



LIBRARIANS' CHALLENGES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN STATE-OWNED UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the challenges of librarians in knowledge management in state-owned university libraries in Nigeria. It highlighted the concept of Knowledge Management (KM), functions of academic libraries and the present condition of state-owned university libraries in Nigeria. The paper also examined the types of knowledge managed in academic libraries as well as x-rayed the challenges of knowledge management in academic libraries. The paper is of the view that knowledge management programmes are not fully implemented in state-owned university libraries in Nigeria as a result of internal and external factors beyond the librarians capabilities. The study therefore recommended that to solve the problems faced by librarians in implementing knowledge management in state-owned university libraries in Nigeria. This paper strongly posits that if these recommendations are implemented, knowledge management in state-owned university libraries will enhance their services.

Introduction

Academic libraries all over the world are established to support academic programmes of the parent institutions through the provision of requisite information resources, conducive environment where study and research could be guaranteed uninterrupted and adequate services to the patrons. Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and monothechnics (Ifidon and Okoli, 2002). The importance of libraries in academic environment was rightly captured far back in 1921. The University Grant Committee (1921) realizing the importance of the library stated that:

The character and efficiency of a university maybe gauged by its treatment of its central organ, the library. We regard the fullest provision for library maintenance as the primary and most vital need in the equipment of a university. An adequate library is not only the basis of all teaching and study, it is the essential condition of research, without which additions cannot be made to the sum of human knowledge.

With this fundamental statement made by the University Grant Committee of Great Britain, I don't think much explanations on the relevance of the library is necessary as we have



been meant to understand that without the library, there will be no qualitative education and research in tertiary institutions.

Similarly Ugwuanyi (2007) added that academic libraries are established to generate knowledge and make people equipped with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the well-being of mankind. The library acquires knowledge in a codified format, organizes and manages it so that people can explore it and gain better and more knowledge. Knowledge management is very important in everything we do particularly in academic libraries where the technicalities associated with the job of making recorded knowledge available to knowledge seekers is enormous. According to Mohammed (2003), knowledge though maybe weightless and intangible, it has since time immemorial been considered as the “light” as it can easily travel far and wide around the world educating and enlightening people of different socio-economic, political and cultural strata for solving all sorts of human problems.

Academic libraries are the custodians and conservators of the entire knowledge of man from age to age. The entire human knowledge in recorded format either in print or other forms of information media are acquired, processed, organized, stored, retrieved and disseminated in libraries. Alegbeleye (2010) averred that the library (academic) deals with the description and organization of the artifacts – messages, text and document by which knowledge is presented. The conventional and contemporary functions of libraries have made it the treasure house of knowledge in the emerging information age (Ani, 2010).

Based on the deficiencies which most state owned universities in Nigeria face today, knowledge management is considered as the only way through which the libraries can provide effective services to the clientele. Though these libraries are surrounded with plethora of challenges which tend to cripple the services they provide to the patrons, yet Ugwuanyi (2007) asserted that academic libraries must strive to provide the right amount of information to the right clientele at the right time with the right expense of financial and human resources. The only viable means that can guarantee this is effective and efficient knowledge management in university libraries. It is however unfortunate that knowledge management which is identified as the only solution to the inadequacies of libraries is faced with much challenges in state owned universities libraries in Nigeria. This present study therefore aims at highlighting the challenges which librarians in state-owned university libraries in Nigeria encounter in implementing and sustaining knowledge management programmes and to proffer remedies to the problems.

