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Challenges of Managing University Libraries in Contemporary Digital Environment

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper focuses on x-raying the challenges of managing university libraries in contemporary digital environment. **Design/methodology/approach:** The paper adopts a combination of the desk research approach and interview sessions. Inferences were drawn from extensive literature review and content analysis. **Highlights of the paper:** the changing scenario of the library environment, the need for effective management of university libraries in digital era and the basic concepts in the paper were highlighted. **Findings:** demands for new skills, cost/funding, managing of new generation of learners, lack of skilled manpower, lack of confidence in the face of increasingly information technology, lack of maintenance culture, resistances to changes etc were identified as challenges to managing university libraries in digital era. The strategies for effective management of university libraries in digital environment include adequate funding of university libraries, effective communication, adopting of good leadership style, recruitment of adequate/skilled staff and training/retraining of library staff. **Conclusion:** The paper concludes that university library are faced with myriad of problems in terms of management, therefore there is an urgent need for library administration in universities to take practical and innovative steps in ensuring that these problems addressed, then and then, can the management of university libraries in the digital environment yields it desired results.

Keywords: University Libraries, Management, Digital Era, Digital Environment, Libraries.

1.0　Introduction

The development of libraries irrespective of type is anchored on the leadership of that library. Library managers make the difference to the performance and productivity of libraries. Without suitable leadership, libraries as a social institution will move at a very slow rate. Power, diversity issues, leaders as change agents and management styles are characteristics that influence the effectiveness of academic library leaders (Weiner, 2003).

With the proliferation of ICTs in libraries, libraries management in university settings has become more complicated. Quality management is increasingly integrated into library service, following their perceived success in manufacturing industries, with particular emphasis on improving service quality (Hsiah, Chang & Lu, 2000). Libraries like other organization are required to maintain harmony with their ever-changing environment. They have to maintain compatibility with the environmental changes for their survival, growth and prosperity (Purushothama, 2015).

Library, like any organization, require managers, but to find a new way forward requires much more than just efficient management or responsible care taking it requires leadership. The global way of information service delivery has change with the inception of ICT in libraries (Jenkins, 2011; Madu & Azubogu, 2017).

ICT has brought thorough change to each and every facet of our lives in the modern era and of course, libraries are not an exempted. It has provided libraries with new opportunities to improve their resource and range of services, which is almost impossible to provide otherwise manually (Garg, 2013). The university libraries in Nigeria form significant part of the nation's transformation and development in providing quality education (Igun, 2013).

University libraries have been enmeshed in the web of changes sweeping across various sectors of the globe as a result of information and communication technologies. The evolution of the " "digital age" has prompted profound changes in the library and information services environment (Tam & Robertson, 2002). Technological changes present a special challenge to library management. Managing this change is the way librarians can carry the library's mission forward (Elbaz & Maraist, 1996). In other words, digital age has reshaped the structure as well as

the form of libraries (Al-Suqri & Afzal, 2007). Though, the digital age is providing lots of new opportunities for various institutions including libraries, there are some challenges too. As aptly captured by Lawal-Solarin (2013:39):

> The 21st century is regarded as an era of information revolution. Advances in information technology have led to far reaching development in higher education sector; an example of which is the application of digital information in learning. Libraries and information centres in Nigeria are not only equipped with materials that are in traditional format but also in electronic formats.

The information communication technology (ICT) has transformed the world to global village (Yaya & Adeyokin, 2011). Information technology-based systems are the greatest wonders of the 21st century and the most powerful and versatile tools for exchange of information (Aniebo, 2004). ICT in the 21st century has greatly transformed all human endeavours in social, economic political, cultural, educational and agricultural spheres. The world has never remained the same as a result of the overwhelming influence of ICT (Ojo, 2012).

