Management of University Libraries in Digital Environment: Problems and Prospects in Taraba State University, Janligo, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This article is on Management of University Libraries in Contemporary Digital Environment: Problems and Prospects in Taraba State University, Library, Janligo, Nigeria. It explained the concept of university library and the role it has to play to ensure successful academic activity in its parent institution. It also explained the concept of digital environment and stressed the need for university libraries to be digitalized so as to play their roles effectively in the contemporary digital environment. It also stressed the need for employment and adequate training of staff and the need to purchase vital ICT equipment and other e-resources to ensure successful digitization programme for the university libraries. The paper also highlighted challenges encountered by university management in the course of managing university libraries in the contemporary digital environment such as copyright issues, funding problems, epileptic power supply, lack of infrastructures, lack of preservation policy, lack of professional staff and training programmes, among others. The paper recommended that National Universities Commission (NUC) mandate all universities to digitize their University libraries, and improve funding of the libraries. It also recommended that university librarians engage in advocacy to attract more funds to purchase digital equipment and employ more professional staff.

Keywords: *Management, University, Libraries, Digital Environment: Problems and Prospects.*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the internet and information technologies have transformed many conventional university library into electronic or digital libraries where books, journals, magazines and other information resources have metamorphosed into e-books, e-journals, e-magazines, etc,. According to Gichora and Kwanya (2015) opined that these recent developments have brought about changes in the manner libraries conceive and deliver information services to the extent that information seekers nowadays are better informed and are no longer confined to the walls of library before accessing information resources.

Therefore, traditional visit to university libraries by users to access their collection is now an old sway. University library is a type of academic library. One distinctive feature of a university library is that it only exists in a university while academics libraries incorporate libraries in other higher institutions such as polytechnics and colleges of education (Okwara, Chioma, & Ayuba,2017). As an academic library, the university library performs such functions obtainable in other academic libraries like provision of materials for teaching research and study, provision of sitting accommodation for reading, lending of books to users, selecting and placing books on reserve for users, and carrying out library instruction to users. Other functions are provision relevant of materials for research and teaching, promotion and dissemination of knowledge and meeting specialized information needs of the students and staff (Agbanu, Ofordili, Okeji & Ogwu, 2010). The advent of the internet and other information and communications technologies led to information explosion and this exerted a lot of pressure on libraries. This then necessitated change in all library operations, especially in the area of acquiring and disseminating information to users in such a manner as to satisfy them, and thus remain relevant in the face of stiff competitions form other information providers. Therefore, libraries all over the world especially university libraries started to re-design their services, reconsolidate

their positions and incorporate new technologies change information objects, models of communication an information delivery in order to add value to their services and to satisfy the changing needs of the user-community, thus holistically changing the information delivery environment.

The main issue presently in the digital age is not technologies usage in our university libraries system, but management of these technologies to achieve the real goal of the parent institutions. Management is a dynamic not a static process. This is the whole lesson which this paper has been attempting to convey. Management involves completing the job according to set plan, whereas leadership requires creating a vision for the library, compelling others to help achieve this vision, and motivating fellow employees to contribute to this vision. Management therefore, 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 (Phillips, 2014).

BRIEF HISTORY OF TARABA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The University, Jalingo was established by the Taraba State Government in 2008, to widen access to University education for Taraba State indigenes and promote economic development in the country. Right from inception, the University set out for itself a goal that is captured in its motto – HARNESSING NATURES GIFT. The University is guided, by the national and international manpower needs usually accredited by the National Universities Commission, Abuja.

Like other Universities the world over, this institution strives to ensure that its products receive quality programmes. To this end, it had always subjected itself to the "peer review" of its programs. Curricula developed are of relevance to the nation as well as being up to date with modern academic trends. Council's supervision in matters of finance and discipline of staff also ensure that this University is accountable to the University system.

Academic and Administrative Structure of the University

The academic structure of the University consists of Faculty organized Research Units and relevant Teaching and Research Support Units. The department is the basic unit of academic organization aimed at enhancing

interaction between related disciplines in the university. Though each unit of academic discipline is an organizational entity, they all have common teaching and research interests through the spirit of cooperative and interdisciplinary research and the development of group effort.

The administrative set up of a school is centered on the Dean's Office, while the departments concentrate essentially on academic matters and pursuits. The overall affairs of the University are guided by the Council in policy and financial matters while the Senate determines all academic matters.

The Vice-Chancellor is the Chief Executive of the University and supervises the academic and administrative operations of the University under the directive and /or advice of relevant committees. Such committees include the Council and its Committees, the Senate and its Committees, council/Senate joint Committees, Faculty Boards, Administrative Committees and other Statutory Committees

CONCEPT OF DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Digital environment is one powered by technology, where information is accessed and disseminated electronically using technological tools and which is characteristic of modern society. With particular reference to libraries, it is a library scene where information access is contained or stored in a digitized format and access to the information, retrieval and dissemination are performed electronically with the aid of computers and other technological tools. Such library is referred to as digital library. Digital library federation (as cited in Uzuegbu and Mc Albert 2012) defined digital library as an organization that provides the resources including the specialized staff to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works, so they are readily available for use by a defined community or set of communities. Ringeera (2007) defined digital library as a managed environment of multimedia materials in digital form , designed for the benefit of its users population, structured to facilitate access to its content, and equipped with aids to navigate the global network with users and holdings totally distributed but managed as a coherent whole. The author posited that the rise of the digital library is liked to information and communications technology (ICT)

advancement. Fremont (as cited in Ringeera, 2007) posited that digital library is an integrated set of services for capturing, cataloguing, storing, searching, protecting and retrieving information. The mission of any emerging digital library is to develop, store, provide, access and electronically distribute collections of high quality digital images.