The Concept of Knowledge Management (KM)

Knowledge Management (KM) though a new concept is defined as that endeavour, activity and discipline that aims at spreading or circulating the knowledge of a phenomenon, individuals, communities, societies and institutions in order to bring about direct positive change in the state-of-the art of a system, institution, organization, community, society and nation especially as it relates to its productivity, efficiency and effectiveness and enhanced performance to achieve its short and long term goals, aspiration and missions (Mohammed, 2003). Alegbeleye (2010) describes knowledge management as an interdisciplinary field that draws on variety of business activities and academic specializations. Knowledge management is also defined as the leveraging of collective wisdom to increase responsiveness and innovation (Frappaolo, 2006, Choo, 1998). It is the capabilities by which communities within an organization capture the



knowledge that is critical to them, continuously improve it and make it available in the most effective manner to people who need it so that they can exploit it creatively to add values as a normal part of their work (Butler, 2000). Saffady (2002) observed that knowledge management is concerned with the systematic and effective management and utilization of an organization's knowledge resources. The author went further to state that knowledge management encompasses the creation and distribution of an organization's knowledge. Skyme (1997) sees knowledge management as the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusing, use and exploitation. This involves changing and channeling individual knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely shared in the organization for the benefit of the organization in general. Knowledge management is the sharing and use of collective individual knowledge to enhance the effectiveness and productivity of an organization.

Libraries initially have been involved in knowledge management. According to Ugwuanyi (2007), the management of information has long been regarded as the domain of librarians and libraries. Similarly, Jantz (2001) examined important issues in knowledge management in academic libraries and how reference librarians can become effective as information intermediaries. KM will certainly assist library and information professionals to improve the services rendered to their patrons (Rajurka, 2011). The main reason for advocating for knowledge management in academic libraries is a combination of shortfalls in library budget and higher user expectation. Rather than adopting an often trumpeted high-technology approach, it is more practical to utilize the existing staff, technology and management structure for academic libraries (Ugwuanyi, 2007). It is the need to close these shortfalls in academic library budget particularly state-owned university libraries that the adoption of knowledge management strategy which hitherto was the preserve of the business sector to libraries became necessary. KM when applied in library management is liberally seen as the way to manage recorded knowledge that is library materials (Carrale, 1998). The objectives of KM in academic libraries as enunciated by Rajurkar (2011) include:

- i. To promote collection, processing, storage and distribution of knowledge;
 - ii. to promote scientific research;
 - iii. to promote relationship between library users;
 - iv. to protect the intellectual property right in information technology era;
 - v. to create knowledge reposition and management knowledge as an asset; and
 - vi. to organize the value of knowledge and improve effective research.
- All these put together are the important reasons why knowledge management implementation in academic libraries should be considered very paramount.

Functions of academic Libraries

Academic libraries are primarily established to support the academic programmes of their parent institutions. The library is the keystore of teaching and learning (Wilson, 1972). It is the heart of the university, the academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depends largely upon the state of health and excellence of the library which is the life blood (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). An inert and moribund university library almost invariably means an inert and moribund university. (Kwapong, 1970). There is no doubt that the library actually

makes the university and not the reverse as people see it. The functions of academic libraries according to Oyelude (2004) include:

- i. Provision of materials for undergraduate instruction, term papers and projects as well as supplementary reading;
- ii. provision of materials in support of faculty, external and collaborating research;
- iii. provision of materials in support of post graduate research;
- iv. provision of expensive standard works especially in professional disciplines;
- v. provision of materials for self development;
- vi. provision of specialized information on the region within which the university is situated; and
- vii. co-operation with other academic libraries with a view to developing a network of academic library resources that are not at the disposal of all scholars.

With effective and efficient performance of the above listed functions by the academic (university) libraries in Nigeria, it is obvious to state that the library is no less an organ of the university to toy with if the realization of the over all academic excellence is the prime motive of the parent institution. In the light of the above, knowledge management is the best possible means of ensuring that information resources in the library are well utilized.

Conditions of State-Owned University Libraries in Nigeria

State owned universities are those universities owned and sponsored by the state governments in Nigeria. It has become the tradition in Nigeria today that such universities are usually located within the state that owns and sponsors them. Most of the staff particularly, the non-academic staff in state-owned universities are indigenes of the state; while more than 85% of the students and academic staff respectively are also indigenes of the state.

