

Librarians' Response to Evolving Trends in Library Resources and Services: implications for Nigerian Academic Libraries

Imran, Abdulakeem Akoworada
Imranfcesoyo@gmail.com

Adeleke, Kamoru Wumi

Abdulsalam, Aminat Obakhume
College Library, Federal College Of Education (Special), Oyo

ABSTRACT

The study investigates the changing user preferences from print to electronic resources and services within the academic library context. The research acknowledges the increasing adoption of electronic access due to its convenience and remote capabilities. Despite the surge in popularity of electronic resources, the paper advocates for a hybrid approach, recognizing the enduring value of print resources. Additionally, the study discusses the impact of librarians in the digital environment. The core challenge identified revolves around the strategic deployment of electronic resources to meet evolving user needs while aligning with institutional missions. This emphasizes the need for academic libraries to navigate the dynamic landscape by balancing traditional and modern approaches to ensure the continued effectiveness and relevance of their services.

Keywords: *Library users, academic libraries, electronic resources, library services, digital library service*

Introduction

The world is undergoing rapid changes, and organizations must continuously scan, assess, and adapt to refine their understanding of what the future holds for them. Within academic circles, librarians play a crucial role as managers and providers of information resources for teaching, research, and scholarship. Traditionally, print resources were the primary means of offering these services. However, the emergence of electronic resources has brought about positive impacts on library resources, services, as well as the storage and transmission of information. In regions like Nigeria and other developing nations with inadequate ICT infrastructure, limited resources, and low IT proficiency, the shift poses significant challenges. Issues such as power supply, low bandwidth, and the evolving demands of the new generation of

academics for a paradigm shift in information management further complicate the scenario. Academic libraries therefore, must confront and address these challenges, reevaluating and redefining their roles to meet the demands of an increasingly ICT-driven world. The purview of this paper is set to reappraise the services offer by academic libraries and bring to light trends of digital library development in terms of resources and services.

Concept of academic library

A library is an institution entrusted with the responsibility of collecting, processing, storing, and disseminating recorded information in both print and non-print formats, dedicated to facilitating reading, study, and consultation. Functioning as an organized collection, its primary objective is the efficient dissemination of information. Academic libraries predominantly feature print resources, with a minimal proportion of audiovisual materials. Okiy (2015), defines a

library as an organized compilation of published books, periodicals, and various reading and audio-visual materials. The inclusion of staff services is highlighted, emphasizing the provision and interpretation of materials to meet the diverse informational, research, educational, or recreational needs of library users.

In the context of academic institutions, a library serves as an integral component, contributing to the learning, teaching, and research objectives of the academic community. The focus on print resources, while predominant, coexists with the recognition of emerging digital and audio-visual trends, reflecting the dynamic nature of information dissemination in contemporary academic settings. Reitz (2014) characterizes an academic library as 'an integral part of a college, university, or other institution of post-secondary education established to provide information resources and services to support the learning, teaching, and research needs of students and staff. According to this definition, academic libraries play a pivotal role in the educational landscape by offering resources and services that contribute to the overall academic mission.

The information resources traditionally housed in academic libraries primarily consisted of printed materials, encompassing textbooks, indexes, abstracts, journals, reports, and manuscripts. These definitions not only underscore the importance of information resources in facilitating services but also emphasize the inseparable relationship between the physical organization and administration of these resources and the defined principles of library and information science. The notion is rooted in the historical practice of physically organizing and confining information resources, both in print and non-print formats, to a specific location within the library. Users traditionally visited this designated space to access and consult the materials. While this framework has historically shaped the library's role, it is crucial to recognize the evolving landscape where digital resources and virtual access increasingly complement or even redefine the traditional physical organization of information resources.

Some scholars, as indicated by the Research Information Network & Consortium of Research Libraries in British Isles (2007), argue that traditional library resources, particularly print materials, are no longer the primary providers of information needs within their communities. This perception is echoed by library users who view the library as a resource consulted towards the end or, at best, in the middle of their information searches (Ugwu & Onyegiri, 2017). Such perspectives carry significant implications for the utilization, services, and relevance of print resources.

