



INFORMATION SERVICE PROVISION BY ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the information service provision of academic librarians in the era of globalization. Information service provision is a role played by librarians which is beyond their traditional duties. The paper discussed the core library services that have been made better by technology which includes institutional repositories, RFID, and library management. The paper further discussed strategies for improving service provision as well as extended library services in the era of globalization. In order to remain relevant in the profession, skills that display academic librarians' creativity and innovation were discussed. Some challenges such as cybercrime and digital rights management were highlighted. The paper concluded that globalization in the academic library seems to have a very promising future with all the new technologies coming up. Recommendations proffered were that maintenance culture should be adopted, adequate funds made available, training and retooling of librarians and constant power supply.

Keywords: Academic librarian, Globalization, Information service provision

Introduction

The academic library is one of the sectors where knowledge and information is on the rise. In this era of globalization, the academic library performs more than the traditional role of just being a physical custodian of resources but rather an academic librarian is a digital custodian of resources. Previously the academic library acts as a physical guide to where the resources are located on the shelves but in the era of globalization, there is a software application that serves as a guide. Part of the information service provision that academic librarians have to carry out as a result of globalization is keeping up to date with the latest development in digital media, collaboration and improving technology access to meet to the demand of the ever-eager users. Ducas, Michaud-Ostryk and Speare (2020) opined that functions such as research support, data management, bibliometrics, digital initiatives, scholarly communication and user experience are gradually becoming part of the academic librarians' responsibilities.

Information technology has transformed the whole world into a global village with a global economy, which is increasingly dependent on the creative management and distribution of information. Over the past decades, the world has been experiencing significant changes in which the need to acquire, utilize and share knowledge has become increasingly essential. In the 21st century, the age



of knowledge and information is in its higher gear. This is an age when invisible knowledge and information take the role of prime movers in all sectors. Otoho (2020) opined that globalization is simple the transfer and unhindered relocation of people, resources, and services across the globe in a manner that it integrates and blends cultures effortlessly, open up trade and interaction between nations and economies. It is a phenomenal change through close interaction and integration of cultures is rapidly impacting on the entire world.

A pertinent issue however, is that globalization like several other changes cannot be wished away. This is because the new information revolution, which Omekwu (2001) believes has come to replace the agrarian and industrial revolution is rapidly compressing the world into digital global village. The revolution has led to a social process, which involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distances through a dramatic reduction in time taken either physically or by representation to cross them, so making the world smaller and in a certain sense bringing human beings closer to one another (Yau, 2005). Information revolution, powered by ICT, has given impetus to a new information economy. Information and knowledge have become a very critical factor of production just like land and capital during agrarian and industrial revolution. This revolution is tremendously impacting in all aspects of human life particularly in critical areas like education.

The academic librarians are critically positioned in this new information revolution to enhance information availability and use in higher education. In the present ever-changing information environment, academic libraries are encountering both opportunities and challenges. Information technology has introduced many changes in the way information is identified, procured, processed and disseminated to library clientele. Academic libraries are witnessing new paradigm shifts. These shifts include; transition of information sources and systems from paper to electronic media, complexity in information needs of highly demanding clientele and increase in the cost and quality of information. There are some skills that the academic librarian must possess in order to deliver services in that era of globalization where almost everything is virtual. This paper therefore seeks to find out how globalization has influenced the academic library, its services, necessary skills and the challenges faced by librarians in the new information environment.

Information Service Provision in the Era of Globalization

Information service provisions area library information service that basically focuses on procedures and operations that maintain, develops and supports the library collection and services. Some of the library collections are online and physical resources while the services ranges from acquisition, cataloguing, classification, inter library loan and so on. In a fast-changing world, there are new demands and influences on libraries and information centres. There is therefore the need for an upgrade in services rendered in the era of globalization. By using modern technologies all over the world libraries are now shifting their emphasis from traditional to multidimensional work force. Therefore, LIS professionals have to play a versatile role in different areas of libraries and information centers to meet the expectations and needs of the present situation. Information service provision is a critical factor which is reshaping the world at large. Titangos and Jan (2006) documented that library profession is at a crossroad in the 21st century as traditional library service appears to be on the decline while new technology based services are on the rise. Emeagwali (2004) and Yau (2005) posit that for information provision to be made possible, critical infrastructures like computers and internet connectivity, sustainable power supply, human capacity development and the political will by the government must be in place. Otoho (2020) outlined three core library services that have been made better by the technology in the era of globalization and they are; Institutional repositories, RFID Technology and Library management system.