A revolution in information technology is occurring now, it is revolutions that will essentially shatter the effectiveness of traditional, scientific and authoritative methods, of management and it will undoubtedly lead these changes and not allow ourselves to be dragged about by them (Yaya & Adeyokun, 2011). The landscape of library and information service (LIS) has been one of the constant change, not only in Nigeria but elsewhere, since the early 1980s (Ononogbo, 2018). Library management is a significant aspect of librarians. It is the control and coordination of human and material resources and services (Anie & Otolo, 2008).

Librarians function in a series of large environments. These include their immediate personnel and home environments, their position in a particular organization, and their citizenship of a country (driven and shaped by political, social, economical, ideological and educational influences) (Fourie, 2004). They are part of a global world that is increasingly being shaped by electronic networks and information technology (IT) (Fourie, 2004). It is in the light

of the above, that this paper seeks to address the challenges of managing university libraries in contemporary digital environment

1.1 Statement of Problem

University libraries by design exist to support the university's overall objective that cuts across learning, teaching, research and community services. This cardinal role however, is being influenced by the penetrating force of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Nevertheless, despite the numerous benefits associated with the incorporation of ICTs to library service delivery, it is disheartening to note that managing university libraries in the digital environment is becoming much more challenging. As noted Thomas, Satpathi and Satpathi (2010), the emerging challenges posed by the contemporary environment are great in number and these challenges posed by the application of ICT, manifest in many form. This situation may be attributed to various variables that have not been empirically unraveled; hence this paper through a content analysis approach tends to examine the challenges of managing university libraries in a digital environment with reference to Nigerian environment.

1.2 Objectives of the Study/ Methodology/Approach:

This study is specifically focused on:

i. identifying challenges of managing university libraries in digital environment
ii. Suggests strategies for effective management of university libraries in digital era

The desk research approach and brainstorming with professional colleagues were combined to elicit the data for the study. The paper adopted content analysis, in which various literatures relating to the subject were used to draw inferences.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

2.1.1 Digital Environment

Digital refers to an age that is characterized by efficient and effective conversion, storage, diffusion and dissemination of data to users (Al-Suqri & Afzal, 2007). The digital environment is the age of networked society where IT, in addition to its use in all spheres of human activity has been used extensively to record, store, and disseminate information in digital form (Saravathy, Nambratha, & Giddaiah, 2012)

The digital age started with the advent of computers and virtual networks (Al-Suqri & Afzal, 2007). In the digital age today, librarians can no longer be simply information providers or the "keepers of knowledge" (Ojo, 2012). Though the digital environment is built as a system, which can be used by its ultimate end user directly from their desktop PC, the role of librarian cannot be overlooked in digital environment, also the librarian and information scientist will be needed for packaging and repackaging of information (Yaya & Adeyokun, 2011).

2.1.2 University Library

Universities are important academic institutions that produce human resources vital for all sphere of life. It is the highest academic institution that produces knowledge through research for problem solving be it social, economic, moral or political (Tsegba, Dike and Agbo, 2015). The university library is a repository of knowledge and the highest reproducer of information. They are repositories of information and knowledge from all fields of learning relevant to the academic community which they serve (Ifukor, 2012; Nwabueze and Anike, 2016).

University libraries are generally categorized under academic libraries. University library is an academic library which is established and funded by the university to support teaching, learning and research activities of the parent institution. They play a central role in the university with their primary responsibility being to assist their patrons in the process of transforming information to knowledge (Waire & Messah, 2010; Shehu & Idakwo, 2017).

The university library is set up to serve its institution and considered as an organ around which all academic activities revolve and therefore the library can aptly be described s the heart of the university (Orim, 2017). Ola and Osagie (2011:155) contends that Nigerian libraries should not only acquire information material, but preserve and make available to all users without discrimination the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and cultural diversity of the Nigerian society and the richness of the environments through proper organization and application of modern tools and techniques for accessibility and retrieval.

