organizations that, within the context of the institutional mission, are expected to meet the academic and research needs of the population they serve by providing resources and services to support teaching, learning, and research activities. In order to align with the mandate, these categories of libraries are expected to embrace current trends to innovate for a future that provides technology-driven services.

In Nigeria, studies have shown that academic and research libraries have been successful in infusing traditional offerings to deliver services. There is no doubt that acquisitions, cataloguing and classification processes, reference services, and bibliographic searching skills remain the core of library service delivery model, however, attention is now focused on users and not on the systems (Otiike, F., & Barát,). As Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals, it is crucial to stay at the forefront of the field, navigating the current trends and emerging issues that shape the way information is accessed, utilized, and shared; especially in this era of rapid technological advancement, where we are witnessing a notable shift from traditional to digital resources, with an increasing emphasis on open-access initiatives.

Academic and research libraries are not only repositories of knowledge, but also hubs of innovation, embracing technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and machine learning to enhance information service delivery. In this presentation, I will talk about the transformative journey of information service delivery in academic and research libraries in Nigeria, examine the changing landscape and challenges, and provide a framework for future-ready academic and research libraries.

THE TRAJECTORY

Libraries, once having a monopoly on the delivery of information were now considered by users as a very small piece of the information pie as a result of the quick and easy access to vast amounts of digital information sources. These developments have prompted a radical change in the “information paradigm” that has shifted from a systems-oriented approach to a user-centred approach. This shift is transforming the provision of information and the roles of the information professionals and the nature of their work as presented in figure 1 - 6.

The traditional librarian played many roles:



Selecting and caring for physical materials

Today's librarian takes on the same duties, adapted for new media and user needs:



*Providing access to electronic and physical materials
Maintaining specialized knowledge of digital databases
Evaluating electronic materials and acquiring licenses*

Figure 1: The old and new order of information service provision



Maintaining connections with community institutions and other libraries



*Developing relationships with database managers, electronic publishers, etc.
Hosting community events
Partnering with other libraries to increase access to materials*

Figure 2: The old and new order of role specialisation

PHYSICAL TO VIRTUAL LIBRARIES

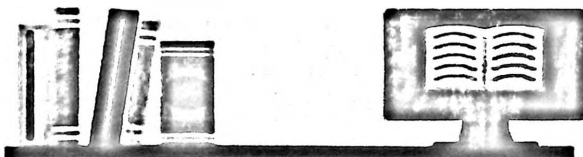


Figure 3: Balancing physical facilities and materials with increased demand for digital resources

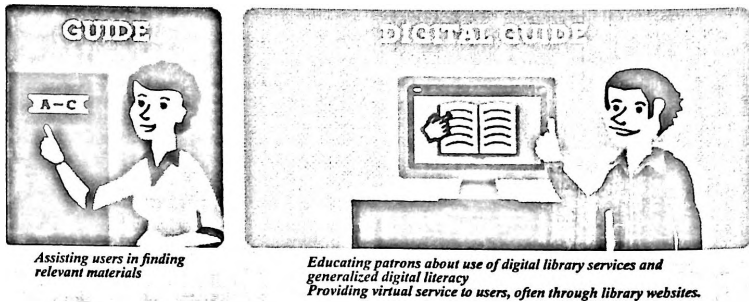


Figure 4: Demonstrating changing roles in information provision

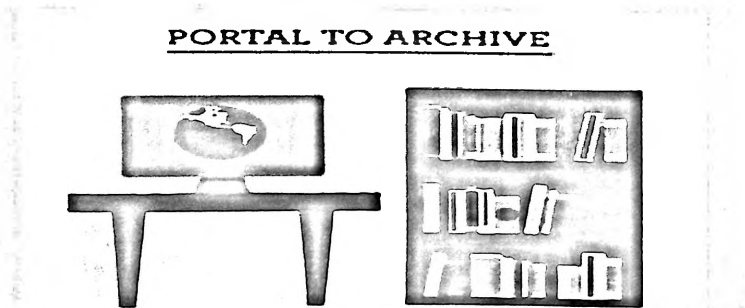


Figure 5: Balancing access to resources via networking with creating physical and digital archive

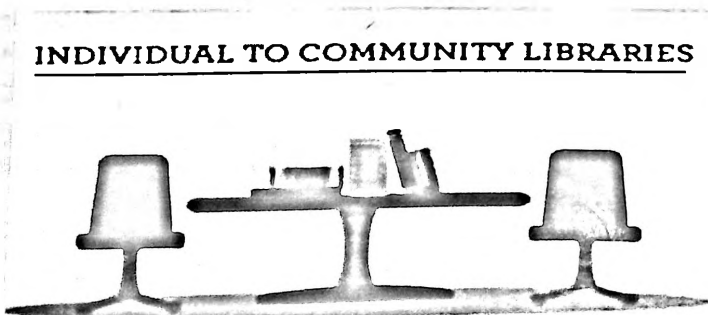


Figure 6: Accommodating users' needs while encouraging community participation by providing event and activity spaces