The conventional definition of a library, characterized as an organized collection of information resources located in a specific place or made accessible to users at a designated time and location, may need to evolve. This shift is prompted by the increasing accessibility of information remotely, extending beyond the immediate physical environment. The fundamental goal of academic libraries; and libraries in general, remains the provision of relevant, timely, and accurate information to meet the diverse information needs of users, regardless of the format in which that information is delivered

Overview of Contemporary Challenges in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries currently confront with range of challenges encompassing resource adequacy, technological obsolescence, evolving modes of educational delivery, shifts in publishing and communication, the need for skilled personnel, financial constraints, and the changing role of librarians as primary purveyors of information. According to Ugwu and Orsu (2017) recent developments have intensified the pressure on the traditional functions of academic libraries marked by:

1. The rapid expansion of student enrolment.
2. The increase in non-traditional students, including part-time and mature students.
3. Escalating costs of printed materials.
4. A surge in the volume of academic publications.

5. Declining budgets allocated to libraries.
6. Transformations in teaching and learning methodologies, emphasizing student-centered approaches.
7. Technological advancements shaping library operations.
8. A shift from the original emphasis on holding materials to the significance of serving as a gateway to networked information, focusing on access rather than mere possession.

The challenges as highlighted by Thanuskodi and Ravi (2019) have led to a lamentation regarding library services in educational institutions, where the inadequacy of library resources is seen as adversely affecting the quality of teaching, learning, and research. Soyemi and Babalola (2018) further emphasize the repercussions, stating that the hindrance in research is attributed to a lack of awareness of the current state of knowledge in the field and the utilization of outdated research paradigms and methodologies.

Electronic information resources have emerged in response to the suboptimal state of library resources and services. Tahir, Mahmood and Shafique (2018) noted that as a consequence of this development, traditional libraries are being marginalized as premier sources of information. The revolution brought about by information technology not only transforms how we store and transmit recorded knowledge and historical records but also revolutionizes how we search for and access these materials.

Indifference towards Printed Resources and Services

A diminishing interest in print resources, as noted by Tahir, Haroon and Muhammad (2020) is attributed to the increasing availability of online full-text content, creating a perception of print resources being somewhat secondary. This is not due to a decline in quality but rather stems from people's preference for the immediacy offered by online resources. The crucial factor influencing the willingness to consult and accept an information source lies in its user-friendly accessibility. This apathy towards print resources also extends to the choice of

publishing medium and the publishing industry. Tahir, Haroon and Muhammad (2020) further observed a delayed adoption of digital publishing technology by academic monographic publishers, but the demand for change has been triggered by the weakening economic model for paper publishing and distribution. This shift is a response to user preferences and market dynamics, necessitating an embrace of the new and prevalent medium.

The preference is distinctly leaning towards online resources and services, and despite current disparities in access and infrastructure, both current and future generations will persist in demanding electronic resources and services, aligning with global trends. The crucial role of information resources and services in learning is emphasized by Adeoye and Popoola (2011), who assert that "for learning to take place, learners must have access to necessary information materials and resources."

The shift towards electronic resources is not only sensible but also recommended, as highlighted by Soyemi and Babalola (2018), who pointed out that many print materials in the collections of Colleges of Education nationwide are deteriorating rapidly. To keep up with global trends, Colleges of Education libraries are urged to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into various educational spheres, including online courses, tele-education, telemedicine, distance learning, virtual learning, and virtual laboratories. Soyemi and Babalola further reported that many Colleges of Education have established virtual libraries, presenting an opportunity to create library portals for students and faculty to access a wealth of resources from both the library and other digital repositories through a single gateway

