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Research Support Services in Selected African University Libraries.

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Research Support Services in Selected African University Libraries.

Background of the study

University libraries are created to support the parent body's mission of teaching, learning and research. This the University libraries achieve through the acquisition and management of learning and research resources. Among these learning and research resources are Information and communication (ICT) equipment such as computers, software of various types, reprographic machines, scanners etc, books including reference books in physical and digital formats; and magazines. Apart from these, the university library also maintains a crop of skilled personnel necessary to bring the ICT equipment, digital and physical materials to life. There are also services designed by libraries to ensure that teaching, learning and research are sustained.

Research is very important to higher institutions. It is beneficial to both academics within an institution and the institution itself. To academic staff within an institution, research is associated with the visibility of the individual. It is associated with the prestige economy in higher education, a pathway to academic seniority and indicator for promotion (Morley, 2014). To the higher education institution, research has evolved as one of the criteria for judging status. It is the ingredient for global University rankings. Fernandez-Marcial, Cosra and Gonzalez-solar (2016) noted that the growing interest in research can be verified at university strategic plans and International academic rankings in which ranking organization assess the research productivity of universities through statistics that aggregate quality and quantity of faculty publications.

In response to the growing importance placed on research and to help foster research activities in their institutions, academic libraries designed services aimed at creating an enabling environment for research to thrive. Among academic and research libraries in the developed nations, these services include searching for funding agencies, teaching and helping researchers write grant proposals and data management plans; provide inductions and training programs to develop research skills, advice researchers on topics such as open access and data security etc. Among, academic libraries in developing countries, not much are known on services designed specifically to promote research. This creates a gap in knowledge. Moreover, a search through literature has shown that statistical data on research publications emanating from universities are gender biased and unfavorable towards women. For instance, Shen, Shoda and Fine (2018) noted that the proportion of female authors in leading science journals such as Nature and Medline has been consistently low for over thirteen years compared to men. The authors further observed that female researchers receive less proportion of prominent research grants than men and also that academic publications authored by women takes a longer time before they are published.

This creates an unhealthy work environment for women in academia knowing fully well that publication is the main ingredient for promotions and publishing in high impact journals is crucial for attracting academic awards and positions. Aiston and Jisun (2015) has attributed the low

performance of women in academia to family related variables particularly marriage and children. The authors saw family as having a significant influence on academic women's career development, creating constraints and demands as they struggle and sacrifice more than men with respect to parenting and house work. Though this assertion may be true, it may not be the only problem hindering women's high performance in the academia. Knowing the library use culture of Africans, it is likely that many researchers especially women who are negotiating the contradictory discourse of successful academic, good wife and mother may not be aware of the vast resources mobilized by their academic libraries to aid research activities. These women may be running from pillar to post to mobilize resources for their research not knowing that their libraries may be of much help to them.

It is in this stead that this study aims to bring to the attention of women researchers in Africa the vast resources in academic libraries to aid research and also to close the gap in knowledge between resources available in academic libraries for research in developed and developing nations.

The general aim of this study is to examine resource mobilization to support research in selected African University libraries. Specifically, this study will:

1. examine the research support services available in selected African University Libraries
2. Identify the modalities for accessing these services
3. Examine the likely problems women may encounter in accessing these problems.

Literature Review

Research support services in libraries

Research support services refer to various services which libraries provide to aid the research process. Fernandez-Marcial, Costa and Gonzalez-solar defined it as a group of services that contribute to scientific communication while Raju and Schoombee (2013) defined it as the proactive engagement of the librarian with the researcher throughout the research process. Brewerton (2011); Cox and Pinfield (2015) and Carlson and Garritano (2010) mentioned some of the research support services which libraries can offer as helping in identifying financial support, helping in literature reviews, news about projects or research groups, bibliometric and research impact assessment, support to quality evaluation system of the university, training in reference management software, promotion of open access, support in data analysis and dissemination of research; and advice in copyright. Keller (2015) added maintenance of institutional repository and data management.