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

“Plato has earlier postulated that the direction in which education starts a man will determine his future in life”. The world is changing rapidly and the unprecedented influence of technology has introduced innovations and revolutionary changes in higher education. In Nigeria, the mechanism for service delivery is also changing rapidly and disruptively in academic and research libraries, such that in the coming years, conventional library services will certainly not be the only offering library can offer but will be complemented by continuous top skills for a complete change all altogether. With focus on emerging trends, LIS professionals are now faced with paradigm shift in library service delivery that are shaping the future of academic and research libraries. Such emerging trends include;

- i. Technological advancements
- ii. Shifting workplace dynamics and skill requirements
- iii. Interdisciplinary approaches to Global Challenges
- iv. Deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and
- v. Research Data Management

I. TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Technology is profoundly changing the educational sector in many ways. It is also expanding access to library resources and services, and making learning more dynamic and engaging. The following are some of the ways in which technology is impacting academic and research institutions:

a. Online Learning

Online learning is evolving, and technology is extending education by providing students and researchers with access to learning resources via the web whenever and wherever there is internet connection. In academic and research libraries, LIS professionals are perfectly positioned to assist faculty in the development of online courses and provision of instruction, technologies and spaces that support digital literacy to address emerging issues which include library automation, creating access to Online Public

Access Catalogue (OPAC), providing quick access to open content and data sets through Open Educational Resources (OERs), curating academic content in Institutional Repositories, providing digital library service, and embarking on library digitization, etc.

Placing librarians physically in the flow of teaching and research efforts has been the trend for years. If courses remain online, deeper integration of both library resources and personnel into learning management systems is essential to ensure students gain information literacy skills. In the new information landscape, librarians, especially those in academic and research libraries are expected to help faculty members develop course content, co-teach, provide research consultations, hold virtual office hours online and assist in the identification and linking of course content.

b. Quality and Quantity of Educational/Research Content

Technology is improving the quality and quantity of educational and research content. Technology is being used to scale up access to quality content, facilitating differentiated instructions, increasing opportunities for lifelong learning, and increasing student/researcher's engagement. In this landscape, academic and research libraries are expected to provide content management of research activities, online reference service, etc.

c. Digital Technologies

Digital technologies are creating powerful impact on education and research processes. For example, access to digital simulations and models is helping lecturers/researchers to clearly explain difficult concepts, and also helping students who are visual or tactile learners better understand learning concepts. Consequently, for an increase in digital technologies in the coming years, by transitioning digitized content from being a method of preservation or preview, to being the primary access point, Library and

Information Science (LIS) professionals will need to deploy applicable skills to effectively fit in the current trends of service delivery.

d. Improved Communication

Technology is improving communication as it provides more opportunities to communicate with library patrons, community and stakeholders.

ii. SHIFTING WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

Workplace dynamics and skill requirements are shifting rapidly due to technological advancements which offers new and potentially more widely diverse ways to work. Therefore, Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals must be prepared to adapt to the shift. The following are some of the ways in which workplace dynamics and skill requirements are shifting.

a. Reskilling and Upskilling

Re-skilling and up-skilling are becoming increasingly important as the skill requirements of workforce is changing. Few years from now, skills considered important in today's job requirements may change. Library workers must be prepared to adapt to these changes by reskilling and upskilling to remain employable in the labour force of the future.

b. Shift in Skill Requirements

The shift in skill requirements is happening across sectors and professions. The pace of technology adoption signals that in-demand skills across jobs will change over the next few years. An estimated one-third of the global occupational transitions will happen in the twenty-first century. Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals must adapt to these changes by identifying the implications of those shifts and building the workforce of academic and research libraries of the future. Now, the question is what skill requirement does LIS professionals in academic and research libraries need

to create new and innovative services to meet patrons' expectations? Based on trend analysis, addressing some realities of how library operations have changed in terms of collections, services and spaces, would require new thinking, new discovery and new skills for LIS professionals. In this presentation, I have conceptualized areas of library offerings that requires new strategies by integrating applicable skills which include: ICT skills, Advocacy skills, Instructional skills, networking skills, Communication skills, financial management skills, problem-solving skills, etc.

c. Impact on Wages (Multiple streams of income)