Reflection on the Past

Nevertheless, conventional libraries persist as the recognized repository of information and services for academic institutions, playing essential roles in gathering and providing access to information most relevant to their users. Within this framework, Rose (2013) suggests that new technologies complement and change the older ones," and

when displacement occurs, it happens gradually, with the new technologies often showcasing advancements. The author finds solace in the observation that "print did not destroy oral tradition; it extended its reach. Therefore, the advent of e-libraries or the digital revolution "is not going to obliterate books or print media." According to Shigeta, Koizumi, Sakai, Tsuji, Inaba and Hiraoka (2017) despite numerous digitization projects, electronic media is not as dominant as print media. Therefore, the "digital and paper-based library will continue to co-exist because electronic publications are not developing so much at the expense of print media but only as a compliment." While this holds true to some extent currently, the rapid growth of digitalization and the emergence of born-digital resources is noteworthy. Importantly, the new generation, often referred to as NETGEN, shows a strong inclination toward digital resources over print. This trend poses significant implications for the future of library resources and services, especially in the academic context.

In response to the influx of digital resources, Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2019) categorically asserted that, despite potential limited use of library resources, users continue to view libraries as reliable sources of information for their academic pursuits. This underscores the enduring trust that some scholars and library patrons place in print information resources. The authors further emphasize that print materials persist due to their portability, relative ease of access, and use. While electronic resources may be gaining popularity, conventional library resources such as print materials still hold significance. These materials contribute to enhancing library collections and reference services. As Sanusi (2016) note, this highlights the ongoing need to provide spaces and facilities within libraries to accommodate the use of traditional resources, acknowledging their continued role in supporting learning. Libraries should ensure the availability of comfortable study spaces catering to the use of both print and electronic resources within the library. Sanusi argued that providing physical space for study is a fundamental responsibility of libraries, especially as the evolving system demands areas that serve dual purposes, accommodating

technologies for accessing electronic resources as well as spaces for utilizing print resources.

Evolving Trends in Library Resources and Services

Despite perspectives on the future of electronic and print information resources, challenges persist regarding the ability of traditional libraries to meet contemporary demands. The landscape is undergoing significant transformations due to emerging trends and advancements in electronic publishing, leading to the proliferation of born-digital resources, digitization, databases, and web resources. The advent of e-libraries has brought to light the vulnerabilities of certain libraries. Rose (2013) noting that some lack comprehensive and reliable documentation on the evolving patterns in library operations and usage, thereby affecting strategic planning in libraries. This situation carries serious implications, as libraries without a clear understanding of their changing roles in the current learning and research environment cannot effectively prepare for the future or strategically position themselves on campus. The impact of new technologies has accentuated the limitations of traditional libraries, underscoring their struggle to meet current demands and contribute effectively to the missions of higher education.

Non-print information resources, such as photographs, videos, cassettes, audio cassettes, projectors, microfiche, microfilms, telex, and fax machines, have historically been integral parts of library resources and services. Their presence did not pose a significant threat to print resources. The current electronic information resources, including the internet, databases, web content, CD-ROMs, electronic books, and electronic journals, are the evolutionary outcomes of the development of these non-print resources that have long existed in libraries. This represents a continuous progression, aligning with Portman and Roush, (2024) prediction that the "academic library of the future will use all kinds of carriers of knowledge and information, with each new means of communication enhancing and complementing the strengths of all the previous means."

In the realm of electronic resources, various services have emerged, including

remote enquiry services, web-based catalogs, dedicated library websites, FAQ pages, interactive services, remote resource links, and connections to other online public access catalogs (OPACs). These services characterize the evolving landscape of e-resources environments. In this context, the advent of electronic resources is viewed both as a blessing and an opportunity to enhance academic library resources and services for its community. While some scholars see electronic resources as complementary to traditional print materials, others believe they have the potential to completely replace them in the near future. Printo and Sales (2018) characterize it as a 'shift from printed forms of information resources to electronic information materials,' suggesting that electronic resources might replace print resources if widely accepted, potentially leading to better-quality materials for research, teaching, and study by academic staff and students.

