Mechanism for Renewing and Maintaining the Library as the Core Access Point of the University Research and Learning Enterprise

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Abstract:

The roles of university libraries have evolved from the traditional resource ownership to global access enterprise. University libraries in Nigeria are expected to transform its operations and services to maintain it present role as access point for university research and learning. Success along this line revolves around the University librarian who is the Dean of the library and a principal officer of the university. It was observed that some university libraries are not performing as expected in this enterprise of global access – indigenous resources (repository) and subscribed databases access. Hence a research was conducted to ascertain the challenges that hinder the global access and perceived or already mechanism taken to maintain this core mandate. Data was collected from 20 university librarians along interview session with the   President of Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and Chairman of the Association of University Librarians of Nigerian University (AULNU). It was found that the challenges of the university librarians are relative and more in the south east than other zones in Nigeria, university librarians have positive perception, and some are already engaged in innovative activities, stepping beyond the bounds of library through formal and informal activities to ensure that the transformational role of global access does not elude Nigerian university libraries. It is recommended that university librarians as leaders of the libraries should brainstorm and analysis the approach to the mechanisms which will yield visible result in the global access enterprise.

Introduction

Traditionally, university system's quality and capacity is adjudged of high standard based on the size and capacity of its library as well as the value it attached to the library. Hence university prides itself on the size of its university library building and collections. By way of underscoring the importance of the university library, the university librarian is a principal officer and by extension a key decision maker as enshrined in the law establishing universities in Nigeria. By the university librarian's positions, decision in the university must have input from the university librarian. Furthermore, it is likely that the activities of the university library reflect the university's position as translated by the university librarian. The changing university environment engendered by technology is refocusing and redefining roles including that of the university library and its leadership. Less attention is paid on size of library building and collections while access to collection as well as the speed of the gateway needed to support open/virtual learning in universities is receiving prime attention.

In view of the evolving and changing roles of university libraries, there is the need for the university librarian to live up to the expected by using his/her good office to ensure that university management understands the changing roles of the university library. These changing roles impact on library's environment, infrastructure, budget, staff competencies, operations and services. Though traditional roles have presented the librarians as officers with modest abilities who have territorial walls built around them (Bevan n.d) it is expected that the new role which evolved from ownership to access will open a vista into great opportunities for librarians.

However, it has been observed that university librarians in Nigeria are constrained from buying into the opportunities provided by the global evolving access window. It is therefore necessary to investigate the issues surrounding the inability of university librarians to use their principal officer position in the university to fully exploit opportunity of the resources access paradigm prevalent in global university libraries in other to move Nigerian universities to the global access enterprise.

Objective

The study was designed to determine mechanism employed by Nigeria university libraries to ensure renewed actions towards effective access to information. Specifically, it sought to
- Find out the challenges university libraries face which hinder its evolving roles of enhancing access to information.
- Ascertain the university libraries perceived ways of addressing the challenges.

Literature review

It is stating the obvious that university education systems and all its subsystems are being transform with the speed of light. The count on the rate of research and addition to the body of knowledge has become overwhelming. Human capacities and roles of the micro units of the university system is threatened and displacement by technology is not in doubt. For the university library, it is a whole lot of transformation from the traditional print ownership through automated hybrid services to digital access modes (Anunobi and Okoye, 2008). The transformation has not only increased and diversified the role of university libraries but has continue to position it as "access points/gateway to information for teaching, learning and research (Cisse, 2004). The expanded and diversified role of university libraries have brought about misconceptions on the statutory role of university library administrators and their importance in the system.

Williams (2009) posits that the global view is that "the library is no longer the centre of information universe". This unrealistic misconception translates to myriad of challenges faced by university libraries which hinder the actualization of the diversified role that points at issue of access. Cheng (2016) articulated these challenges to include budget issues, communicating about the changes in the library to gather the needed support, declining patron requests for content and the challenge of career development. Part of the challenges according to him include keeping up with changing technical requirement, understudying research trends and institutional policy changes, managing library operations and tracking staff performance, convincing researchers on the value of library and managing continuous transition from print to digital based collection.

