



Emerging Roles of Libraries as Core Institutions for Research and Education

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Abstract

Promoting research and education has been a major concern that needs not to be overlooked. This is also coupled with the continuous negligence of the library on the side of many educational and research stakeholders. It is however right to assert that the library stands at the heart of education and research through certain emerging roles. To this end, the paper focuses on emerging roles as core institutions for research and education. In doing this, the study x-rayed the paradigm shift in the roles of libraries towards research and education promotion. It further explored into the emergent roles of libraries and librarians in promoting research and education as well as revealing vital skills required of the librarians to actively carry out these roles as ways through which these emerging roles can be sustained. Having discovered all these, the position of the paper lies on the conclusion that libraries as institutions acquire process, organize, preserve materials, provide reading and learning materials to help argument lectures notes with the facts and ideas while also playing critical role in ensuring the sustainability of the educational system, literacy level of the people and research productivity. The paper recommends, among other things, the need to organize sensitization programmes aimed at providing researchers, educators, and educational institution/policymakers with the understanding of the roles of the library as avenue by which information is acquired and disseminated to the people.

Keywords: Emerging, Roles, Libraries, Research and Education.

Introduction

It is very clear that education, research and library are inseparable concepts. These concepts are fundamentally and synchronically related to and co-exist with each other as one cannot be separated from the other. The success of one, depends on the other. This is in tandem with the submission of Kruse and Thestrup (2014) while revealing the place of research libraries in research data management. The library is saddled with the responsibility of playing central support roles in the lives of academic and research institutions in the tripartite areas of teaching, learning and research. Not only has the library continuously support research and education, Chukwueke and Onuoha (2019) observed that the roles of libraries in promoting research and education have

experienced new paradigm shift, unprecedented reshaping and alterations as a result of emerging waves of information communication technology (ICT) and its accompanying sustainable and disruptive technologies. With these, no doubt, the library is serving as the pivot around which academic activities revolves in educational and research institutions. In supporting this, Omeluzor and Ogo (2018) stated that in Nigeria, no tertiary institution can be established without a functional and well stocked library. Also, no academic programme can be accredited by the regulatory bodies, unless there are adequate library materials in print and non-print available in the library.

In the light of the above assertions, Mahesh (2019) remarked that libraries are expected to act as a catalyst that supports learning, teaching and research activities of a learning community by the steady contribution towards educational sustenance through acquisition, provision and dissemination of information materials beyond the print pattern or format. However, Ani et al. (2022) in their submissions agreed that libraries, especially academic and research libraries serve the research needs of students and staff. In the view of Agbo and Onyekweodiri (2014), the abundance of information resources provided by libraries makes them a potential learning environment. The authors therefore advocated that a good library should provide multifunctional environment within the library space as this would create a platform for individuals to achieve set goals bearing in mind that their major objectives are to serve the needs of the academic community; to provide study areas for users; to provide a lending service appropriate to the different types of users; and to provide an active information service. This can only be done by leveraging on the roles of the library, and understanding the constantly changing needs of library users. To this end, the paper seeks to focus on the emerging roles of libraries as core institutions for research and education. This is with the view of further advocating the need for libraries to diversify their resources and services in such a way that they can significantly support teaching, learning and research.

Roles of Libraries in Promoting Research and Education: A Paradigm Shift

According to Omeluzor et al. (2017), libraries define, develop, and measure outcomes that contribute to institutional effectiveness and apply findings for purposes

of continuous educational and research improvement. They serve as agents for the advancement of professional values of intellectual freedom, intellectual property rights and values, user privacy and confidentiality, collaboration, and user-centered service. All these in the submission of Ekeh et al. (2023) are necessary ingredients in promoting research. Coming down to its pride of place in education, Mahesh (2019) noted that the libraries partner in the educational mission of the institution to develop and support information-literate learners who can discover, access, and use information effectively for academic success, research, and lifelong learning. This they do by enabling users to discover information in all formats through effective use of technology and organization of knowledge.

