

ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 4: THE PLACE OF LEARNING COMMONS IN NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

BY

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential of transforming traditional Nigerian academic libraries into "Learning Commons" collaborative, technology-integrated, and resource-rich environments to advance SDG 4. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasizes quality education, ensuring inclusive, equitable access and lifelong learning opportunities. In the Nigerian context, academic libraries play a pivotal role in actualizing this goal by providing essential resources and support to students, educators, and the community. Through a review of literature, stakeholder insights, and best practices globally, we propose strategies for creating effective learning commons that align with SDG 4 objectives in Nigerian academic institutions. It was recommended that libraries should foster connections with local communities by offering public workshops, resources and spaces accessible to the general public, thus promoting lifelong learning and community education.

Keywords: *Information Services, Sustainable Development Goals, Learning Commons, Nigerian Academic, Libraries Services*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to addressing pressing development challenges. SDGs 4, which is Quality Education, aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, promoting lifelong learning opportunities (United Nations, 2015). Academic libraries play a vital role in supporting quality education, and the concept of Learning Commons has gained prominence in enhancing student learning outcomes.

Education is central to human development and sustainable growth, forming the backbone of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The United Nations (UN) developed SDG 4 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Libraries, particularly academic libraries, have long been hubs of knowledge, literacy, and research. In the Nigerian context, however, these libraries often face challenges in adapting to modern educational needs, limiting their capacity to contribute effectively to SDG 4.

Learning Commons, also known as Information Commons or Knowledge Commons, refers to collaborative learning spaces that integrate technology, resources, and services to support student-centered learning (Beagle, 2020). These spaces foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, essential skills for the 21st century. Library enables its users to acquire information literacy and learning skills by providing quality service to accompany and support teaching and research activities. Second, the library implements the university's library policy, and serves the information and documentation needs of students, faculty, and researchers. In addition, it supports literacy programs, provides a safe space for learning, and assists researchers in the reuse of research results and data to advance knowledge.

In Nigeria, academic libraries face challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and outdated technologies (Adeyeye, 2017). Despite these challenges, some Nigerian libraries have established Learning Commons, demonstrating potential for improvement. Learning commons have gained popularity in academic libraries worldwide as a means to provide collaborative, technology-enhanced spaces for students to engage in various learning activities (Beagle, 2012). In Nigeria, the concept of learning commons is relatively new, but there is growing interest in implementing these spaces to support modern pedagogical approaches and enhance the learning experience (Adeyemi, 2017).

Oladokun (2019) conducted a study on the implementation of learning commons in Nigerian university libraries and found that while some institutions have begun to adopt this model, many still face challenges in terms of infrastructure, funding, and staff expertise. The study highlighted the need for more research and investment in this area to fully realize the potential of learning commons in supporting SDG 4.

One of the key aspects of learning commons is the integration of technology to support learning and research. Adeleke and Olorunsola (2010) examined the role of academic libraries in promoting digital literacy among Nigerian students. They emphasized the importance of equipping libraries with modern technologies and training staff to support students in developing essential digital skills.

Building on this, Emiri (2015) investigated the use of emerging technologies in Nigerian academic libraries and found that while there is a growing awareness of their importance, many libraries still struggle with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to digital resources. The study suggested that implementing learning commons with up-to-date technologies could significantly contribute to achieving SDG 4 by improving access to quality education and

promoting digital literacy. This research investigates the achieving the sustainable development goals 4 for learning commons in Nigerian academic libraries

Literature Review

Concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs were adopted as the UN agenda for 2030 by the UNs 193 members in September 2015 and they came into force on 1 January 2016 (Chewe and Imasiku, 2018). Sometimes referred to as the UN agenda 2030 (Arhin, 2016), it is a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that everyone, everywhere enjoys peace and prosperity (Mensah, 2019; Siakwah et al., 2020). While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of all Goals (Michael and Salleh, 2021; Tuokuu et al., 2019). The SDGs are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all (Gyamerah, 2019). They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice (United Nations, 2019). It is often the key to success for one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another (Gyamerah, 2019). There are seventeen goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues, from ending poverty and hunger to improving health and education, reducing inequality and combating climate change (World Health Organization, 2015).

