Full Length Research

Information and Services Provision by Academic Libraries in Nigeria

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The paper highlights the services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria which were discussed in two folds. The first part is on the conventional services of academic libraries. The second part is based on the services rendered by academic libraries through web based services. The paper also explains briefly both the functions and the objectives of academic libraries in Nigeria.

Keywords: Information, Services, Services Provision, Library, Academic Library

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have for centuries played critically essential roles in supporting research in all subjects and disciplines within their host universities and colleges. But the last decades has brought a sea-change in relationships between researchers and libraries. Technological developments and the availability of information resources online have changed how research is done and also the services that academic libraries provide to their research communities. Both researchers and librarians have welcomed the benefits these changes have brought, adapting rapidly to them and seeking to exploit their potential to the full and they both look forward to further change in the coming years. In the period before electronic resources became available, the reserves were supplied as actual books or as photocopies of appropriate journal articles (Breeding, 2007). Academic libraries must decide what focus they take in collecting information resources since no single library can supply everything. Librarians examine the needs of students and instructors, as well as the priorities of the college or university when deciding what to focus on. When there are particular areas of specialisation in academic libraries these are often referred to as niche collections. These collections are often the basis of a special collection department and may include original papers, artwork, and artefacts written or created by a single author or about a specific subject.

Academic libraries today vary with regard to the extent to which they accommodate those who are not affiliated to their parent universities. Some offer reading and borrowing privileges to members of the public on payment an annual fee; such fees can vary greatly. The privileges so obtained usually do not extend to such services as computer usages, other than to search the catalogue, or Internet access. On the other hand, access to the libraries of some universities is absolutely restricted to students, faculty and staff. Even in this case, they may make it possible for others to borrow materials through inter-library loan programmes.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The information and services provision in academic

libraries in Nigeria calls for examination and the objective of this paper is:

(a)   To examine the information and services provision in academic libraries in Nigeria.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

(a)   **Information:** Information as a concept bears a diversity of meanings, from everyday usage to technical settings. Generally speaking, the concept of information is closely related to notions of constraint, communication, control data, form, instruction, knowledge, meaning, mental stimulus, pattern, perception, and representation. Information is a quality of a message that is sent from a sender to one or more receivers.

(b)   **Services:** The performance of any duties or work for another; helpful activity. It can also be seen as employment as a member of an organization working to serve or benefit others in some ways; such an organization.

(c)   **Services Provision:** The availability of services to library patrons.

(d)   **Library:** Library is a social institution established to collect, organize, preserve information resources and disseminate them to people for whom the library is established in a place conducive enough for the use of the information resources.

(e)   **Academic Library:** Academic library is one which is established in institutions of higher learning to support learning, teaching and research activities of the universities and colleges.

DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY

Academic library is a library that is attached to an academic institution above the secondary level, serving the teaching and research needs of students and staff. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the school curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. The support of teaching requires information resources for class readings and for students. In the past, the information resources for class readings, intended to supplement lectures as prescribed by the instructor, has been called reserves. According to Fabunmi (2002), Academic libraries are operationally defined as organized collections of information resources (print and non-print) which form an integral part of tertiary institution. In essence, the academic libraries provide resources to

support the teaching and research activities of their parent institutions.

FUNCTIONS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

According to Ifidon, et al (2002), traditional functions of academic library which includes (teaching, research and public service) remained, additional functions were added which includes:

(a)   Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge
(b)   Provision of intellectual leadership
(c)   Manpower development
(d)   Promotion of social and economical modernization
(e)   Promotion of intra and inter-continental and international understanding

OBJECTIVES OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The objectives of academic libraries according to Ifidon (2009) are:

(a)   Provision of information resources for undergraduate instruction, term papers and project as well as for supplementary reading.
(b)   Provision of information resources in support of faculty, external and collaborated researches.
(c)   Provision of information resources in support of post-graduate research.
(d)   Provision of expensive standard work especially in the professional disciplines.
(e)   Provision of information resources for personal self development.
(f)   Provision of specialized information on the region within which the university is situated.

INFORMATION AND SERVICES PROVISION BY ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

To facilitate academic success, academic libraries must provide access to a broad range of information resources. Reference and referral services, orientation activities, and instruction sessions that teach students the critical thinking skills necessary for using library information resources are one of the basic services provided by the staff particularly to new students of the institutions in Nigeria. Varied and innovative orientation programmes to new users of the library include teaching by personal contact and through the preparation and use of instructional information resources in various formats. Introducing the library users to the library activities,

provide a gateway to all future inquiries, not only preparing the users as independent users but also teaching them to use information sources as citizens, as consumers, as professionals, and for recreational purposes. Moreover, the services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria are highlighted and explained below:

Circulation /Borrowing Services

Circulation / borrowing services are one of the most vital services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria to their clienteles. These services are being provided for her teeming population of users which constitute students, staff and other potential patrons at large which are outside the academic environment such as the immediate communities' members where the library is situated. The academic library provides these services by way of providing information resources that can cater for their endeavours.

