

Navigating the turbulence of inadequate funding of academic libraries for effective service delivery in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines measures for navigating the turbulence of inadequate funding of academic libraries for effective service delivery in Nigeria. It established that libraries require sufficient financial resources to provide effective services to all patrons. Proper funding is essential for libraries to fulfill their crucial role in society, offering a wide variety of resources and services in different formats to meet the diverse needs of individuals and groups for their personal development, education, information, recreation, and leisure. The study notes that today's libraries have transformed into bustling information hubs, offering information in various ways to benefit users. The study highlights the challenges faced by academic libraries in securing funding and explores various strategies for generating revenue. These include fee-based services, consultancy services, subventions, budgetary allocations, grants, endowments, and creating groups such as friends of the library. To remain relevant and provide value to their users, academic libraries must also innovate and adopt new technologies and models of service delivery.

Keywords: Funding, Alternative sources, Academic libraries, Service Delivery, Nigeria

Introduction

Funding is a vital component for any successful organization, including libraries. Without sufficient financial resources, librarians may struggle to provide effective services to all patrons. Modern library services require basic facilities such as computers, software packages, and Internet accessories, which cannot be acquired without adequate funds (Irenea, Emilian, Eru, 2019; Madu, Gomna, Oname & Jibril, 2020). The act of providing financial resources, usually in the form of money or other values, to support a need, program, or project is known as funding. For a library to thrive, it must be well-funded to acquire all necessary information resources. Studies have shown that the current lower levels of reading and learning proficiency can be attributed to underfunding of libraries and their services (Mehta, 2019; Madu et al, 2020). Proper funding is essential for libraries to fulfill their crucial role in society.

Libraries have a crucial role to play in offering a wide variety of resources and services in different formats to meet the diverse needs of individuals and groups for their personal development, education, information, recreation, and leisure. In today's fast-paced world, libraries have transformed into bustling information hubs, where information is presented in various ways to benefit users. The value of a library collection goes beyond the quantity of information sources it holds; it also depends on the effectiveness of providing and interpreting them to users.

The ongoing trend of decreasing budgetary allocations for libraries globally can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including economic pressures, the ruling class's perception of libraries, and

inadequate advocacy by library professionals and associations in Africa. Additionally, tax support for libraries is also dwindling, exacerbating the challenges faced by these institutions. Numerous studies have documented these challenges. (Babayi, Makintami & Tumba, 2019; Irenea, et al. 2019; Mamman & Nwokedi, 2019; Madu, et al. 2020). As a result, libraries have been forced to operate with limited resources, making it challenging for them to deliver quality services to their patrons.

Nigerian libraries face financial constraints, especially in funding information resources and services for students with special needs. Adequate funding is necessary to acquire materials for all categories of people, whether challenged or unchallenged, as well as for maintaining staff, facilities, and services. Thus, libraries must receive the necessary funding to cater to the needs of all users and continue to serve as valuable resources for personal growth and development.

Funding and Academic Libraries in Nigeria

The issue of insufficient funding for libraries is not a new one. Libraries face a range of challenges due to inadequate funding. In Nigeria, various obstacles hinder library funding, such as a lack of emphasis on education and library development by successive governments, with only nominal support given over the years. Typically, funding for library and information services is obtained from the university library's owner. The number of resources allocated can vary, either as a fixed percentage of received grants or through informal arrangements. Therefore, it is crucial to explore alternative library funding approaches. The level of funds available to a library has a significant impact on all aspects of its operations. That is to say, for library activities to truly thrive and succeed, they must be supported by sufficient and sustainable funding.

However, with the dwindling library budgets and steep increases in the prices of library materials, universities in Nigeria are facing a daunting challenge. Furthermore, the low and unbalanced exchange rate of the Naira against the US Dollar is making it increasingly difficult for universities to maintain the expected quality standards. Despite these challenges, universities are witnessing overwhelming enrolment figures, which makes it imperative to identify and harness alternative sources of funds and library resources. Only through such measures can all the university libraries in Nigeria be equipped to provide quality education and research opportunities to students and researchers alike.