The SDGs are complex, ambitious and interconnected and relate to themes ranging from industry, sustainable cities and communities, climate action and infrastructure (Kumi et al., 2020). The interconnected nature of the SDGs reflects the complexity of the agenda involving efforts by multiple stakeholders (Kumi, 2019). They are intended to be universal in the sense of embodying

a universally shared common global vision of progress towards a safe (Gyamerah, 2019; Chewe and Imasiku, 2018), just and sustainable space for all human beings to thrive on the planet (Omisore et al., 2017). They reflect the moral principles that no one and no country should be left behind (Kumi et al., 2020; Gyamerah, 2019) and that everyone and every country should be regarded as having a common responsibility for playing their part in delivering the global vision (Kumi et al., 2020). In general terms, all of the goals have, therefore, been conceived as applying both as ambitions and as challenges to all countries (Owusu-Manu et al., 2020). All of the goals and targets contain important messages and challenges for developed and developing countries alike.

The SDGs reflect an opportunity for us to come together to advocate for positive change (Mukhi and Quental, 2019) built on the values of solidarity, human dignity, care for creation and inclusive participation (Owusu-Sekyere, 2019; Chetty, 2018). Actions to achieve these global goals should always have those who are far behind (the poorest and most marginalized people) at their heart (Rosa et al., 2019; Chetty, 2018) so that no goal or target is considered achieved unless met for all people, whoever and wherever they are (Omisore et al., 2017).

SDG 4: Quality Education

Obtaining quality education is the foundation for creating sustainable development (Hickel, 2015). For quality education to be effective, investment is needed in educational scholarships, teacher training workshops, school buildings and improvement of water and electricity access to schools (Kumar, 2017). Quality education thrives on information and knowledge (Karkouti et al., 2021; Dei, 2019). Information and knowledge again serve as the foundation for the growth and development of individuals, organizations and societies (Dei, 2017). This is because they are the supporting tool for all decisions and actions regarding any

development and enterprise (Centobelli et al., 2018). Information and knowledge are, therefore, strategic tools for achieving sustainable development in the areas of quality education, economic, social and environmental objectives (Alakpodia, 2010).

The SDG 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and has seven targets and three means of implementation (Owusu-Ansah, 2021; English and Carlsen, 2019). This goal came about through an intensive consultative process led by member states, but with broad participation from civil society, teachers, unions, bilateral agencies, regional organizations, the private sector and research institutes and foundations (Unterhalter, 2019). Progress has been made towards achieving the SDG 4 (Gyamerah, 2019) and there are new knowledge horizons and opportunities for strengthened solidarity and partnerships around the provision of quality education and lifelong learning for all (Boeren and Field, 2019). Yet the context is also changing with new technologies and skill demands (Comyn, 2018), as well as economic shocks and environmental degradation (Usman et al., 2020). Many barriers to education access and educational outcomes remain in place while challenges to the monitoring of progress persist (Kioupi and Voulvoulis, 2019).

Concept of Learning Commons

Learning commons in academic libraries integrate technology, collaborative spaces, and diverse resources to create adaptable environments that support active learning. These spaces encourage peer learning, access to digital resources, and community engagement, key components in achieving SDG 4. One of the key aspects of learning commons is the integration of technology to support learning and research. Adeleke and Olorunsola (2010) examined the role of academic libraries in promoting digital literacy among Nigerian students. They emphasized the importance

of equipping libraries with modern technologies and training staff to support students in developing essential digital skills.

Learning commons are designed to facilitate collaborative learning and the development of 21st-century skills. Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2009) explored the impact of collaborative learning spaces on student engagement and academic performance in Nigerian universities. Their findings indicated that such spaces could significantly enhance student learning outcomes and contribute to the achievement of SDG 4. Furthermore, Idiegbeyan-Ose et al. (2019) conducted a study on the role of academic libraries in developing employability skills among Nigerian graduates. They argued that learning commons could serve as ideal environments for students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, which are essential for lifelong learning and employability.

Building on this, Emiri (2015) investigated the use of emerging technologies in Nigerian academic libraries and found that while there is a growing awareness of their importance, many libraries still struggle with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to digital resources. The study suggested that implementing learning commons with up-to-date technologies could significantly contribute to achieving SDG 4 by improving access to quality education and promoting digital literacy.

Academic Libraries and SDG 4

Libraries play an important role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It is globally considered as a centre of research and a place of information empowerment which role can never be over emphasized, as the public benefit immensely from it. Library and information centres is an institution that is responsible for the selection, ordering, acquisition, processing,

storing, preservation of resources in diverse formats to users at the appropriate time (Tbaishat, 2021). Similarly, Nicholas and Perpetual (2015) pointed out library as an information centre that acquire process, organize, store, retrieve and disseminate information to users.