1. **Institutional Repositories:** Institutional repository is whereby an institution with the help of ICT services deposits its resources in an open-source platform. Institutional repositories were not part of the traditional library package. With the advent of globalization, institutional repositories have defined a futuristic function in the library services by digitization. Developing countries are beginning to proud owners of institutional repositories because it serves as a bank for their resources which can be consulted when the need arises.
2. **RFID Technology:** RFID means Radio Frequency Identification Device. This is self-service software that is developed and adapted for libraries to track student's use of library materials, payment of fines and for security of books borrowed by students. RFID technology uses radio waves to identify library items through barcodes. RFID works with a book tracking navigation application. An important point to note here is that when the book has been placed in a different location, the application needs to be reset.
3. **Library Management System:** Library management system is a new technological interface called "Symphony" and "Enterprise" which was developed by Sirsi – Dynix Company for libraries for an integrated library system. Library management system can be found in countries like Louisiana in Louisiana Library Network of the Louisiana State University. Library management system is an interface that allows student to access catalogue across libraries in the network (Blessinger & Conneaux, 2020)

Strategies for Improving Information Service Provision in the Era of Globalization

Information service provision can be carried out better if the academic librarians are strategic about it. Being strategic about anything yields results. Izuagbe (2021), highlighted several strategies for improving information service provision of which some of them are;

- i. **Accept the new normal:** Accepting the new normal is basically flowing with the trend that is not being left behind in any new thing going on in the information professional world. Izuagbe (2021) cited OCLC (2006) and revealed that libraries were not mentioned as a beginning point for students who seek information, rather library came up after several option basically because ICT was not as developed as it today. So being abreast with any technology that is introduced is a key strategy for academic librarians and this was supported by Lund (2021), who opined that, in the digital economy, clients are the ones in the driver's seat.
- ii. **Identify and understand your users:** An academic library is domiciled in a university or college of education, so identifying one's user is simple. They are mostly students, lecturers who need to engage in one research work or the other. Outsiders too who are engaged in research are target audience for academic libraries. In order to achieve a patron focused service, academic librarians must be guided by the framework of target audience and embrace the fact that they have outgrown what is physically available but rather they know what they want, what media they want it in and how they want it (Izuagbe, Ibrahim, Ogiamien, Olawoyin Ilo & Osayande, 2019).
- iii. **Develop a variety of services:** Variety they say is the spice of life so globalization has aided the wide range of information service provision. The social media is not only about social activities but there are other things that might interest the target audience such as information on politics, religion, entertainment, socio-economic and so on. However, it is pertinent that the academic librarians meet the primary needs (research needs) of its users first before attending to their secondary needs (Igwe, 2017).
- iv. **Build a social media community:** In building a social media community, the academic librarians need to determine the type of social media that is mostly used by the target audience probably through a survey. Afterwards they can add them up and communicate with them to get their queries and respond accordingly. User-friendly apps can also be introduced to speed up



information provision service. If this is well coordinated, it increases the audience base and ensures loyalty (Izuagbe, 2021).

Extended Library Services in the Era of Globalization

In repositioning the academic librarian in the era of globalization, library and information services doesn't need to be within the four walls of the library but rather it can be delivered anywhere and at anytime. Bello and Ezeri (2020) expressed that it is clear that the survival and advancement of globalization greatly depends on information and communication technology. What this means is that for academic libraries to be high flyers in their profession, some of their services are virtual with the assistance of information communication and technology. This has paved the way for unrestricted access to library and information services as well as its resources. Globalization has enlarged the scope of the academic librarian and broadened their duties. With every day that passes by, there is one new technology or innovation that the academic librarian has to be abreast with so as to deliver ones' services promptly to its users. Kumar (2018) listed out some important reformations introduced by technology and powered by globalization are: -

- i. collaboration and knowledge sharing among libraries in a network;
- ii. easy retrieval of information resources by students and other users;
- iii. reduction in time consumption and travel space when consulting library material;
- iv. multiplication of information services rendered in libraries for researchers and patrons;
- v. provision of quick and timely access to learning resources; and
- vi. integration of the library with other industry-based organizations.

