

Full Length Research

Merging Role of Libraries as Core Institutions for Research and Learning

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The merging of libraries as central research institutions reflects a profound transformation in the educational world. Libraries are not passive repositories anymore; they are active participants in the research life cycle. As technology advances and research becomes more collaborative, libraries will be at the forefront, constantly adapting their services to the changing needs of scholars. By embracing this new role, libraries will remain indispensable partners in the quest for knowledge and research. Libraries have long been recognized as crucial institutions for research and learning, providing access to a wealth of knowledge and resources. In recent years, the role of libraries has evolved significantly, with a growing emphasis on their function as core institutions for both research and learning. This paper explores the merging role of libraries in these domains, highlighting their importance in facilitating academic inquiry, supporting lifelong learning, and fostering a culture of innovation. By adapting to changing technological landscapes and embracing new modes of information dissemination, libraries are poised to play a central role in shaping the future of research and education. The paper delves into the multifaceted ways in which libraries are transforming into dynamic hubs of intellectual engagement, collaboration, and discovery, thereby underscoring their enduring relevance in an increasingly digital age

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries have always been at the core of educational institutions. They are essential in promoting research, education, and knowledge sharing. However, with the ever-changing world of information and technologies, libraries have become a multi-faceted institutions that not only preserve and provide access to a wide range of resources but also actively engage in research. This combination of traditional library functions with an expanded research function has made libraries essential centres of academic and scientific progress. The library institution has traditionally been known as a place for sourcing information. Its major objective was to meet the information needs of the user's community. Proctor (2021) noted that key positions in universities' missions to support teaching and learning are held by the modern academic library. The adage "the library is the heart of the university" may be the finest way to describe this centrality. Instead of being establishments, structures, warehouses, shops, housing goods, etc, libraries are revolutionaries or agents of social, political, educational, and economic change in the community, and they are now

available to anyone in need of information (Igbashal, Asue, Beetseh, 2019). The library is the only central place that can cater sufficiently for the various education and information needs of members of the academic community. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of libraries in higher education (Ashikuzzaman (2019).

The university libraries' serene environment and extensive range of resources make it the ideal place for learning. Libraries are access points to information resources. They provide a wide range of books, periodicals, databases, and multimedia content, acting as entry points to a vast array of information resources. By offering advice on efficient information retrieval and utilization, libraries play a critical role in developing students' research abilities. Some identified services rendered by university libraries that promote higher education include:

- i. Resource Provision
- ii. Research Support
- iii. Information Literacy Education
- iv. Collaborative Learning
- v. Technology Access
- vi. Archiving and Special Collections
- vii. Reference service to users
- viii. Inter-library loan services
- ix. Promoting Open Access
- x. Cultural and Intellectual Engagement
- xi. Remote Access

The provision of these services is important in revitalizing the educational sector in every respect. Salisu, Danjuma and Zango (2022) opine that through services and programs like teaching kids to love reading and become lifelong readers, libraries and information services play a vital role in a country's educational and competency development. They also support scholars and researchers in using their research skills to further development. The library is critical to human capacity building in any organization and society in general. This is so because, exposure to electronic databases, current journal publications, up-to-date books, and communication technology, equips the users with the required skills required to excel in the competitive society of today. Libraries are organizations that make sure that educational information resources are available both within and outside of schools (Saka et al., 2022). Beyond the confines of traditional learning environments, libraries support functional literacy, lifelong learning, and continuous education (Aboh and Yusuf, 2020).

Access to a wide range of intellectual resources, such as print and electronic books, scholarly journals, research papers, multimedia materials, and databases, is the main goal of a university library. This is achieved through the identification, selection, acquisition, processing, storing, and dissemination of knowledge in print and non-print formats. Academic libraries and librarians are essential to the administration of an institution's research productivity.

The Role of Libraries in Research

Gabbay & Shoham (2019) enumerated the roles of libraries in research to include:

- i. Provision of access to electronic databases
- ii. Provision of access to printed books and journals
- iii. Provision of information about conferences and seminar
- iv. Provision of conducive reading space
- v. Purchase of printed and electronic materials for researchers
- vi. Provision and continuous updating of library collections.
- vii. Provision of technological gadgets to assist researchers
- viii. Provision of inter-library loan service
- ix. Assistance in course materials preparation.