Automation and Artificial Intelligence are having a significant impact on wages. Librarians who can complement the new automation and perform tasks beyond the abilities of machines may enjoy rising compensation.

d. importance of Social and Emotional Skills

The importance of social and emotional skills is increasing in the workplace. Historically, technical skills have been the most important skills in the workplace. However, as technology become more prevalent, social and emotional skills are becoming increasingly important. Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals in academic and research libraries must be ready to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and manage their emotions to succeed in the new trends.

iii. INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Global challenges are complex, and require interdisciplinary teams to address issues around problems of development, implementation, and evaluation of solution systems. Globally, the current trends in academic and research institutions is the idea of not operating in silos. Now, in Nigeria, librarians are collaborating with faculty members and researchers to apply for research grants to identify real-world solutions to environmental, economic and social challenges.

iv. DEPLOYMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) now marks an acceleration over the shifts of even the recent past. Concept such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (AR) and Machine Learning (ML) are transforming educational and research institutions and fundamentally changing teaching and learning across higher education.

Library and Information Science research have reported that libraries have been reluctant to embrace artificial intelligence technologies due to fear of human being losing jobs and the need to protect the intellectual freedom of library patrons. However, in the current trends, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies have been harnessed to provide more tailored search results, attract patrons to the library, improve efficiency and impact with personalized content, provide personalized marketing messages that resonate, enable users to experience digitally rendered content in both real and virtual environment, provide answers to frequently asked questions to users, and general improve library ambience.



Figure 7: *Deployment of Artificial Intelligence to Library Service at the University of Lagos*

v. RESEARCH DATA MANAGEMENT (RDM)

Many organizations, including academic and research institutions has realized that data is the new oil because of its importance in the knowledge economy. The increasing valuation of data has led to the emergence of data management services in most academic and research libraries. Adopting a strategy framework which could address some issues around service delivery may enable academic and research libraries remain ahead of the curve when it comes to offering relevant and top-notch data for research work, and to remain relevant in their role of providing timely and reliable data to users that benefit from the data on offer.

CHALLENGES

In a bid to meet up with this fast-changing track, academic and research libraries have faced a lot of challenges, such as:

1. Chronic financial constraints
2. Inadequate basic infrastructure
3. Insufficient ICT infrastructure
4. Slow acceptance of open access resources
5. Resistance to change

More than two decades ago, Colson (1980), in his essay about the education of librarians, asked two questions that are still relevant today. He asked what does a librarian needs to know and when does a librarian needs to know it?

Ladies and gentlemen, the issue at hand seems inexhaustible, however, taking the following steps is deemed to be capable of repositioning academic and research libraries in Nigeria:

1. Internal and External assessment to discover the shortcomings and gaps
2. To authenticate/confirm or subject findings made to existing norms,
3. Redefining the vision, mission, value and client or audience (stakeholders)
4. Redefining the environment (internal and external) including the

competitors

5. Identify gaps and define the differences
6. Itemize and Prioritize
7. Develop an action plan
8. Develop a new position with a sellable statement or preposition
9. Develop policy to serve as blueprint document, and make
10. Present your position and proposal to stakeholders with a new branding statement.

Specifically, therefore, the foundational requirements to delivery of good information services in academic and research libraries will require the following:

1. Good leadership and governance
2. Financial autonomy
3. Knowledge driven programme
4. Good policy structure
5. Knowledgeable, exposed, experienced, creative, dynamic and innovative library personnel
6. Supportive stakeholders
7. Private sector support and partnership
8. Modern library facilities - quality and quantity

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, repositioning academic and research libraries to deploy current trends to information service delivery is not a wishful thinking. It is a clarion call to all and sundry of the need to remain relevant and move with the current trend. Therefore, it is expedient for libraries to look at their vision and mission statements, rejuvenate and reinforce where there is need for structural service disequilibrium. I have no doubt that this is a task we can accomplish. If we keep providing information services the way it ought to be done, rather than being unnecessarily conservative, we are bound to achieve better results. Maybe we need to ask the question after this 9th annual

conference, what is next? What are students, researchers, faculty, staff, and other external users' need from our libraries? What impact has library services had on our users, immediate community and Nigeria? Have we heard of one day economy? How are libraries in developing countries transforming their communities. If we are not there yet, now is the time to try to get there. Therefore, the executives of the academic and research libraries section of the Nigerian Library Association should not work in silos in building capacity and skill competencies to their members to face emerging issues in information service delivery in academic and research libraries in Nigeria. Strategies for a future-ready academic and research libraries section would need to be strengthened by working together with other section of the Nigerian Library Association in order to find answers to the questions asked, and maybe ask new questions that will help to educate Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals of the future as problems cannot be solved in isolation.

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