In the recent past, state-owned universities compete favourably with federal universities in terms of funding, employment of renowned academics and professionals, provision of infrastructure and lots more. Today, the story has changed. With the increase in students population and the dwindling budget, state-owned universities are now characterized by incessant strikes by the workers, non-payment of staff salaries and other financial benefits, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, fewer staff and too much work load, high school fees, politicization and nepotism in appointment of staff, borrowing of staff and resources during accreditation and above all, poor funding. The pitiable condition of state universities in Nigeria today depicts the gory state or mismanagement of the economy and outright neglect of important organs in the country's economy. Something has to be done now to improve the dilapidated condition of state-owned universities in Nigeria before it becomes worse and irreparable.

The library is the worst hit of all these neglects. The libraries of state-owned universities are migeary funded, short staffed, with few and out-dated information resources; old fashioned facilities, furniture and equipment. Very few state-owned university libraries can boast of having ICT facilities. In some libraries, the ICT section may not be functional because of their inability to pay subscription fee to internet providers, while others display non-functional ICT facilities and components. With the ever increasing shortage of funds and inadequate staff, knowledge management is the only survival strategy for the libraries to overcome the changing and competitive environment (Nazim and Mukherjee, 2011).

Types of Knowledge Managed in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries' primary functions involve the selection acquisition, accession, processing and organization of knowledge in all formats. These information resources represent the entire knowledge of man which cut across all ages. According to Alegbeleye (2010), the term used for this process in KM is codification, which is putting knowledge in a form that it is possible and easy to trace, locate and use. Knowledge Management in libraries according to Edem and Okon (2010) involves identifying, acquiring, developing, resolving, using, storing and sharing knowledge to create an approach to transform and share tacit and explicit knowledge and to raise the emergency and innovative capability by utilizing the wisdom of the team. Knowledge management in academic libraries encourages the sharing of knowledge. Edem and Okon earlier cited stated that the main role of KM is to encourage information and knowledge sharing capabilities, make interest and potentials among the stakeholders to enhance their over all performance as against traditional protective tendencies and instinct of preserving it to guaranty use in future.

Challenges of Knowledge Management in State-owned University Libraries

Knowledge management in state-owned university libraries is surrounded with myriads of problems; and unless these persistent problems are tackled, knowledge management in these libraries may not be feasible. Some of the issues encumbering state-owned university libraries in Nigeria include:

- i. **Inadequate funding:** In Nigeria, it is a known fact that the National University Commission (NUC) stipulated that the library should be given 10% of the yearly budget of the university. Federal universities might be adhering to this rule, but no state university library can claim to have received this 10% fund allocation ever since the NUC made this pronouncement. In the state universities, the library is usually seen as a side issue that can only be remembered during accreditation and after that, the status quo remains. With this situation, the library cannot acquire the needed information resources, basic infrastructure and facilities as well as employment of qualified professional staff who are needed for effective knowledge management. The need for adequate funding for academic libraries has been emphasized. This is because without finance, information resources cannot be acquired and accessed for efficient and effective knowledge management cost analysis is very essential (Asogwa, 2012).
- ii. **Inadequate professional staff:** The employment rate of professional librarians in state-owned universities is very poor. It is unbelievable to **note** that a university that has upto fifteen thousand (15,000) regular students excluding part-time students and staff has only between 12-15 professional staff working in the library. If the employment standard of librarians in academic libraries should be strictly implemented, it means that such library is grossly understaffed. Professional staff employment standard for academic libraries is 1:2:3:500 where: 1 means one professional librarian, 2 for two Para-professional librarians, 3 for three support staff; and 500 for five hundred students. This number constitutes one team in library operations and services.

Owing to this short-fall in personnel, knowledge management in state-owned university libraries remains impracticable.