Library Science Academy (2023) also views the function of libraries in postsecondary education as multifaceted and essential in shaping the academy journey of students by providing access to vast repositories of knowledge to foster research, critical thinking and innovation. The library plays a pivotal role in the educational landscape. Some of the key aspects of their significance are:

Information Access: Libraries are repositories of an extensive array of resources, including books journals, research papers, e-books multimedia and digital archives. These vast collections grant students and faculty, access to a wealth of information access diverse disciplines, fostering a culture of enquiry and continuous learning. As leaders in information

management, libraries make it easy for researchers to explore and use resources, enabling them to make important discoveries. In addition to making it easier for patrons to access, libraries also help users to learn and research remotely. Libraries have evolved beyond their physical spaces. They provide round-the-clock global access to their resources through web portals. Because of its worldwide reach, libraries can collaborate with other organizations and exchange resources, research, and expertise more effectively (Skill Prepare, 2023)

- i. **Supporting Academic Curricular:** Libraries play an integral role in supporting the academic curricula of higher education. They complement classroom lectures and reading, offering supplementary materials that deepen understanding and provide multiple perspectives on the subject.
- ii. **Promoting Research and Innovation:** Higher education is centred on research, and libraries are an essential resource for researchers. They make scholarly publications, research materials, and academic databases accessible so that academics can engage in cutting-edge study and further knowledge. Libraries offer research support services that help scholars with their research. From research consultations to information literacy programs and data management, Librarians are helping researchers with their research. Librarians used to be limited to information gatekeepers. Nowadays, Librarians work with researchers to help them with literature reviews, site management, and information retrieval strategies.
- iii. **Cultivating Critical Thinking:** Librarians encourage critical thinking and independent learning by offering students the autonomy to explore various topics, conduct research and evaluate information, libraries empower them to become analytical and discerning thinkers.
- iv. **Creating Learning Space:** Beyond their role as book depositories, libraries create conducive, learning space that foster creativity and collaboration. Modern libraries incorporate comfortable study areas, group discussion zones, and multimedia centers enabling student to engage with their studies in diverse ways. Libraries Design collaborative spaces that encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration and provide researchers with spaces that promote innovation and knowledge sharing. These spaces create a sense of community and encourage the sharing of concepts and the advancement of research networks (Waters, 2023)
- v. **Digital Resources and Technology Integration:** With the advent of the digital age, libraries have embraced technological advancements. They now offer online catalogues e-books, research databases and other digital resources, facilitating seamless access to information anytime and anywhere. Technology's integration into library services is one of the most significant changes that have taken place in the evolving role of libraries. From digital repositories to online databases and access to electronic journals, technology has become an essential part of the modern library (Singh, 2019). Not only does technology improve the availability of information, but it also allows researchers to conduct collaborative and cross-disciplinary studies, thereby breaking down geographical boundaries and promoting a worldwide research community.
- vi. **Information Literacy:** Libraries are instrumental in promoting information literacy among students. Librarians educate users on how to navigate information sources effectively, critically assess information credibility and ethically use and cite resources.
- vii. **Enhancing Teaching Pedagogy:** Faculty members benefit from the resources available in libraries to improve their pedagogy. Together with lecturers, librarians select materials that are appropriate for each subject, suggest pertinent books, and help teachers incorporate information literacy into the curriculum.
- viii. **Preserving Cultural Heritage:** Libraries are not only repositories of contemporary knowledge but also guardians of historical and cultural heritage. Libraries preserve cultural heritage by archiving and preserving rare and unique materials. As the keepers of historical manuscripts, rare books, and archive collections, libraries preserve the cultural heritage of societies. Not only does this preservation function play an important role in historical research, but it also guarantees that future generations will be able to access the rich heritage of human experience and creativity. The merging role combines traditional preservation practices with cutting-edge digital archiving technologies to protect cultural heritage for generations to come.
- ix. **Lifelong Learning:** Libraries foster a culture of lifelong learning even after graduation, alumni and members of the community can continue to utilize library resources, engaging in continuous self-improvement and staying abreast of new developments in their field.
- x. **Community Spaces and Engagement:** Libraries are not just repositories anymore. They are becoming community hubs. Collaborative learning spaces, maker rooms, and community events are transforming the physical layout of libraries. Libraries are actively fostering a feeling of belonging and community. They imagine themselves as community hubs, not just academic centres. This community-centric approach improves the social fabric inside and around libraries, providing spaces for diverse interactions.

CONCLUSION

Libraries play an indispensable role in higher education by serving, facilitating research, promoting critical thinking and creating vibrant spaces for academic growth. As Technology advances, libraries continue to evolve and adapt to ensure they remain vital cornerstones in the pursuit of intellectual excellence and lifelong learning. The merging of these roles marks a significant shift in the way libraries operate. They are no longer a thing of the past, but an active part of education, research and society. As they evolve, libraries will continue to lead the way in technological innovation, information sharing and cultural preservation, keeping them relevant in an ever-evolving world.

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