Irenea, et al. (2019) note that the core backbone of library services is hinged to a large extent on the level of funds at its disposal and the creative use of the funds. Unfortunately, academic libraries in Nigeria have experienced a considerable decrease in budgetary allocation and funding sources over recent years. This reduction has resulted in a significant challenge to the core functionality of these libraries, impacting their ability to provide adequate support to students, researchers, and other users. A study by Mamman and Nwokedi (2019) revealed that the sources of funding are mainly from the parent institutions of the libraries and grants from TETFund. Mamman and Nwokedi (2019) emphasized that funding is an indispensable requirement in libraries of academic institutions globally, as it ensures the attainment of the institutions' goals and guarantees national development. Poor or inadequate funding of academic libraries can have devastating consequences on a country's educational system. Adequate funding is the lifeline that ensures the achievement of the institution's academic goals and objectives and contributes to the overall development of the country. The effects of poor or insufficient funding of

academic libraries can be catastrophic, as it can have far-reaching and devastating consequences on the country's educational system.

Lamenting the effect of inadequate funding of academic libraries, Madu et al. (2020) assert that lack of funds to procure library resources is one of the major problems affecting effective service delivery among libraries. Lack of funds to acquire the necessary resources is a big challenge in the provision of quality service to users. Insufficient funds can lead to a shortage of materials, outdated collections, and a lack of access to the latest research and information, all of which can impede effective service delivery. Libraries rely on such resources to serve their communities effectively, and without sufficient funding, they may struggle to meet the information needs of their users. Lending a voice, Inyang and Wiche (2015) suggest that libraries can embrace diverse fundraising methods. They can do it as part of their own institution's fundraising efforts such as an unusual capital crusade. They can also divide fundraising work with the university management or hire an outside firm to do it for them. Several critical factors contribute to successful fundraising. The library must clearly state its objective and financial situation to potential donors, so they understand the need for fundraising. It should also select the most excellent group for fundraising, which includes volunteers, staff, and board members who are committed to the library's mission and have the skills and expertise to support the fundraising campaign.

Libraries, being an integral part of society, require financial support to function effectively. To obtain the necessary funds, libraries often appeal to the public for assistance and endowments. These contributions can come from individuals, organizations, or even government bodies. As rightly noted by Ubogu (2019), with appropriate structures for effective and resourceful responsibility and simplicity, funds can be generated to balance the shortfalls in monetary allocations. It is worth noting that support for libraries doesn't always have to come in the form of cash funding. Donations of equipment, supplies, or other resources can also be extremely helpful in supporting the library's mission and improving the user experience.

Challenges of Academic Libraries in Nigeria

Academic libraries in Nigeria encounter numerous challenges that hinder their ability to deliver efficient and productive services. Among these challenges are:

Inadequate funding: Unfortunately, libraries struggle to secure the funds needed to carry out their essential operations. These operations include acquiring new books, maintaining existing collections, providing access to digital resources, and offering educational programs and events. Unfortunately, many libraries face funding cuts due to budget constraints, leading to reduced hours of operation, understaffing, and a shortage of resources. As a result, patrons may experience longer wait times for popular materials, reduced access to technology, and fewer opportunities for community engagement. It's important to recognize the critical role that libraries play in our communities and to advocate for adequate funding to ensure that they can continue to serve and enrich our communities.

Inability to access funds: One of the main challenges faced by academic libraries in Nigeria is their inability to access funds from various agencies of the government such as the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), Ministry of Education, the Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PTDF), and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). Even though these initiatives were put in place to provide

funding for tertiary education in Nigeria, they seem to have failed to deliver the expected results. The Director of Research, Innovation, and Information Technology at NUC pointed out that the academic community in Nigeria is not proficient in writing grant proposals and accessing available funds, which is why they are not receiving funding like the TETFund. Instead of learning the art of grant writing, they simply expect the allocated funds to be handed to them (Alade & Aikulola, 2018 in Irenea et al. 2019).