Universities the world over are centres for academic pursuits as well as place where learning is sought at its maximum level (Akporhonor, 2011). However, this cannot be achieved in isolation without the library in place. University libraries all over the world, occupy prominent position in the provision of university education. A university library is established to provide information services to enable the institution achieve excellence in the performance of its functions of research teaching and community service (Nwosu, 2007).

University libraries are the heart of the intellectual life of academic communities in Nigeria. They are basically established to provide information resources of all sorts to back up the academic programmes of university (Ahia, Yakub, Nweke & Makintami, 2014). University libraries in Nigeria as noted by Ola (2011), maintain special collections, containing rare, archival and manuscript materials, theses or dissertations, university records, published or unpublished, faculty publications, grey literature, and other documents of prominent citizens such collections may encompass regional or national collections such as African or Nigerian a collections aimed at facilitating research.

2.1.3 Management

Management is getting things done through others, the coordination of all resources through the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling in other to attain organizational objectives. Nwosu (2007:48) writing on management in libraries asserted that:

> Management of these libraries are expected to develop medium term plans
> for their own growth, maintenance and development. They should develop
> performance evaluation systems for their staff and services as well as

effective information to students, staff and the larger university community on available services. They need to focus on development of their collection and products as well as on improvement of their processes, staff skills and student support services.

Phillips (2014) citing Mason & Wetherbee (2004) noted that management involves completing the job according to set plan, where as leadership requires creating a vision for the library, compelling others to help achieve this vision, and motivating fellow employees to contribute to this vision.

3.0 Library Services in Digital Era and the Changing Scenario in Libraries

Libraries according to Tam and Robertson (2002), are adapting to the changing educational and learning environment by making the library fully accessible both physically and intellectually via electronic networks, and by providing ICT support for remote users on a 24 hour basis. Librarians as professional trained in acquisition, organization, retrieval, and dissemination of information need to adapt and acquire new skills of digital age (Sarasvathy, Nambratha & Giddiah, 2012)

According to Thamaraiselvi (2009), librarians of this digital era, are in the position to change their role as arbitrary information scientists/ gatekeepers and to meet the challenges of the internet, World Wide Web, online access in the knowledge society. A paradigm shift triggered by ICT has been a common phenomenon in the service sector, but applied to library and information science it has been radical and fundamental (Thomas, Satpathi & Satpathi, 2010).

Library and information professionals are currently operating in a rapidly changing environment. Information and communication technologies are major driving forces for the change (Omotoso, 2012). The modern university library is IT-dependent and IT-driven (Ononogbo, 2004). Law (2009:54) writing on the changing landscape of library services asserted that:

We have reached a point where entrenched and traditional organizational settings give rise to organizational clashes, as new issues and content emerge which do not fit historical patterns. The bundling of functions has imperceptibly changed, but we have become so busy and adept at keeping the library efficient and well managed that we have lacked the space to step back and observe it from a higher level. One perspective is that the library was created as a set of activities to minimize transaction costs. Now that all of these activities are possible for individuals and groups on the web, can we shift these transaction costs? Should we move on from that past to explore what categories of function are distinctive to libraries and librarians and which can be left to the web.

Similarly, Purushothama (2015:9) writing about the penetrating influence of technology asserted that:

Service organization like library should incorporate suitable changes as per the situation demands. While adopting the technology functionality, one should understand clearly the perception of the organization. In the changing environment and growing competition in the world, and the impact of ICT on libraries are gearing up for change management in their organizations, shifting from manual management of library activities to automated management.

Isah and Kayoma (2005:66) asserted that, as virtually all academic libraries strive to provide users with maximum level of service, university libraries in developing countries face formidable difficulties in satisfying the needs of their users as they exist in a constantly floating environment in which threat to survival and growth are relatively common place. University libraries exist to support the university's overall objectives (learning teaching, research and community services).