Academic library services as it affects research differ from institution to institution. Some may offer one type of services while others may offer another. Fernandez-Marcial, Costa and Gonzalez-solar (2015) noted that among top ten universities in Anglo-American universities, the only

services common to the universities are repository management, open access support, intellectual property support, bibliographic/content management. In other words, different universities offer different research support services. Within universities libraries, research support service may be grouped under some other services offered by the library. At Universities in Kogi state, Nigeria, Anyim (2018) observed that research support services are grouped among e-library resources and service.

Modalities for accessing research support services

Modalities for accessing library support services varies based on particular university library policy. At the Open University, UK, access to electronic resources starts and ends on specified date. For instance, post graduate students have access one month prior to commencement of lecturers and three months after lecture must have ended. Use of the open institutional repository is free but, in many cases, intending users have to e-mail the authors to request papers. There are also plug-in which users need to install in their computers to access full text of articles if they are available on open access (Open University, 2019).

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Green (2012) noted that users can access popular library services on their phones through MIT mobile web, iphone app or android app. Users can also have access to electronic licensed library materials from just off campus or from anywhere in the globe. There is also provision for researchers to stay connected to the library by setting up RSS feeds and email alerts to receive notifications on new literature in their field.

The nature of information one is requesting also determines the mode of access. There are some information that may require the information seeker to visit the library in person and some that may require online communication between the librarian and the information seeker. For instance, at the university of Nigeria, Nsukka, a user that needs information on funding agencies need to pay a physical visit to the library to use the “Grants register” while one that need to do similarity check on an original research study only have to send the work on email attachment to the librarian concerned.

When searching for information in a specific field of study, Beekink (2000) advices that science subject directories may yield better search results than general ones. In some research and university libraries, librarians compile directories of high-quality science websites, often including annotations and rating (Hoggan, 2002).

Other methods through which library services can be accessed include through the library catalogue, with assistance from library staff, browsing library collections and assistances from friends and colleagues.

Problems women researchers may encounter in accessing research support services in university libraries.

Research information exists in many forms. There are physical materials in form of books, CD'S artifacts etc. There are also materials in digital form such as e-journals articles, e-books and other scholarly information on other websites, web databases and databanks. Accessing information from these sources requires skill, knowledge of the various types in existence and the way various publishers structure their website. Unfortunately, many researchers especially women lack the skill to search appropriately for information online. Hoggan (2002) observed that many researchers do not know that there are various ways through which databases can be searched. Some data bases allow for cited references searching in addition to general subject and author searching. Some are not even aware of the databases available in their disciplines. Hussain and Kumar (2013) opined that some library users know some of the services provided by their libraries but not all of them.

Time constraint is another problem that prevents women scientist form accessing research support services from libraries. Aiston and Jung (2015) noted that apart from family related issues that occupy most of women's time, workload allocation from departments occupy the few hours unoccupied by family issues. This leaves women scientist with very few hours to spend in the library.

Time constraint has also forced many women to work remotely from home relying on e-resources only. Yet the cost of e-resources has placed a limit on the number of subscriptions placed by libraries. A through search for literature to support a research work at times requires that the researcher should pay a physical visit to the library to search the library collection. However, time constrain has forced many researchers to read only the few information available online and base their decisions on them (Hoggan, 2002).

Moreover, many research support services in libraries are fee based. Women researchers being always in the low cadre as a result of failure to progress through the academic hierarchy in significant numbers and attain senior leadership positions of academic institutions may not have the resources to pay for these materials from their personal account. This may hamper the women's ability to produce good research works capable of being published in high quality journals and also earn promotion.

Method

This is a mixed method research that employed descriptive design. Three purposively selected African University Libraries participated in the study. These are the Universities of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Pretoria, South Africa and University of Nairobi, Kenya. 4 librarians from each university involved in reader services were selected to participate in an online survey. The respondents were contacted through emails. The email addresses of the respondents were collected through their university web sites. The questionnaire has three clusters based on the three research objectives. Reminders to notify the respondents to fill the questionnaires were sent two days after the questionnaires were sent. The poor response rate to the questionnaire forced the researchers to apply checklist to complement the results obtained from the questionnaire. Interview was also

used to compliment the information obtained from questionnaire and checklist on research question two at the Universities of Pretoria, South Africa and University of Nigeria, Nsukka where the information on the library portal were too few. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies, percentages and narratives.