However, OCLC (2015) strongly opposes a total shift to electronic resources, arguing that libraries are traditionally more credible in providing accurate information compared to electronic resources, which are perceived as more reliable, effective, easy to use, convenient, and fast. While digital or electronic resources may offer easy access and appear more affordable than owning print resources, Rose (2013) notes that there is a risk of loss unless archival records created or digital collections are migrated to new future formats.

Academic Information Resources and Services for the Future

Acknowledging the value and utility of print information resources, there is a movement toward adopting or proposing an integrated system for providing information resources in a networked electronic environment, commonly referred to as an information commons, in the digital age (Premarathne, 2017). An information commons is characterized by "one-step" shopping approach that offers comprehensive library services for learning. This concept provides an opportunity to aggregate or integrate information resources to support research and teaching, imparting information skills to students across both print and

electronic formats, along with expert technical support. This approach aligns with the current era of transition towards hybrid information resources, emphasizing the value of information sources rather than solely focusing on the ease or medium of access.

In an environment of hybrid information resources, information can be sourced from virtually anywhere, encompassing blogs, personal experiences, books, journals, magazines, articles, expert opinions, encyclopaedias, and web pages (<http://www.lib.vt.edu/help/research/info-sources.htm>). This approach recognizes the diverse array of sources available and emphasizes the importance of providing access to information in various formats to meet the needs of a dynamic academic community.

The technology-driven digital environment has indeed brought about significant transformations in the services provided by librarians. The transition from manual to online reference, online document access, direct borrowing, self-checkout systems, and user instruction represents a noteworthy change in how libraries interact with their patrons. However, an ongoing debate questions whether these technological advancements surpass the effectiveness of human-mediated or librarian-mediated services. Tlakula and Fombad (2017) assert that "no innovation has impacted the library profession to such a great extent as the Internet, world wide web, and networked resources." This profound impact has fundamentally reshaped the roles, paradigms, and culture of libraries and librarians. The evolution towards a digital environment has prompted libraries to reconsider their traditional approaches and embrace new technologies, influencing how information is accessed, shared, and managed within the library community. The impact of this digital shift extends to various areas, including control and ownership of resources, physical handling and processing of information materials, direct and personal contact and assistance to resources and services, as well as manual operations like cataloguing and classification, and restricted operational times, among others. In response to user demands for remote access to electronic resources, some academic

libraries have adjusted their focus from ownership of information to a model that emphasizes 'anywhere, anytime' access (Tlakula and Fombad, 2017)). This reflects a proactive response to the changing needs and preferences of library users in the digital age.

Future Library Users and Information Seeking behaviour

In a study conducted by Omotayo (2010) on the access, use, and attitudes of academics towards e-journals, it was revealed that all respondents were aware of and had used e-journals. Moreover, current statistics on Internet access indicate that in 2022 approximately 84.4 million Nigerians accessed the Internet, and about 6.6 million were users of Facebook (<http://www.internetworldstats>). These figures underscore the increasing prevalence of digital platforms for information access and suggest a growing reliance on electronic resources among library users. The findings of such studies provide valuable insights into the preferences and behaviors of future library users in their information seeking practices.

MacColl (2020) highlights that new generation students demand libraries procure both print and electronic resources, provide access to these resources through well-designed library websites with technical support, and offer physical spaces within the library for intellectual and interactive work. According to a survey by the EDUCAUSE Centre for Applied Research (ECAR) in 2008, 82% of students in their study owned laptops, with early adopters of technology accessing the Internet from their handheld devices weekly or more frequently. The study identified various devices used by students, including mobile/smart phones, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), clickers, personal response systems, MP3 players, iPods, and laptops/notebook computers.

In response to these trends, academic libraries were advised to consider "retooling for mobile users and mobile devices." The suggestion involves examining the consequences of mobile technology and identifying opportunities for innovation in content systems and tools, services, and both

physical and virtual environments for the provision of services and packaging of information for users (MacColl, 2020). This underscores the importance of adapting library services to meet the changing technological preferences and needs of the new generation of students.