Additionally, Ekeh et al. (2023) added the providing access to collections sufficient in quality, depth, diversity, format, and currency to support the research and teaching missions of the institution while also serving as the intellectual commons, where users interact with ideas in both physical and virtual environments to expand learning and facilitate the creation of new knowledge, as part of the place of the library. To this end, remaining in the pride of place of education and research in any nation. Over the years, in the opinion of Uche-Okobi (2015) many libraries have supported educational efforts by providing teaching resources, information and referral services as well as offering educational classes. Some of these libraries have literacy programs designed to meet the needs of specific groups of people with limited infrastructure and available manpower (Somi & De-Jager, 2005). The provision of libraries is crucial and indispensable to education and research in any nation. Therefore, whatever is done to improve the quality of education is done to improve the nation. The absence of libraries will have negative impact on education.

It is a known fact that libraries have witnessed significant changes in recent years with an attempt to improve on their services. This change which is brought about by the introduction of ICT into library operations and services (library automation) has impacted on the mode of providing information services and further improved information service delivery in a more easy and fast method. While the developments and application of ICT in library operations have improved and facilitated the dissemination of information and access, it has equally provided new roles in information provision, dissemination and transfer. The library and librarian no longer

play a passive role but assume an active role. In line with this, Chukwueke and Onuoha (2019) noted that while providing books was a standalone function for libraries and librarians throughout the last few centuries, their offerings have evolved with the digital age to meet the changing needs of their patrons.

Aina (2014) had earlier noted that core library and information services, such as literature search, information literacy programmes among others are rarely provided to clients by Nigerian libraries. Thereby, making the submission of Omeluzor et al. (2017) which revealed that most Nigerian libraries did not organize programmes on reading and information literacy for its patrons, a decrying state. Ebiwolate (2010) stated that effective library and information services in rural areas can enhance development and improve quality of education in rural communities. According to Bertsch and Warner-Söderholm (2013), the educational institutions and libraries can serve as a medium to extend cultural discourse, literacy and research. Furthermore, the library can improve the literacy level of its users, sustain the educational system and support national development through the collection of relevant information materials.

The library is an indispensable element of the absolute well-being of the citizens and that of the nation at large. People acquire education through certain institutions, schools, agencies, welfare bodies, museums, and organizations, and library is the most outstanding of such institution. The library can be seen as an extension of education as it helps institutions to recruit and retain top researchers. Ani et al. (2022) opined that the library also contributes, positively or negatively, to an institution's reputation. The quality, nature, and extent of the library's collections, of its staff and the services they provide, and of its buildings are all important. Libraries help researchers win research grants and contracts, addition to the fact that successes in winning research grants and contracts is a side that the library can advance. Libraries could play a greater role if researchers knew that support was available, and if their involvement was more formalised. Going further, Brown, Malcome, and Richardson (2015) wrote that libraries have an opportunity to use their skills to help researchers improve the quality of their funding applications, and to increase the institution's success in winning research income. They also promote and exploit new technologies and new models of scholarly communications as well, libraries are critically important in helping

researchers to exploit the full benefits and opportunities of the networked world, including such developments as open access and social media. But libraries are not always well-equipped to promote change, and researchers sometimes resist efforts to modify their behaviours and practices. Nevertheless, many libraries have succeeded in addressing such problems, by establishing stronger links with researchers and re focusing their services to promote and exploit new technologies and new models of scholarly communication.

The Emergent Roles of Libraries and Librarians in Promoting Research and Education

It has been severally reported by authors that education and research cannot be sustained without the library. Some of these emergent roles that supports research and education include but not limited to the following:

1. Serving as an information broker institution for both prints and electronic media. This it does through the careful and scholarly selection, acquisition, organization, repackaging and provision of access to both digital and print information sources that supports research and education.
2. Serving as a center that facilitates and provides access to information easier by providing access to network, purchasing appropriate library software, databases, e-books and e-journals that cannot be subscribed by individual researchers.
3. Serving as an education center charged with the responsibility of training its users on how to access both prints and electronic information resources. The library plays a role of educating the users on the use of search engines to surf materials from the internet.
4. Serving as a business management institution with the ability to negotiate with publishers. The library also discusses license agreements for books, e-journals and databases, which they in turn educate or assist the researcher or other education institution on the choice of publishers and other issues related to book publishing, trading, and its standard.