Technological challenge: Many academic libraries have challenges providing basic services due to the absence and inability to subscribe to: Internet connectivity where available, bandwidth subscribed to is very insignificant to what is needed in many institutions around the country (Madu et al. 2020; Sahabi & Otoho, 2021), yet internet connectivity remains a very important requirement to service delivery in the current century; Online Databases and journals; functional library management software (LMSs) as most academic libraries in Nigeria do not have functional LMSs or where available have technical issues; proliferation of cloned/sub-standard computers and related technologies in the libraries due to corrupt practices within the system; poor security of resources due to the absence of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) to monitor users and staff with cases of theft and mutilation of resources rampant in most academic libraries (Olajide, 2017).

Corruption and mismanagement of available resources: Nigeria has been grappling with the issue of corruption and mismanagement of resources for a long time now. This issue has seeped into various sectors of the society, including the academic circle. Unfortunately, many academic libraries in Nigeria are also affected by this endemic scourge. The libraries lack adequate infrastructure and amenities that are necessary for learning and research. These amenities range from professional tools such as indexing and abstracting tools, to computers, scanners, printers, and many more. Due to the frequent power outages that are common in the country, students and researchers are forced to work in an environment that is not conducive to learning. Additionally, poorly maintained facilities such as restrooms, water supply, and other basic amenities only add to this already dire situation. The government and other stakeholders must take urgent steps to address this issue and provide better facilities for the academic community in Nigeria.

Poor leadership culture: The state of academic libraries in Nigeria has been a cause for concern in recent times, especially when compared to other African countries. Mmejim and Nsirim (2023) noted that poor leadership is one of the major contributing factors affecting the effective operations of academic libraries. Unfortunately, the appointment of leaders in these libraries has been based on socio-political and religious calculations rather than merit and qualification. As a result, many unqualified leaders have been placed in acting capacities in academic libraries, without adequate know-how and managerial competencies. This trend has hurt the libraries, as they have continuously faced a downward spiral in the academic environment. The leadership of these libraries has not been able to defend their cause or promote their continued subsistence. Libraries have now become a mere feature for accreditation exercises, due to the compulsory stance of the NUC, and not a focal feature of the universities. This decline can be attributed to the failure of library leadership.

The culture of free services: The issue of the "culture of free" services in academic and other libraries in Nigeria is becoming a major problem. It is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain academic library services due to the expectation of free services from patrons. This expectation has become so ingrained

that it has led to a sort of resistance, especially when patrons are asked to pay for services. Even some library staff are resistant to the concept of charging, as they have been trained in a culture of "free" public services and may feel demeaned for asking patrons to pay. Surprisingly, resistance to charging sometimes even comes from those who have funded the library in the past and are being let off the hook by income generation to replace their diminishing or non-existent contributions to academic library services. It could be seen that academic libraries often encounter significant challenges, primarily revolving around financial constraints. To effectively address these issues, these institutions must explore innovative solutions and strategies. By adopting a proactive approach, academic libraries can overcome financial hurdles and continue to support the educational and research needs of their communities.

Strategies for navigating the turbulence of inadequate funding by Academic Libraries

Academic libraries have traditionally relied on funding from their parent institutions to survive. However, some libraries have recognized the potential for generating their income to facilitate growth and development that would not have been possible with institutional grants alone. In Nigeria, the rising cost of books and other resources, combined with the devaluation of the Naira, has increased the need for greater support for academic libraries. Government agencies and tertiary institutions have expressed concern over the decline in overall revenue, which limits the amount of funding that can be allocated to the library. While there is a need for more funds to support library services, it is important to link any income generation scheme to specific needs of the library, such as collection development, equipment purchase, or building construction. This is particularly important given the current economic environment, which necessitates careful consideration of all funding options.

Madu et al (2020) citing Eskay (2013) note that suggestions for alternative sources of funds listed below could provide the financial resources needed for quality library services in Nigerian educational institutions.

1. Heavy fines should be levied on overdue books to serve both as a deterrent for other defaulters, as well as, boost the revenue base of libraries in Nigeria. Charges can also be imposed on outside borrowers and other users who are neither staff nor students of the institution to which the library belongs.
2. Consultancy services through conferences, workshops, and seminars can be organized for schools, public libraries, and the community in which the library finds itself.
3. Bindery services can be done by various libraries to generate funds through binding of books, journals, projects, and other works for the immediate community and outsiders.
4. Revenue can also be generated by libraries through Internet services if available.