Results

Table 1. Research support services in three selected university Libraries in Africa

Research support services in selected universities	Frequency	Rank
Free access to the internet	12	1 st
Management of institutional repositories	11	2 nd
Research resources such as data bases, e-books and Journals	11	4 th
Training on Information Literacy	11	5 th
Training on research skills	10	6 th
Originality check	9	7 th
Help in locating appropriate literature	9	8 th
Dedicated research space	7	9 th
Bibliometrics	6	10 th
Embedded Librarian(Information Manager for aspects of entire research project)	6	11 th
Data repositories	6	12 th
Teaching grant proposal writing	5	13 th
Helping in writing data management plan	5	14 th
Searching for funding agencies	4	15 th
Helping in writing grant proposal	4	16 th
Data management education	4	17 th
Helping in locating appropriate data sets	4	17 th
Data analysis support	4	19 th
Data sharing services	3	20 th
Helping developing data workflows	3	21 th
Grammar check	3	22 th
Liaison services for institutions	2	23 th
Provide advice on topics such as open access	2	24 th
Preparing data sets for deposit	2	25 th

Table1 show responses to online questionnaire on research data services in three African Universities. The table shows that free access to the internet, management of institutional repository, free access to internet services, research resources such as databases, e-books and journal, training on information literacy, research skill, originality check and help in locating appropriate literature ranked highest as research support services offered in the three selected African Universities. Research support services such as helping in writing grant proposal and data management plan, searching for funding agencies and data analysis support ranked lowest.

Check list at the university libraries portals show that at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, research support services were mentioned among the services offered by the library but no mention was made of the specific services offered. It was observed that research support services such as training and advice on copyright and plagiarism, ethics, referencing software, statistical support and Language editing were listed among online services provided by the library. At the University of Nairobi Kenya website, it was mentioned that the library provide services in form of citation and referencing tools (Zotero and Mendeley); Copyright and plagiarism software(Turnitin), Sciva, Digital repository and Online books and journal while the University of Nigeria, Nsukka website mentioned Institutional Repository, originality check, internet access, online data bases and training on research writing as some of the research support services offered by the library.

Table 2. Modalities for accessing Research Support services from the three selected universities.

Modalities for accessing service	Frequency	Rank
Face to face contact with librarians	12	1st
Remotely through the internet	11	2nd
Browsing library shelves	11	3rd
Within the University through the Local Area Network	9	4th
Assistance from colleagues and friend	1	5th

Table two shows the most common methods of accessing research support services in the three university libraries used for the study. Face to face contact with Librarians ranked highest as a method of accessing research support services. This is followed by remotely through the internet and browsing through the library shelves which ranked second and third respectively. Assistance from friends scored lowest (5th) as a method of accessing research support services.

Result of the check list on library portals show that at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, research support services can be accessed through the internet as well as face to face contact. To access the library through the internet, users use personal computers (PC) running on windows, iPads on IOS, Tablets on Androids and various smart phones. More than one browser is required to access the services. This is to enable users switch browsers should they experience difficulties with one. Access to the library online resources is through the university website. Remote users can access the library through the library link <http://vpn.uonbi.ac.ke>.

At the University of Pretoria library portal, there is not much information on how to access the library except that users create library account to access online information in the library. Data

from interview conducted on access to library support services in University of Pretoria as a result of too few information on the library portal show that access is free for registered students but non-students pay a stipulated entrance fee. The University of Pretoria library can be accessed online from all its branches, through two mobile buses in remote areas of Limpopo and West Cape and physical visit to the Library. The University of Pretoria has a free mobile app that helps people locate and search the library catalogue to find books and articles. There are four basic steps to using the University of Pretoria Library. They are as follows:

1. Use or purchase electronic student card,
2. Set up your self service pin.
3. Book a training session free of charge to teach you how to use the library
4. Register at Library at Unisa and claim the “My life Library account” to help you access library services.