While some university librarians seam aloof of these challenges, they have the responsibility to convincingly explain to the management of the university the need for shift

in the statuesque (Gibbon, n.d). As a rider, the management of the university often fail to recognize the librarian as a specialist in his own right (Okojie, 2017) a situation that tends to compound the transformational challenges the university library faces. Consequently, according to Okojie, the place, role and position of the library and university librarian is diminished both in attitude and action. Toole(n.d) informed that low concept of the library and librarian could be appreciated where people perceived the library as "a building that is a warehouse of books and nothing much more".

This perception is amplified in countries like Nigeria where in some cases the university librarian is restricted from maximizing the provided resources for effective transformational operations and services toward provision of access to support teaching, learning and research.

In view of the place of the university library and librarian in teaching, learning and research activities as well as management of the university, it is very pertinent that steps should be taken to ensure continued transformational operation and services geared towards effective access to information resources.

Toole (n.d) informed that libraries should find a convincing way of demonstrating the import of their activities to the institutions. Advocacy according to him is the watch word within and outside the institution. Students should be part of the advocacy. Toole also emphasised the need to use the informal university governance to convince the vice-chancellor on the position and the transformational role of the university library. Gibbons (n.d) emphasis on the provision of cutting edge services and demonstration of knowledge of the university system and research process. Visibility of the library is also paramount according to him. This involves "creating roles and providing learning and development opportunities that enable current and new staff to step beyond the confines of their profession. Other areas of remaining relevance to ensure effective transformational role according to Gibbons developing include partnership with relevant stakeholders. On his own part Bevan (n.d) suggested encouraging university librarians to try to understand the key metrics and divers of the university and find ways of supporting the "work with a beta forever philosophy", adapt to changing circumstances while ensuring that students and researchers are brought to the side of the library.

Supporting Bevan, Fraser-Krauss (n.d) proposes that the university librarian should engage with stakeholders in support services like estates, registry, IT, Alumni relations and finance officers which to him provides protection to library and librarian. The view was supported by Dewey (2014) that library leadership should align library activities with "areas

of strategic importance and articulate this alignment clearly and effectively. The understanding of university governance and active participation at the institutional level by the library dean (university librarian) is also emphasised by Fraser-Krauss.

The review actually shows that the institutional libraries particularly university libraries have lots of huddle to overcome to ensure the transformational role of provision of access to resources for teaching, learning and research. The authors x-rayed the huddles as well as the ways of overcoming it. Though university libraries in Nigerian are visualised as not effectively performing this role of access, no research has been carried out to find out the underlying challenges which has been hindering this expected global transformation as well as perceived and actions taken by university librarian to overcome the challenges . The research is therefore poised to fill this gap.

Method

The survey was carried out using university libraries that participated in the conference and meeting of Association of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (AULNU), the AULNU Chairman as well as the President of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA). A questionnaire instrument made up of three sections namely demography, challenges and approaches to plummeting the challenges were advanced to the university libraries. The Chairman of AULNU and President of NLA were engaged on interview to elicit data based on the objectives of the research.

Findings

Data from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively using tables and figures while information from the interview were used to confirm /and clarify data from the interview. The midpoint of ≥2.5 was considered positive response for questionnaire items on the scale of 4 while 50% was considered positive response for responses on percentage scale. Of the 50 questionnaire distributed to the university librarians who attended the 102 meeting of the Association of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities, 20 which represents 40% of the distributed instants returned the questionnaire.

Demographic information

The spread of the university librarians who completed and returned the questionnaire shows that 13 of them are from the northern part of Nigeria while 7 were from the south. Other demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that majority (60%) of the responding university librarians were from the federal university, 30% from state and 10% were of private university extraction. A 15(75%) are male while 2(25%) are female showing that the position is still dominated by male in Nigeria. 17(85%) of the university librarians have served in that position within the period of one and five years and 3(15%) have beyond five years, a reflection of the tenure position of principal officers in the university especially federal where a university librarian serves for one five years.