Creative and Innovative Skills of Academic Librarians in the Era of Globalization

For academic librarians to remain relevant in delivering their services to its users in the era of globalization, they need to be creative and innovative. Abubakar and Attahir (2018) who cited Nelson (2003) highlighted several skills namely; interpersonal skill, technological awareness skill, leadership skill, problem solving skill and knowledge of intervention skill.

- i. **Interpersonal skill:** Interpersonal skill is also called human skill. An academic librarian should possess a human skill when dealing with colleagues and users so that they can understand their needs and collaboratively work together as a team. Interpersonal skill enables the academic librarian to share knowledge. Being that there is always one new technology, product or service, there is need to share knowledge and this can be done easily when the academic librarian possess interpersonal skill.
- ii. **Technological awareness skill:** Technological awareness skill is a necessary skill that includes the experience of software, hardware, on-line services and electronic performance support system. Academic librarians need to be abreast in recent technological advancement in order to provide information service to its users promptly.
- iii. **Leadership skill:** Leadership skill means being able to influence others. An academic librarian is meant to lead in discharging duties or services to its users whether physical or virtual. Leadership skill is a combination of completing ones' coursework in MLIS, work experiences and life experiences. Once these are in place, the academic librarian is equipped to lead.
- iv. **Problem solving skill:** Problem solving skills are important to academic librarians in the sense that first, a problem must be identified that the librarian wants to resolve. Thereafter, the problem is defined and broken into bits and pieces, the next step is to establish a dialogue between the stakeholders, brainstorming and finally be among the change solution and implementation team.
- v. **Knowledge of intervention skill:** Knowledge of intervention skill demonstrates a personal and procedural intercession whereby the academic librarian identifies a gap in the library and looks



for way to bridge the gap. For example, if there is a particular thing that users are requesting for and it is not readily available, it is the duty of a creative and innovative librarian to identify the gap and discuss with management on how to bridge the gap.

Challenging faced by Academic Librarians in The Era of Globalization

Khan (2016) opined that poor funding of technological infrastructure was a challenge in information service provision especially in the 21st century which is the era of globalization. Khan also opined that there was high annual operational cost hindered the advantageous use of technology as well as its potentials in creating unemployment. When a new technology is released, the academic librarians need to update themselves and this is done by training and retooling. Okiy (2010) highlighted that library staff should be trained and retooled and that the government has a role to play in funding libraries to the full specifications that comes with globalization. Virtual privacy network (VPN) is used to protect privacy and security by offering an encrypted tunnel from the users' device to the VPN provider and this prevents surveillance of data from any source or malicious snooping such as a fake wifi stealing data (McAndrew, 2020).

In developing countries, poor power supply is inevitable because they are not at the stage where electrical power can be on all day (Kumar, 2018). He opined that cybercrime, digital rights management strangulating information dissemination as well as forced placement paraprofessional librarians on redundancy list were challenges those academic librarians faced in the era of globalization. Lack of technical know-how cannot be over emphasized, some academic librarians know the basics but going a little further than usual, some of them will have difficulty in delivering their services to users. Kumar (2018), opined that frequent breakdown of technical infrastructure and cost of maintenance plagued academic libraries in the era of globalization and caused a major threat in information service provision.

Conclusion

The future of the academic librarians in the era of globalization as regards information service provision seems to be very promising and it can be hoped that the standard will be maintained. Academic librarians in the era of globalization are in a position to switch roles from just being custodians of information to being gurus in information service provision using online access in the knowledge society. Globalization has made academic libraries to have repositories for their parent institutions where they reside. Academic libraries around the world have gradually moved away from their traditional roles to services that spurred creativity in the management of libraries and their services in the era of globalization. Technology has undoubtedly come to stay and should be embraced by not only academic libraries, but other libraries.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, it is recommended that:

1. Adequate funds should be made available on a regular basis
2. Alternative power supply should be explored such as solar panels and inverters.
3. There should be a culture of training and retooling of staff on a regular basis so that no matter the kind of technology available, the academic librarians can work around it to satisfy users need.
4. The technological infrastructure used in academic libraries should be properly maintained at intervals.



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