Reference Service

Academic libraries in Nigeria also provide qualitative services to the users by means of answering questions over the telephone, answering via the web or by email, answering reference questions by means of meeting face-to-face. Reference services for library users often involve not only answering specific questions but also personalized instruction in the methods of identifying and locating research information resources (Umar, 2008). Databases, bibliographies, and other aids designed to introduce library users to the information resources the library provides and to guide them in finding the research information resources to further enrich the pool of available information resources. Reference services provided by academic library staff introduces the wide variety of information resources in the library system and beyond, connecting the users with branch or specialized libraries, and other campus supportive services including academic, financial, writing, and counselling services.

Orientation activities may take many forms, but all acquaint library users with the facilities, information resources, and services of the library system for the first time. Orientation may also include public relations activities that introduce students to information resources available within the university community or on any information network. Academic libraries also play some important roles with regards to reference services to its users (Connell, 2009):

(a)   To assist users
(b)   To help readers make the best selections from the universe of recorded information
(c)   To justify the existence of the library by

demonstrating its value to those who support it

In the survey of large academic libraries in Nigeria, Aguolu (2002) found out that apart from the primary functions of answering queries, the responsibilities carried out by most reference departments includes the following:

(a)   Inter-library loan service
(b)   Public document service
(c)   Current periodical
(d)   Micro text and newspapers
(e)   Library tour
(f)   Library instructions
(g)   Book selection for the general library collection
(h)   Processing of theses dissertation, etc

Bibliographic Verification Services

This service involves provision of facts about publications rather than people, events or organizations. In providing this service, reference librarian searches his bibliographic tools such as indexes, bibliographies, catalogues, etc, to verify that users' information about a document (i.e. bibliographic publication) is correct and complete. This service is very important because it is evident that students, scholars, publishers, authors and the general public sometimes miss some bibliographic information about some items they cited. Information about data of publications, correct names of authors etc is sometimes wrongly cited. This service is therefore provided to assist users to verify any of such information.

Current Awareness Services (CAS)

Many information services are provided by academic libraries in Nigeria especially to alert their users about the existence of some current publications or information. According to Madu (2009) that CAS take the form of periodic (Daily, Weekly, etc) listing of publications, monographs and periodical articles within a given subject area. These publications are circulated among some categories of users or general users of academic libraries in Nigeria in order to notify them about the existence of such information resources contained on the list. For example a user may find something relevant to its area of specialization and therefore request for the resources or a specific part of it. Elizabeth (2004) described the concept (CAS) as "The service which includes review of publications immediately upon receipt, selecting information resources pertinent to the programmes of the organization served and note individual information resources to be brought to the attention by one means or the other of those persons to whom work they are

related". Information according to him can be reviewed through the following:

(a)   Using circulars
(b)   Using telephone
(c)   Using library bulletin
(d)   Using notification forms to be sent to the users
(e)   Routing of periodicals where relevant articles are marked to draw attention of the users
(f)   Circulation of table of content, etc.

Reprographic Services

The photocopying is the most frequently requested element of user services in academic libraries in Nigeria. Information resources such as reference works, rare books, theses, periodicals or heavily used items which are not normally loaned may be photocopied. Adhering strictly to copyright laws and supplied to students, some even permit the photocopying of personal document or private note. In addition, certain libraries especially academic libraries are responsible for giving binding services to the users provided that the binding unit is not overburdened with the library official work.

Technical Services

Under the technical services the academic libraries in Nigeria are seen as providing some technical services to their users. Gbaji (2007) highlights some of those services as follow:

(a)   **Acquisition / collection management:** The academic libraries in Nigeria acquire, collect and manage the information resources (books and media) as well as making these information resources available for their users in order to meet up with their information needs.
(b)   **Systems Department:** The users of academic libraries in Nigeria gain free access into the systems department of the library such as computers or automation department so as to be able to search the information needs online.
(c)   **Cataloguing and classification:** The academic libraries in Nigeria provide both manual and electronic cataloguing systems for their users that facilitate easy access to the information resources of their choice in the library. Academic librarians make impact in this area by suggesting a suitable classification system to be used in the library. The section also advices the cataloguers to include some information while cataloguing in order to provide useful information about information resources on the catalogue cards so

as to assist users in locating information resources easily.

(d)   **Digital Initiatives:** The digital initiatives programme oversees the selective digitization of the universities manuscript collection and other records.
(e)   **Indexing and abstracting services:** Abstracting and indexing journals as well as subject bibliographies help to provide access to information resources. The international indexing and abstracting services are very selective in respect to the journals they cover. Academic librarians provide these services.