Today, librarians can no longer be simply information providers or the keepers of knowledge as their roles have gone beyond that. It is no longer possible for these

librarians to act without being continuously abreast of new methods and techniques and without being informed regularly about new trends and approaches. to make the service and development of information systems successful, librarians need to understand how people relate to information in every social situation. They must also be able to relate their clientele to the information needed, independent of the location and which media the information can be found. Brown et al. (2015) submitted that librarians must be able to educate users on the myriad of 'good' and 'bad' information on the Internet. They are expected to help sieve the 'good' information from the 'bad' while maintaining their position as managers of information.

Furthermore, Giarlo (2013) noted that the shape of traditional libraries containing a large number of printed documents is in the process of being transformed to paperless libraries containing a large number of digitized documents. Angie, Ria, Diane, and Yan (2016) added that the facilities offered by networking have not left libraries untouched. Modern libraries are not only digitized but networked also. This has led to the creation of virtual libraries i.e., libraries beyond four walls through which the users have access to information at anytime, anywhere in the world by using the modern tools of communications, such as computers and Internet facilities. Necessarily, these forces of change encourage libraries to work together in new as well as collective ways. The fact that some libraries have resources and incentives to build and manage unique collections can allow others to focus more intensively on ensuring accessibility to the range of information now available from other libraries as well as from multifarious digital sources (Chukwueke & Onuoha, 2019). A defining element of this moment is the capacity for academic and research libraries to accelerate their own transformational goals of enhancing education and supporting research through collaborative action. Nonetheless, in sustaining education and increasing the literacy level of library users, libraries in Nigeria are expected to create awareness of available information resources in the library (both on the shelves within the library and on databases), and serve as an advocate of information literacy. Ebiwolate (2010) noted that the library in the rural areas can be utilized to distribute literacy materials to the rural communities that will help the people to be more functional in their occupations. According to Omeluzor and Ogo (2018), libraries in the new millennium are leaders in knowledge management while librarians are innovative in their use of the new

information technologies to provide access to a range of multimedia sources. Today's libraries teach students the information handling skills to last a lifetime. While the library is essential to any formal educational system, the resources offered by the library are also required by people engaged in improving their education, whether at the remedial, functional or higher educational level as a good well-equipped library is a *sine qua non* for the intellectual, moral, and spiritual advancement and elevation of the people of any community. In recent years, many libraries have demonstrated that they can seize opportunities to help institutions respond to changes in the research environment.

Leveraging on the Emergent Roles of Libraries: Librarians and the Need for Skills Acquisition

As the traditional custodian of information, librarians in the 21st century need to be aware of these significant changes and as such employ their technological knowhow and intellectual masterpiece in order to retain the leading role of the libraries in supporting teaching, learning and research. This means that the 21st century librarian will have to be armed with competent skills that will enhance the provision of effective library services to meet client's changing information needs. Literature abounds on the competencies and skills needed for the 21st century library professional. Some of the skills required include the capacity to learn constantly and quickly; flexibility; innate skepticism; propensity to take risks; abiding public service perspective; good interpersonal skills; skill at enabling and fostering change; and capacity for and desire to work independently. Mahesh (2019) mentioned basic knowledge of computers and their capabilities to involve competency with search engines; internet facilities; e-mail; internet navigator tools, web browsers and web file formats; database software; internet development and management know-how. Also, some of the 21st century skills according to Ansari (2007) include communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, media literacy, ICT literacy, flexibility and adaptability. According to Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013), librarians have the power to change lives and build community- but to do this, they have to leave their desks, leave their buildings and show the community what a powerful tool they are or have in their possessions.