4.0   Need for Effective Management of University Libraries in Digital Era

It is the leadership of the library that determines whether a philosophy and vision are articulated and to what extent they are implemented. Leadership affects a library's effectiveness, its role in the academic institution, and its adaptability to new function and initiatives (Weiner, 2003:5). Libraries as non-profit service enterprise has a particular management process, just like for profit. The basic elements of this process, planning, organization, leadership and effective and efficient management of control systems in libraries contain important functions (Kakirman-Yildiz, 2012).

Tam and Robertson (2002) opined that the management of change in the library and information service environment in the digital age can be summarized as deciding what needs to be changed, making the pre-change analysis by deciding why changes need to be made and setting objectives. Next, is carrying out a force field analysis by predicting the likely impact of change, i.e. who will be affected by change, and to what degree. However, according to Ugah and Udo (2011), effective management is not the duty of everybody. Conversely, wherever people will work together, there is generally the need for the co-ordination of efforts in order to attain the desired goals. Management and leadership are both necessary for the survival and growth of a library (Phillips, 2014).

The changing technological advancement in our environment requires everything to be advanced. To move with this trend, every field is supposed to accept this fact and implement new emerging technologies (Yemi-Peters, 2011). Today, Nigerian university libraries are at the cross roads, beset with problems of dwindling resources, inadequacy of appropriate infrastructure, and new information technologies for the provision of statutory services (Ononogbo, 2008).

With the new trends in libraries and information centres, it is imperative that pragmatic and proactive measures are put in place to ensure that the university libraries remain relevant in the educational domain. The digital library has come with new challenges and library managers in the university settings must braced up with these challenges, else the university libraries and librarians will be relegated to mere bookshops and book keepers. In other words, if there had been anytime that university libraries require effective management of both human and

infrastructural resources, it is such a time as we are in already otherwise known as the "*digital age*".

5.0   Challenges of Managing University Libraries in Digital Environment

The challenges associated with managing university libraries in digital age include but not limited to:

Demands for new skills: According to Anyakoha (2005), the new information environment makes it very necessary that librarians themselves have to acquire skills and expertise, especially in the application of modern information and communication technologies, electronic publishing, digital information management and knowledge management. It is obvious that the trainings given to libraries in the library schools with respect to Nigerian library schools can no longer keep them safe in the digital environment. In other words, for librarians to remain relevant in the university libraries there is need for them to acquire ICT-based skills

Cost / Funding: Though the cost of maintaining e-library in the university is high, it is even more risky maintaining the status quo. Librarians cannot afford to remain where they are, it is either they adapt to new trends or perish. As buttressed by Adigun (2015), the greatest challenge facing libraries in Nigeria is that of funding. The provision of improved, effective, efficient and sustainable information services, as well as access to a wide array of knowledge and information sources in the face of dwindling funding is not feasible. Funds are needed to cater for a whole range of services in the library of the 21st century yet government subventions in the education sector are not adequate (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). This no doubt validates the fact that fund is a prerequisite for effective management of university libraries in the digital age.

Managing of new generation of learners: There are alternatives to libraries and information centres especially, in contemporary digital environment, these alternatives that are available to library users to exploit poses challenges to library managers. A click of the button using any search engine would yield millions of information sources in a second, in view of this, librarians are faced with the herculean task of designing means of ensuring that students in the university are not fully drifted away from the library environment. The new generations of learners are

partially if not fully ICT compliant. Hence, to effectively manage libraries to meet their needs requires libraries to reposition itself.

Lack of skilled manpower: There is dearth of skilled manpower to maintain the electronic resources in university libraries in the digital environment.

Lack of confidence in the face of increasingly information technology: To effectively manage both human and infrastructural resources in university libraries requires confidence. Having a strong confidence to manage university libraries in digital environment requires the library manager being in touch with modern developments. Many librarians lack confidence in the face of increasingly information technology

Lack of maintenance culture: One of the major challenges of managing university libraries in the digital environment is lack of maintenance culture. This attribute is not just synonymous with libraries but Nigerian government and leaders. Without the spirit of maintenance culture, managing university libraries in the digital libraries becomes problematic.