It is noteworthy to state that, the income-generating activities that a library can undertake will depend on various factors, such as its mission and the environment it operates in. Some of the activities that an academic library can pursue to generate income may include one or more of the following options:

Fees-based services: The traditional methods of imposing fines on overdue materials and charging for lost books or borrower cards have proven ineffective. Libraries in developed economies are now turning to fee-based services to sustain their operations. Academic libraries in Nigeria can also explore this

approach by considering charging for bibliographies, online searches, and other services to ensure continuity of service. To support these efforts, research grant beneficiaries could be asked to incorporate the costs of fee-based services in their funding proposals. Additionally, academic libraries can generate revenue through services like translation, book sales, reprographic services, document publishing, bookbinding and facility rentals, as noted in previous studies (Igyuve & Ashaver, 2014; Ejezie & Okeke, 2021; Etukudo & Ayanlola, 2023). Other potential revenue streams include abstracting services, indexing services, cataloging and classification services, and setting up libraries for private individuals and agencies for a premium fee. These measures can help enhance the relevance and sustainability of libraries.

Consultancy Services: Academic libraries have exceptional potential to monetize their expertise and boost their revenue. They can capitalize on their professional skills by providing bibliographic, information brokerage, cataloguing, and classification services. As information specialists, they can confidently organize seminars and workshops on specialized topics and charge a premium to support library services. Libraries have the resources and infrastructure that are most suitable for such profitable ventures.

Lobbying and Advocacy: Academic libraries should lobby and advocate for their interests to improve the current situation through policies and laws. They occupy a strategic position in society as ivory towers where intellectuals, professionals, experts, and elites shape society. Lobbying top political elites should be pursued vigorously. Librarians and heads of academic libraries must understand that it is essential to develop skills and apply practices about politics and lobbying if they want to contact, express arguments and convince potential donors and sponsors to offer money and, of course, politicians and policy-makers to increase library funding and avoid “strange” mergers or library closures (Irenoa, et al. 2019).

Grants and Endowments: These funding opportunities can come from a variety of sources, including private individuals, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and large corporations. Each source of funding has its own set of criteria and requirements, and it is important for academic libraries to carefully consider which opportunities to pursue. Grants, for example, may be awarded for specific projects or initiatives, such as the development of digital collections or the creation of new research tools. Gifts and endowments, on the other hand, may be used to support ongoing operations, such as staff salaries or the purchase of new materials.

Friends of the Library: One possible idea to support libraries is to create groups called Friends of the Library. These groups can help libraries find sources of funding and advocate for financial and material support from government officials and university authorities. Another possibility is for the Friends of the Libraries to work with booksellers or publishers to create a library bookshop. Additionally, these groups can help raise funds for library projects and infrastructure by organizing public fundraising events.

The key to success for any library seeking to generate income is to determine which activities will be most effective in meeting its goals, while also being mindful of the needs and preferences of its patrons.

By understanding these factors and developing a strategic plan for revenue generation, libraries can continue to thrive and serve their communities for years to come

Conclusion

Academic libraries play a critical role in the teaching, learning, and research processes in tertiary institutions. However, the funding of these libraries remains a significant challenge due to the perception of academics, librarians, and management. These perceptions are not unrelated to the numerous challenges that libraries face, including the emergence of new technologies and competing agencies. To remain relevant, academic libraries must face these challenges head-on and innovate to provide services that meet the evolving needs of their users. While subventions and budgetary allocations from parent bodies are essential, they are often insufficient to sustain the services provided by academic libraries. Therefore, libraries, librarians, information professionals, and management of information and library centers must explore alternative means of generating additional support. In this digital age, academic libraries must be creative and innovative to remain relevant and provide value to their users. This requires a shift in mindset and a willingness to embrace new technologies, adopt new models of service delivery, and collaborate with other organizations. By doing so, they can ensure that their services are sustained and that they continue to play a vital role in the academic community.

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