In a related study addressing the concerns and apprehensions of staff involved in the educational process regarding Net Gen or Millennial students who are avid users of technology, Printo and Sales (2018) conducted research under the UK-based Joint Information System Committee (JISC) to examine how the digital environment affects learning. The study reported the following observations:

1. Students utilize mobile phones, laptops, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to support their learning.
2. They employ software to create, manipulate, and present content.
3. Students seek peer support through informal networks of friends and family, using various communication channels such as email, texting, chat, and Skype.

These findings shed light on the multifaceted ways in which students incorporate digital tools and platforms into their learning processes. It emphasizes the need for educators and institutions to understand and adapt to the evolving technological landscape to effectively engage with and support the learning preferences of the current generation of students. Indeed, it appears that students use these technologies to enhance learning, facilitate information sharing, and engage in exchanges that contribute to their academic activities, contrary to the belief of some faculty staff. The utilization of tools like mobile phones, laptops, and PDAs for learning purposes, as well as the creation and sharing of content through software, demonstrates the students' active engagement with digital resources.

Turning attention to the African context, Tlakula and Fombad (2017) highlights the rapid growth of the Internet on the continent in recent years. The survey conducted by Khan

(2020) on student internet usage further supports this trend, revealing that 38.24% and 22.06% of university students use the internet on a weekly or daily basis, while 11.76% use it monthly or bi-monthly. These statistics underscore the increasing presence of digital technologies in the academic activities of African students, aligning with global trends in the integration of technology into educational processes.

The Impact of Librarian

Librarians play a crucial role in the evolving landscape of resources and services, especially considering the increasing competition from external providers. Kattimani (2019) emphasizes the critical role of librarians in creating awareness and ensuring the quality utilization of online information resources. This includes:

- i. Selecting databases that are relevant to the user community and creating awareness through email alert systems.
- ii. Teaching and promoting the use of advanced searching techniques.
- iii. The need for formal library instruction and online information instruction.

Rose (2013) underscores the importance of making some library services available online and accessible remotely to cater to the growing population of online patrons. This adaptation is essential for academic libraries to remain relevant in the digital age. However, the use of e-resources also presents challenges to traditional libraries, as noted by MacColl (2019), who observes that library users are becoming more self-sufficient in accessing online resources, potentially distancing themselves from the library and its staff. Therefore, the author advises libraries to actively engage patrons to ensure they continue to appreciate the capabilities of resources and services offered by academic libraries in support of their research. This engagement is vital for fostering a positive and interactive relationship between users and the library. It is evident that the Internet has led to a reduction in use inquiries at reference desks, and this trend is on a declining trajectory (Paraschiv, 2017). However, contrary opinions are presented by other studies, such as those by Shigeta, Koizumi, Sakai, Tsuji and Inaba

(2019) and Hiraoka, Edem and Khan (2020), strongly argue that reference services and user education will continue to be essential in the digital age.

Similarly, Oladejo and Adelua (2022) pinpoint several reasons driving these changes as stated as follows:

1. Information needs can be delivered from the most appropriate source to the user.
2. Users can dynamically re-specify their needs.
3. Information is obtained when wanted, making it "just in time" rather than "just in case."
4. Users can select only the information needed to answer specific questions.
5. Information is stored only if the user wishes.

Despite the observed decline in traditional reference desk inquiries, these changes present advantages such as enhanced efficiency, personalized information delivery, and a more tailored approach to meeting users' specific needs. This highlights the evolving role of librarians in adapting to digital trends and continuing to provide valuable reference services and user education in the digital age. The shift to digital resources and the utilization of the Internet for information retrieval present various advantages, as highlighted by Oladejo and Adelua (2022):

- Faster consulting than print indexes.
- Use of a combination of search (keywords).
- Ability to search multiple files simultaneously.
- Searches can be printed or saved for repetition at a later date.
- Availability and accessibility remotely outside the library.