Nonetheless, the use of technology in these modern libraries has various impacts on the librarian's role as well. Today, libraries are moving from use of card catalogues to the use of online catalogues. Librarians have also shifted from manual to online cataloguing, such as the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Their present roles and expectations include indexing services, web designing as well as management of library computer systems. They are faced with the issue of developing software and the MARC standards needed for cataloguing records electronically as well as management of intrusion servers. They equally teach their clients how to use the new technologies in accessing their materials. Most modern day librarians provide virtual reference services and battle with the challenges of moving from manual to more virtual work environments. Gerolimos and Konsta (2011) observed that it is time for libraries and librarians to publicize themselves, their professionalism, and the skills they have to offer. From the foregoing, one can see that the librarian in the face of emergent is no longer one that sits behind the reference desk answering mere reference questions but rather an active marketer who sells the library's products and services to his community at every opportunity. All these are pointers towards assisting the academic and research libraries to advance their emergent roles in promoting education and research.

The modern day library and librarian can only operate maximally in this dispensation if the enough skills to match with the present responsibilities and emergent roles are acquired and made available. Muthu, Rameshbabu, and Baskaran (2015) opined that the onus of transforming traditional libraries into the 21st century ones mainly fall on the librarians. They must shift from information locators to information evaluators and instructors in the use and evaluation of information sources, especially, in academic libraries. The academic and research libraries of the present day, need librarians who are educated, experienced, intelligent and resourceful. Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013) opined that librarian in the 21st century must train and retrain themselves and should stop believing that the onus of training falls entirely on their employers. Academic and research librarians must constantly update their skills and become multi-skilled to meet up with imminent current challenges. They must also be equipped with a wide range of personal and transferable skills in order to manage the changing environment in which they work. These

librarians are technology application leaders who work with other members of the information management team to make information accessible to users.

Eghe-Ohenmwun (2015) referred librarians to knowledge-based practitioners who use research as a foundation for their own professional practice. They are further expected to be engaged in the exploration and implementation of new technologies needed to match with the present patrons most of whom have become technologically savvy in the use of ICT. They must possess high level of information literacy skills, as well as knowledge of the principles and techniques of effective reference services. It is expected that the present-day academic and research librarians participate in research which plays a big role in both knowledge acquisition and service delivery. Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013) posit that the academic and research librarians in the face of emergent roles for quality education and research must be committed to research and contribution to the profession.

Conclusion

Libraries have vital role to play in education and research. It is in search of this justification that this paper was conceived. It clearly explained how libraries through the array of its resources have continuously played an important role in the education programme in sustaining the diverse forms of cultural expressions. Libraries acquire process, organize, preserve materials, provide reading and learning materials to help argument lectures notes with facts and with ideas. It also provides information service, which is an essential element in the communication and research processes. Additionally, libraries serve as information system to allow one to explore parameter of his topic, promote functional literacy and education for individuals outside the formal school system. They provide appropriate reading materials to assist the government efforts in providing the illiterate adults in improving their educational standard and technical competence. Consequently, identifying the library's role in achieving a sustainable educational system and infusing literacy among the people will ensure vibrancy of a nation's human capital development. A nation cannot be well developed without a stable educational system and the library at the centre to support learning, teaching and research. Enhancing the library's emerging roles as core institutions for research and education will bring about a turnaround in the literacy level of the citizens and further improve on research productivity

Recommendation

Considering the library as a strong pillar of education and research and revealing its emerging roles entails putting everything in place towards ensuring that it plays its critical role in ensuring the sustainability of the educational system, literacy level of the people and research productivity. In view of this, the following are recommended.

1. Sensitization programmes should be organized to provide researchers, educators, and educational institution/policymakers with the understanding of the roles of the library as avenue by which information is acquired and disseminated to the people.
2. Government and other authorities concerned should ensure the provision of adequate funding and support to libraries to strengthen them towards supporting research and development.
3. There is need to acquire and deploy modern facilities that supports education and research into the libraries. These facilities, include ICT facilities that provides library users the opportunity to have access to array of information resources at their comfort zones. Some of these ICT facilities include, Augmented Reality (AR) Devices, multimedia tools, digital microscopes and cameras, audio recording devices, wearable devices, robotics kits, etc.
4. Librarians should be made to undergo training and re-training on skills and emergent roles of librarians. With this knowledge, these librarians will have the ability to fit into reality instead of leveraging on ancient roles and means of delivering library services.

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