Libraries play critical roles in achieving the SDGs (Omona, 2020; Dzandza, 2017) by going a step further in advocacy and exploring a more advanced narrative of policies and indicators (IFLA, 2016). Libraries are globally considered as a center of research and a place of information empowerment whose role can never be over-emphasized, as the public benefit immensely from it (Cyr and Connaway, 2020; Pinto and Ochloa, 2017). Libraries are institutions that are responsible for the selection, ordering, acquisition, processing, storing, preservation of resources in diverse formats to users at the appropriate time to help in the achievement of the SDGs (Igbinovia, 2016; Abata-Ebire et al., 2018). Similarly, Chigwada (2021) pointed out libraries are centers that acquire, process, organize, store, retrieve and disseminate information to users with the desire to achieve the SDGs. Libraries, whichever form or type, have a greater responsibility in the development of a global partnership for development by acquiring, packaging, organizing and disseminating knowledge and experience (Tbaishat, 2021).

Libraries, therefore, can foster understanding of academic libraries and communication through library awareness campaign strategy and this brings together some of the ideas for global development (Uhegbu and Igwe, 2006). Libraries contribute to improved outcomes across the SDGs by promoting universal literacy, including digital, media and information literacy and skills, with the support of dedicated staff; closing gaps in access to information and helping government, civil society and business to understand local information needs better; providing a network of delivery sites for government programs and services; advancing digital inclusion through access to ICT; serving as the heart of the research and academic community; and preserving and providing

access to the world's culture and heritage (IFLA, 2016). Libraries provide information literacy skills and long-life learning for the public (Bahrami and Harandi, 2020; Abata-Ebire et al., 2018) by educating and enlightening youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (Nwankwo et al., 2020; Abata-Ebire et al., 2018). More so, they must organize and disseminate information that society will access and use to inform themselves on various issues of life (Agboke, 2019; Chukwuyere et al., 2020) and by empowering communities through knowledge and the ability to access information for themselves (Agboke, 2019; Abata-Ebire et al., 2018).

SDG 4 emphasizes the importance of inclusive and equitable education. Adebayo et al. (2018) examined the accessibility of library services for students with disabilities in Nigerian academic libraries. Their study revealed significant gaps in providing inclusive services and recommended that the implementation of learning commons should consider the needs of all users, including those with disabilities. Academic libraries provide crucial support for education, offering resources, study spaces, and technological tools necessary for academic success. SDG 4 emphasizes the need for inclusive, quality education an aim that aligns with the objectives of modern academic libraries that function as learning commons.

Role of Learning Commons in Advancing SDG 4

1. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** A learning commons model in Nigerian academic libraries promotes accessibility to all students, including those from marginalized backgrounds, supporting SDG 4's goal of inclusive education. Features like digital literacy training and online databases ensure students gain access to quality materials irrespective of economic status or geographical location.

2. **Enhanced Learning Experiences:** Learning commons are designed to support collaborative work and research activities, encouraging knowledge exchange and peer-based learning. Students benefit from diverse study spaces, including silent areas, multimedia rooms, and communal zones, fostering skills like teamwork, problem-solving, and digital literacy.
3. **Infrastructure and Funding Needs:** Substantial investments are required to renovate libraries and equip them with modern technologies. Public-private partnerships, grants, and government initiatives could provide funding to support this transformation.
4. **Technological Integration:** Learning commons rely heavily on technology, requiring reliable internet, digital resources, and electronic learning tools. Collaborations with tech companies and NGOs specializing in digital education can facilitate the implementation of such technologies in Nigerian academic libraries.
5. **Training and Professional Development:** Library staff need training to manage and facilitate learning commons effectively. Workshops on digital resource management, teaching pedagogy, and student engagement will empower librarians to support SDG 4 by actively participating in the educational process.

Conclusion

Libraries are essential tools in the society and they play an important role in achieving sustainable development goals. If sustainable development goal in Nigeria is to be sustained, citizens need to be well informed and this can be done through information selection, processing, organizing and dissemination of resources taking into account the development indicators raised in the sustainable development goals (SDGs), hosting local forums where people can discuss problems such as community health, education, environmental issues, climate change etc.

The literature review reveals that while there is growing interest in implementing learning commons in Nigerian academic libraries to support SDG 4, significant challenges remain. Transforming Nigerian academic libraries into learning commons presents a powerful avenue to achieve SDG 4, addressing barriers to quality education through enhanced accessibility, inclusivity, and digital learning. While challenges such as funding and technological constraints exist, strategic partnerships and policy reforms can provide sustainable solutions. Academic libraries, as learning commons, can redefine the educational landscape, offering Nigerian students and communities lifelong learning opportunities that support equitable development and quality education. Future research should focus on developing strategies to overcome these obstacles and exploring innovative approaches to implement learning commons that are tailored to the Nigerian context. Additionally, more empirical studies are needed to assess the impact of learning commons on student learning outcomes and their contribution to achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria.

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