Rose (2023) emphasizes that as libraries transition to a digital environment, creating online instructions and tutorials, leveraging social networking sites, and effectively conveying the complementary nature of physical and online services for supporting teaching and instruction pose new challenges. The author notes that academic

libraries have evolved from struggling to obtain enough information to facing the challenge of identifying and retrieving reliable and accurate information from the vast digital resources available. As patrons increasingly rely on the Internet, librarians now utilize websites and portals to facilitate access to the internet and other digital resources. This adaptation is crucial for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of library services in the digital age.

Challenges

Librarians and academic library services in the digital age face formidable challenges, and according to Sanusi(2016), addressing these challenges requires a proactive approach in determining what librarians can offer in the new information environment. Some proposed solutions include:

1. Licensing information products specifically for mobile devices used by library patrons.
2. Hosting or directing users to institutional content designed for mobile devices, such as podcasts.
3. Preserving new content types and formats.
4. Becoming a service hub for mobile content and devices.

Academic College and Research Libraries (ACRL)(2018) notes that the proliferation of smartphones, e-books, iPods, and other handheld devices is driving user demands and expectations. An ECAR study on undergraduate students and information technology revealed that 51.2% of respondents own internet-capable handheld devices. The report suggests that librarians should play a proactive role in educating faculty and students on scholarly communication, authors' rights, open access options, and recruiting content for institutional repositories.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of recognizing social networking tools as emerging changes in services and required skills that will attract patrons to online services. The new trends in electronic resources development include the growing use of open-source products and the creation of more locally

oriented digital collections. Addressing these challenges and embracing these trends is essential for the continued relevance and effectiveness of academic library services in the digital era. The challenges faced by academic libraries in the digital age are multifaceted, as highlighted by various studies:

1. Population Growth and Inadequate Resources: Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2019) report that academic libraries grapple with issues like ever-increasing population growth, inadequate library facilities, insufficient resources, and funding constraints.
2. Barriers to ICT Usage. Omolayole (2022) identifies three factors hindering the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigerian academic libraries, including a low level computer culture, poor telecommunications infrastructure, and a general lack of awareness.
3. Skills Gap: Thanuskodi S and Ravi S. (2019), pointout challenges faced by public libraries in ten Anglophone African countries, such as a lack of adequate ICT personnel, insufficient funds, and, notably, Nigeria being the only country facing power supply issues. Additionally, Okiy (2015) notes problems like poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities, low computer literacy, inadequate computer facilities, and limited awareness of internet facilities.
4. Obstacles to E-Resource Deployment: The report by the Mortensen Center for International Library Programme at Illinois Urbana-Champaign (2015) identifies obstacles to the deployment of e-resources in academic libraries, including lack of government funding, limited and expensive internet bandwidth, unstable power sources, and insufficient staff development.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort involving improved infrastructure, increased funding, enhanced training for library staff,

and initiatives to raise awareness and promote digital literacy among library users.

Summary and Conclusion

To summarize, Nigerian academic libraries need to carefully examine and adapt to the evolving trends in the digital age while addressing the significant challenges outlined above. Key areas of focus should include:

1. Stable Power Supply: Ensuring a reliable and stable power supply is crucial for the effective functioning of digital services in libraries.
2. Adequate Funding: Securing sufficient funding is essential to address resource and facility inadequacies and support the implementation of new technologies.
3. Manpower Training in ICT: Investing in the training of library staff in information and communication technology (ICT) is imperative to enhance their skills and ability to manage digital resources effectively.
4. Improvement in Cost, Bandwidth, and Access Fee: Efforts should be made to reduce the cost of acquiring and maintaining necessary technologies, improve bandwidth availability, and make access fees more affordable.
5. Support from Donor Agencies and International Organizations: Collaborating with donor agencies and international organizations can provide additional support and resources to help overcome challenges and implement innovative solutions.

In conclusion, by strategically addressing these areas, Nigerian academic libraries can position themselves to better serve their user communities in the digital era, fostering an environment conducive to effective research, learning, and information dissemination.

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