Extension / community services

Apart from the aforementioned services rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria, they also extend their services to their immediate communities in which the academic libraries are situated. This is done by ways of providing the community users with adequate information resources that would go a long way to cater for their immediate needs and aspirations. The academic libraries provide services such as computer programmes designed to inculcate to the users on how to use the systems for their personal and immediate needs. They also provide books that could serve as a yardstick for education and cultural development of their society. Academic libraries in Nigeria also assist the community members to actualize their dreams and aspirations by providing them with information resources that would improve the quality of their lives particularly low-income individuals.

Inter-Library Co-operation

Inter-Library co-operation is another vital service rendered by academic libraries in Nigeria. This type of service is usually seen to be practiced between two or more libraries with mutual benefits in which the libraries involved come together with an agreement to share and exchange information resources.

The IFLA Pre-Conference in Athens (Dickson and Robert, 2010), a research was conducted highlighting six libraries services in an attempt to determine their acceptance in the service context of academic libraries. These services are: RSS, instant messaging, streaming media, weblogs, tags and social networks. The findings included (but are not limited to) a rather low usage of those services, and evidence that Really Simple Syndication (RSS) was the only widely used web service among the six, and tags was the least used. The integration of a specific set of services is re-examined after two years, a period of time that can provide some

clues as to the state of affairs in the field of academic libraries and the incorporation of web services. The implementation of several web services was recorded, showing an increase in provision but at the same time, there was not a corresponding increase in user participation in several of these services. Consequently, these services may not have the anticipated impact on the strategic service plans of libraries, the purpose was to document the usage of twelve library services: the six services mentioned above with the addition of Face book, Twitter, web site interface for mobile devices, reference service via SMS, YouTube and browser toolbars.

(a)   **Really Simple Syndication (RSS):** Although the RSS technology is widely used by academic libraries in Nigeria, it should not be considered as social software, but a way to bridge the various social software applications using an XML format (Brown-Sica & Jeffrey, 2008). Mu (2008) write about the features and different functions RSS can have for academic libraries in Nigeria. Blackburn and Walker (2008) discussed some of the wrong steps that academic libraries take when they promote RSS to users. Academic libraries in Nigeria use the RSS service to inform their users of library news and developments in a way that resembles the "news service" that many academic libraries still have, often in collaboration with the RSS service: change to the academic library's schedule, new acquisitions, library renovations, exhibitions, etc.

(b)   **Instant messaging:** This service presents some interesting opportunities for academic libraries in Nigeria to reach out to their users but there are still several issues that need to be addressed. Although it has been reported in several cases that instant messages can be a useful tool for academic libraries in Nigeria, especially in relation to reference services but there are still several issues that need to be addressed (Clements, 2010). There are arguments that this service can be inefficient or inappropriate for some academic libraries in Nigeria because of limited funds, low volume of use, technical inefficiencies and staffing problem; issues that lead, in some cases, to the decision to discontinue its use (Desai 2006).

(c)   **Weblogs:** Weblogs are the subject of several papers regarding different aspects of their use by libraries, librarians and World Wide Web users. Breeding (2010) investigated the possibility of thinking about weblogs as a scholarly activity and Davenport (2008) stressed the issue of longevity of both personal and institutional library weblogs. Hall and Davidson (2010) argued that weblogs can be effective learning tools and Aharony (2010) researched the comments posted on LIS blogs, professional and personal and concluded that there is a low dynamic in content creation.

However, this study recorded that academic library weblogs do not contribute to what has become known as "content creation" and the "participatory Web", since they are mainly used as a platform for delivering library news and not as an open discussion forum that library patrons use to interact with library personnel and other users.

(d)   **Tags:** An intriguing study by Christensen, (2009) on tag use by academic libraries in Nigeria concluded that a mixture of both controlled and uncontrolled vocabulary would benefit academic libraries and their catalogues the most. He also identifies some issues to be considered when implementing user tags in library catalogues, such as polysemy, synonym, plurality and luck of hierarchy. In addition, Christensen (2009) reports several uses tags can have for an academic library and Aharony (2009) explores the use of tags in library science weblogs.

(e)   **Social Networking:** Social networking sites have been at the fore front of discussion about the use of the web in academic libraries in Nigeria but there are several issues that might need to be considered. Breeding (2010) argues that students use Face book to escape, even for a short period of time, from their academic responsibilities, which is the opposite of what led academic libraries in Nigeria to exploit Face book in the first place. Steel and Geoffrey (2010) surveyed over 36,000 students in academic libraries in Nigeria and found that although more than 90% use social networking site, only 30% of them use those sites for course-related purposes and 8% to communicate with course instructors. Fuchs (2009) reported that university students consider the provision of information and news to be a minor advantage of social networking sites, with eight other purposes being valued more highly.