- iii. **Lack of tools and technology:** Knowledge management can only be feasible whereby the working tools and technological facilities needed are provided. The unstable financial situation of state-owned university libraries makes the provision of the tools and technological facilities needed to kick-start and sustain knowledge management impossible.
- iv. **Lack of incentive:** Librarians working in state-owned university libraries hardly receive any incentive from their employers unlike their counterparts in the federal university libraries. Librarians who work on Saturday and Sunday are not paid overtime allowances neither are they paid shift allowance. This situation is very discouraging and do not create conducive work environment that will facilitate KM. This situation is rather pathetic.
- v. **Irregular payment of salaries:** Irregular payment of salaries and other financial benefits accruing to workers is synonymous with state-owned tertiary institutions. In most cases, workers in state-owned tertiary institutions are owed more than three months salaries. Under this condition, librarians working in the libraries of such institutions will lack the full concentration and interest required to engage in KM programmes. This therefore becomes a serious challenge to KM in state-owned university libraries in Nigeria.
- vi. **No capacity development programme:** Capacity building programmes for librarians working in state-owned university libraries has become a mission impossible. Librarians are not sponsored to conferences, workshops and even seminars. Organizing an in-house workshop for staff is also not possible. It is obvious that librarians gain more knowledge and skills to perform efficiently when they attend workshops, conferences and seminars and through the exchange of ideas, gain more knowledge and ideas which will enhance their productivity. Since librarians are denied these capacity building exercises needed to increase their knowledge and skills, implementing knowledge management programme in their library will not be possible.
- vii. **Unconducive working environment:** The environment under which most libraries working in state owned university libraries find themselves in Nigeria is better imagined than experienced. Most of the libraries lack conducive offices, conveniences, pipe-borne water and electricity. This condition affects their psych, demoralize and discourage them from thinking like academics. Any staff under such working condition is hardly productive and cannot remain stable to engage in knowledge management programmes in their libraries.
- viii. **No co-operation among library staff:** The relationship existing between librarians and other staff working in state owned university libraries is not cordial. Librarians see themselves as superior to other support staff and therefore sees it as derogatory to learn from them. The support staff on the other hand fill marginalized and less important since the libraries do not embrace and carry them along in the scheme of things. The support staff do not enjoy sponsorship to seminars, conferences and workshop hence they hardly give in their best for the development of the library. Bedeviled with this type of problem, engaging in effective knowledge management is not realizable in state owned university libraries in Nigeria.



The Way Forward

Encapsulated with the aforementioned problems, KM in state-owned university libraries in Nigeria can only be feasible with the implementation of the following recommendations:

- i. Adequate fund allocation should be made available to the state-owned university libraries in Nigeria. The 10% of the total annual university budget should be given to the library to enable it organize itself and prepare for knowledge management programme.
- ii. The library management of state-owned universities should be allowed to employ commensurate number of staff who will work in their libraries. Where there is embargo on employment, the libraries should be given waiver to employ staff particularly professional librarians. It is this class of staff that can implement fully the programme of knowledge management in their libraries.
- iii. Technology and other related facilities are the basic tools needed for effective knowledge management in academic libraries. State-owned university libraries should acquire the basic technological tools needed to implement KM in their libraries.
- iv. Librarians working in state owned university libraries should be encouraged to put in their best at work by making sure that they are given enough incentives that accrue to them either in form of overtime, shift allowances, leave allowances or training allowances. Prompt payment of these financial benefits to librarians will persuade them to put in their best in their work positions.
- v. Irregular payment of salaries to workers in state-owned universities should be discouraged. The government should provide enough subvention to the universities to enable her pay salaries to their workers promptly. If this issue is resolved, work in all the sections of the university will improve tremendously.
- vi. Librarians in state owned university libraries should benefit from capacity building development fund of the parent institution. Librarians should be sponsored to conferences, workshops, seminars within and outside the country and sometimes trained in-house, whereby the older staff should teach and transfer the knowledge they have acquired over the years through experiences and training to their subordinates. The fraternization and interactions librarians enjoy during conferences, seminars and workshops are usually an eye opener and healthy development for improvement in their official duties.
- vii. The management of state owned universities in Nigeria should improve their facilities and structures particularly their libraries since it is the hub of every academic activity in the university. Library buildings should be expanded and made conducive enough for staff working in them. Good working environment encourages workers to put in their best.
- viii. Finally, both professional librarians and the support staff should work in synergy to realize fully the goals of their libraries and by extension the goals of the parent institution. All the workers in state-owned university libraries should see themselves as partners in progress hence they should work harmoniously to implement knowledge management programmes in their libraries



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