According to Achebe (20008) basic steps in preliminary digitization of library materials are compilation of physical library catalogue and provision of the electronic version, compilation of periodical indexes and their abstract and provision of its electronic version. Others are organization and compilation of periodicals and reference works in large quantity and quality as a prelude to establishing a data base as well as a publishing content of the database in book form and provision of electronic version of it. Managers of digital libraries need to possess specialized skills for optimum service delivery in the digital environment. According to Verma (2015) as technology levels of library operations and services increase, the library professional has to anticipate expectations of users and be flexible in adapting and adopting new skills. According to the author, the library professional should acquire effective oral and written communication skills as well as technical and professional skills. Professionals in charge of digital libraries are called digital librarians.

Digital environment is characterized by efficient graphic user interface, digital imaging, efficient transfer and storage of texts. Presence of relevant ICT infrastructures like computers, high speed local networks , a fast connections to internet, relational databases that support a variety of servers such as web servers and FTP servers and electronic management functions that will aid the overall management of digital resources is necessary for optimum performance in a digital environment. According to Ringeera (2007) a digital library system must be capable of storing a large amount of data in a variety of format and accessing his data as quickly as possible.

MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN DIGITAL ERA

It is the Management 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). 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).

Tarn 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"*

LIBRARY SERVICES IN DIGITAL ERA AND THE CHANGING SCENARIO IN LIBRARIES

Libraries according to Tarn 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 & SatpathL 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.

Similarly, Isah and Kayoma (2005:66) asserted that:

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).

PROBLEMS OF MANAGING TARABA STATE LIBRARY DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Among the glaring challenges Taraba state university libraries are paucity of adequate digital resources, funds and skilled personnel. According to David (2018) opined that the problems of university libraries are poor funding, poor infrastructure, lack of invesion, absence of digital and e-library, lack of properly trained and proliferation of the internet. Ringeera (2007) challenges of managing university in the contemporary digital environment include digital preservation issues, poor ICT infrastructure, data migration and storage issues, copyright/ intellectual property issues and lack of skilled employees. According to the author adequate digital preservation which entails planning, resource allocation and application of preservation methods and technologies necessary to ensure that digital information of continuing value remains accessible and usable is lacking. In the issue of copyright, Ringeera (2007) noted that libraries do not own the copyright of the material they hold and as such cannot freely digitize and provide access to the copyrighted materials in their collections. More so, most of the library employees do not have adequate knowledge of ICT. Other challenges as highlighted by Ringeera (2007) are attitude of users towards digitization, connectivity problems, lack of awareness, training related and system design issues, management policies and poor knowledge of the use of information systems. According to Suqri (2014) information privacy, copyrights and information security are some of the challenging issues faced by the libraries in the digital age.

Managing university libraries in the digital environment is also capital intensive, as funds are continually needed for purchase and servicing of digital resources, training and sundry needs. According to Aguolu (2012) transforming Nigerian university libraries from conventional to electronic libraries is a long-term assignment. Changes from traditional library practices of book ordering, processing and lending practices will last some years considering financial, infrastructural and technical constraints the author identified challenges of managing university libraries the contemporary digital environment as indecision of the management, funding problems, infrastructural provision problems, scarcity of ICT technical staff, sustainability /maintenance problems, training and delay caused by transition from traditional to electronic formats. The poor electricity situation in Nigeria is also a serious challenge to optimal operation of university libraries in the contemporary digital environment.

Confirming this ugly situation, Zakari (as cited in Okiy, 2010) stressed that academic libraries in Nigeria are plagued by epileptic power supply among others in their efforts to connect their libraries to the internet. Okonkwo (2017) identified such challenges as lack of proper preservation policy, lack of proper planning, financial limitation, lack of competent human resources and high cost of internet access. Others are ineffective configuration of library network, lack of reliable and permanent source of power, lack of adequate professional training programmes implementation delay, lack of infrastructures and lack of interest and adequate commitment by management.

CONCLUSION /RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the revelations from the literature reviewed in the course of writing the paper, and the conclusions it is hereby recommended as follows:

- That the National Universities Commission (NUC) makes it mandatory for all university libraries to be digitized within a specified period. This mandate will yield positive result as it will make the university management to approach digitization of the university library with all seriousness.
- That university management should approve more funds for the running of the libraries. This is because lack of funds has been found to

be the cause of so many challenges confronting university libraries. With improved funds, more staff will be sent on trainings through seminars and workshops. More ICT equipment will be purchased and damaged ones will be repaired or replaced.

- That university management institute and prioritize the issue of training and retraining programmers for staff to help build and sustain their capacity to operate more effectively in the contemporary digital environment.

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