Resistance to changes: According to Maa (2017), change is a phenomenon that is inevitable for progress. It is not easily accepted in any society because of fear of the unknown. Librarians are afraid of it. They are not sure of what change may bring to their profession. Resistance to changes in libraries will limit the extent that university librarian can go in managing university libraries.

Lack of well-defined ICT Policy: University libraries in Nigeria are yet to come up with uninformed ICT-based service policy. Such policy will articulate what is required for sustainable ICT-based library services in the digital environment, areas of digital library services to be given top priorities, ICT training need of library staff and strategic plan to ensure continuous maintenance of ICT facilities. Most university libraries in Nigeria do not have a well defined ICT-policy to guide and regulate the application ICT to library services delivery. There is need to address pertinent issues relating to the expediency of ICT training needs of librarians, the nature of ICT-based library services, the ratio of library allocation that should go into ICT-based library services. Igiamoh, Saliu and Hansetu (2013), observed that there are no policies and capacity building for libraries and librarians to render e-library services.

Lack of ICT literacy: According to Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013), some professional librarians lack the requisite technological literacy needed for a 21ˢᵗ century library service. To them, lack of basic skills in the use of information technology has become a clue to better library services.

6.0   Strategies for Effective Management of University Libraries in Digital Era

Library managers can use a diverse approach to create a atmosphere that promote leadership development in their organization. The following strategies if adopted would help administrators of university libraries to effectively manage university libraries in the digital era. They are:

Adequate funding of university libraries: There is an urgent need to adequately fund university libraries in Nigeria. According to Igun (2013), librarians have to advocate for adequate financial investment in the ICT-based libraries by the stakeholders and government. Adequate funding is vital for the sustainability of ICT-based library services

Effective communication: Effective communication in an organization refers to all the elements that make up the human group (the customer/user, the employee/librarian, manager, cleaning personnel, etc), cooperate with each other, provides an open and reliable environment that takes on an essential role to organizational success (Kakirman-Yildiz, 2012). According to Onwubiko (2004), effective communication and the free flow of information is the underlying current in the life of an organization

Adopting of good leadership style: Good leadership as well as appropriate leadership styles could facilitate job effectiveness and by extension organizational effectiveness (Makinde & Opeke, 2017). They noted further that organizations all over the world depend to a large extent on the quality of leadership style provided by its front-runners which is often propelled by the nature of the organizational environment.

Recruitment of adequately skilled staff: In other for library administrators to effectively manage university libraries in this digital age, it is imperative that adequately skilled staff should be recruited.

Training and retraining of library staff: as noted by Chiware (2007), the digital age has brought about many opportunities and challenges to the African university libraries and research institutions. For the African university libraries to make it in the digital age, they must make sure that staff is adequately trained to initiate and manage the digital resources. The success of ICT adoption in the library is hinged on training of both staff and users (Anunobi, Nwakwuo, Oga & Benard, 2011).

Conclusion

The paper has extensively examined the challenges of managing university libraries in contemporary digital environment. There is no doubt that effective management of university libraries in digital era is critical for the sustainability of the university. The paper reveals that demands for new skills, cost/funding, managing of new generation of learners, lack of skilled manpower, lack of confidence in the face of increasingly information technology, lack of maintenance culture, resistances to changes etc are the major challenges to managing university libraries in digital era. The study recommend strategies that could be adopted for effective management of university libraries in digital environment which include adequate funding of university libraries, effective communication, adopting of good leadership style, recruitment of adequate/skilled staff and training/retraining of library. The paper thus concludes that university library are faced with myriad of problems in terms of management, therefore there is an urgent need for library administration in universities to take practical and innovative steps in ensuring that these problems addressed, then and then, can the management of university libraries in the digital environment yields it desired results.

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