Another aspect to consider when a library creates an account with a social network service, such as Face book or MySpace, is the possibility that a portion of the targeted audience will reject the library's aim of finding new ways of communicating because they will think their privacy is potentially infringed despite the fact they are users of that particular service (Connell, 2009) or simply because they do not want libraries as their "friends" (Breeding, 2007). Breeding (2007) also reported students' concern about libraries infiltrating their social spaces through Face book. He investigated library related Face book groups at two universities in Nigeria and found that it was hard for those groups to maintain a steady flow of posts and participation by the students.

Breeding (2007) studied the role of Face book as a social search engine and concluded that it is mainly irrelevant. He had a response rate of only 3.2% when he reached out to academic library audiences in Nigeria through Face book. Moreover, librarians who decide to use Face book as a tool for marketing and promotion of

academic library services in Nigeria should be aware of the fact that they might find themselves in an environment where the level of professionalism found in their libraries is difficult to maintain (Graham, 2007). Chu and Meulemans (2008) considered Face book and My Space to be good outreach tools for an academic library alongside other older outreach tools.

Moreover, we should carefully consider if we should create applications and encourage our patrons to use them on some of the social networking sites, when it is now reported that user data transmitted through various applications to advertising companies on the web (Steel and Fowler, 2010). Should we consider our list of "friends" as part of our services, when we know that it may be exploited for profit? (Stone, 2010). We might expect a commercial service to try to make a profit by selling user data. Problems can arise when institutions that users trust choose to lead users away from safe places and expose them to possible exploitation by third party services (Graham, 2007). Fuchs (2009) argues that the users of social networking sites are under constant state and economic surveillance.

(f)   **Face book, Twitter, YouTube and blog usage:** It did not go unnoticed that the interest that academic library patrons in Nigeria showed in core web services (Twitter, Face book, YouTube and weblogs) was rather limited. Despite the fact that measuring the effectiveness of academic library services in Nigeria in terms of the "like", "followers", "comments" or "view counts" may not be the most scientific method of data gathering, it does provide a measure of their acceptance (Crawford, 2011). With very few exceptions, academic library pages in Nigeria of some of the core web services recorded only limited participation by library users, based on the volume of users taking advantage of those services. Furthermore, web services should not be considered in terms of their social element, but rather as the implementation of new technologies within a framework of a library's daily functions. Technologies that were not developed to be used in libraries (e.g. e-mail, chat services, even computers) have been successfully incorporated into libraries for many decades now, and we should think about the newer technologies as an extension of the move towards an automated library environment that is constantly adapting to social, economic and informational developments.

Socializing our services is around the clock jobs, and we should be prepared to invest our time in these services, not only because of the extra workload, but mainly because today's popular web services might be tomorrow's out-of-date, old and indifferent web services. We should carefully examine our options before engaging in an endless race to catch up with the most popular web service. Although, user preferences can change rather quickly, our commitment and investment in time, energy,

money and ultimately, status cannot. Academic libraries in Nigeria should try to draw attention to their digital or physical space by offering exceptional online services.

Breeding (2007) opined that the web has become a marketing concept that is trendy. A trendy marketing tool for librarians but not for libraries, one might add. Poor promotion should be seen as a poor excuse for an unsuccessful web service implementation. There has been so much web hype that if our students have not found our Face book page by now it is not because it was not promoted properly, but because they did not care enough to search for it. User willingness is the key to the success of new and trendy services. Though, most of these web services have not been properly utilized in some developing countries like Nigeria. As opined by Gbaji (2007) that the shortage of web technologies skilled librarians, poor information technology infrastructure and high cost of equipment has hindered the Nigerian Academic Libraries from providing online information services.

CONCLUSION

The academic library is the main organ that can assist the university and colleges to achieve their goals. Both manual and automated services need to be available in every academic libraries in Nigeria but users often prefer automated services because they have become aware of the capabilities of automated library services. To enable the academic libraries in Nigeria to perform these functions effectively and efficiently they have to be planned for effective customer services to be achieved. They should provide information to support all key operators such as acquisition, circulation control, and serial management. This will enable the users to find the information they want quickly and easily.

Similarly, users' needs are diverse and satisfying them is a daunting task, but the dream of every librarian is to satisfy the users with their information needs through the services provided. In Nigeria, academic libraries services should be planned to cater for the present and future users' needs demand and expectations. User awareness is increasing and their needs are becoming more pressing, while their supplies are declining, satisfying them is the only reason why the academic libraries exist in the first place and no sacrifices is too much to achieve this.

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