At the University of Nigeria, Nsukka library portal, there is no information on how to access the library. Interview with a key library staff showed that access to library support services for staff and students is free for staff and students who must have registered with the library. Non-registered users need to be introduced to the library by their institutions through an official letter to the University Librarian. Students and staff have individual passwords through which they access the university website and library portal.

Table 3. Problems women encounter in accessing research support service.

s/n	Problems women encounter in accessing research support service	Frequency	Rank
1	Lack of ICT Skills	10	1st
2	Poor internet search skill	9	2nd
3	Lack of knowledge of alternative sources of Internet connectivity	9	2nd
4	Lack of funds to pay for services	7	3rd
5	Lack of time to access services	7	3 rd
6	Poor internet connectivity	6	4 th
7	Lack of ownership of functional Personal computer	5	5 th
8	Inflexible library operating hours	3	6 th

Table 3 shows that lack of ICT skills ranked first as one of the problems women encounter in accessing research support services. This was followed by poor internet search skill, lack of knowledge of alternative sources of internet connectivity, lack of funds to pay for services, poor internet connectivity and lack of ownership of functional personal computer. Interview results show that family pressure, time constraint, excess workload, lack of concentration and inflexible library operating hours are some of the problem women encounter in accessing research support services.

Discussion

Findings show that research support services exist in the three universities used for the study. Among the services that are available is free access to the internet, management of institutional repository amongst others. These services are among the ones mentioned by Cox and Pinfield (2011), Brewerton (2011) and Carlson and Garritano (2010) as some of the research support services which libraries can offer. Findings also show that services differ from university to university.

There are various ways through which the services can be accessed. Some can be accessed online through the university library portal while some can be through a visit to the physical library. The finding is consistent with Green (2012) who noted that users can access library services in the University of Massachusetts from anywhere in the globe. At the University of Pretoria, South Africa, access to research support services can be through a free mobile app. This is the same as in Massachusetts Institute of Technology where users access popular library services on their earphones through the university mobile web, iphone or android app.

Findings on the problems women encounter in accessing research support services revealed that the problems are of three major types. Those related to technological skills (lack of ICT and search skills, lack of knowledge of alternative sources of internet connectivity), finance (lack of fund to pay for service and lack of ownership of functional ICT equipment) and family pressure. Lack of skill can prevent one from carrying out appropriate search online for literature, funding agencies or free software tools. Lack of finance can prevent one from owning a functional personal computer than will enable one work efficiently from remote or pay for needed services. Family pressure may place time constraint on women's ability to access library research support services. This finding is consistent with Aiston and Jung (2015) who noted that family related issues occupy most of women's time.

Conclusion

This study looked at research support services for in three academic libraries in Africa. Findings shows that libraries provide various forms of services such as free internet access and management of intuitional repository amongst others. In some academic libraries, resources for research may be grouped under headings other than research support such as Online services. Various methods are used to access these services. These include remotely through the internet, local area network or through a visit to the physical library. Women encounter some challenges such as time constraint, lack of funds to finance services and sexual abuse while trying to access service. Strategies used by libraries to mobilize resources for research is through the maintenance of research writing services. Unfortunately, most female researchers encounter some setbacks in accessing these services. The Implication of the finding is that women will continue to remain at the low cadre of academic professions if efforts are not made to bring to their attention the vast resources assembled by their libraries to aid the research process. Many will continue to be scared away by the huge amount of money required for carrying out research not knowing that the huge amount has been drastically reduced by the resources available in their university libraries.

Recommendations

1. Women researchers should set out specific period within their tight schedule for research.
2. Women researchers should devote a portion of their monthly income to fund research.
3. There is need for researchers especially women to visit the library physically and acquaint themselves with the resources available.
4. Working form remote is good but should come after one has acquired the necessary skills for accessing information online and are aware of the databases available in particular fields and their structures for access.
5. There is need for libraries to set up alert services for women researchers. This will help the libraries to notify the women of new services and resources in their fields.

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