Expectedly 55% of librarians ascended to the position of the University librarian from the next lower rank which is deputy university librarian. Only 3(15%) became university librarian from senior librarian position as practised in state and private universities. A 2(10%) of them had served as university librarian elsewhere before this appointment on the current position as university librarian. It is very worrisome to allow a senior librarian who may not have pass through the managerial tutelage to become a university. This can affect the managerial capacity of the professional. It is expected that the management mentorship starts from the deputy position when the later acts and is delegated to represent the university librarian in some decision making meetings of the university.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the University Libraries

Indices		Universities			
Gender		Federal	State	Private	Total
	Male	8(40%)	5(25%)	2(10%)	15(75%)
	Female	4(20%)	1(5%)	-	5(25%)
	Total	12(60%)	6(30%)	2(10%)	20(100%)
No of Years Served as University Librarian	1-5	11	5	1	17(85%)
	6-10	1	1	1	3(15%)
	11-15	-	-	-	-
	16-20	-	-	-	-
	≥21	-	-	-	-
Last Position Held	Senior Librarian	-	2	1	3(15%)
	Deputy University Librarian	8	3	-	11(55%)
	Director of Research	-	1	-	1(5%)
	Polytechnic Librarian	1	-	-	1(5%)
	Professor	1	-	-	1(5%)
	University Librarian	1	-	1	2(10%)

Challenges that hinder renewed action towards effective access to information

The university librarians were required to indicate the extent to which they agree to the statements on challenges hindering their effective action towards access to information. Their responses were put at a scale of four with responses ≤2.5 considered as positive. The result of the response is presented in Table 2.

The Table shows that all issues relating to the university librarian participating in policy decision and management of the university system elicited positive responses showing that they do not constitute a challenge to ensuring that university libraries in Nigeria perform effective access role in the changing information access enterprise. Such issues as the university librarian participating in policy development/implementation in the university, decisions on the development of university, as well as the vice-chancellor and other principal officers' visit to show solidarity to the library development also elicited positive responses. The university librarians affirmed that they participate in the academic matters as academic staff in-charge of academic unit (the library). According to their responses, they are not hindered from making contributions in academic matters, in collaborating with faculty for

acquisition of resources. On the area of financing which includes budgeting in the university, the university librarians are given opportunity to participate in university budget exercise, management of library budget and execution of library budget as well as having express access to the budget meant for library operations and services.

In the management of the staff recruitment, operations and services of the library as it relates to selection and acquisition, service design and implementation, recruitment of staff and development of library policy, the university librarian is unhindered hence all elicited positive responses.

Further analysis was made on the all-embracing positive responses since the interview responses from the President of the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) and the Chairman of Association of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (AULNU), contradicted the university librarians responses. The interviewee's position was that the nature of library management challenges in Nigeria is relative and varies between universities in the North and those in the South. AULNU chairman posited that many university librarians do not participate in budget preparation and implementation and that in some cases the vice-chancellors have taken over the professional roles of the university librarian. The situation according to the Chairman is not being addressed by the regulatory body like National Universities Commission or the intervention bodies like Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) who have failed to enforce their policies that would have protected the university librarians and the libraries. The NLA President in affirmation to the position of the AULNU Chairman informed that the relativity of the challenges is indisputable as the issues of the university librarian exercising his role as a principal officer of the university and chief executive officer of the library is well protected in many south west universities. Specifically the NLA chair emphasised that some of the challenges as mentioned are not prevalent in University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos.

Further analysis was carried out by comparing the responses from the university librarians from the North and those from the South. The aim was to confirm the position of NLA president and AULUN chair. The result of the responses to the challenges as it concerns university librarians of the North and those of the south is presented in Table 2. University librarians from the two regions provided similar responses except for the statement that bothers on freedom to manage the library and integrate library staff into the mainstream of the university activities. This discrepancy goes to confirm the varied nature of challenges that undermines the efforts towards achieving effective access to resources by university librarians.

Table 2: Responses on the Challenges that Hinder Renewed Action towards Effective Access to Information

Challenges	Mean Response Nigerian University Librarians (Decision)	Mean Response Nigerian University Librarians from North(Decision)	Mean Response Nigerian University Librarians from South (Decision)
As a university librarian and principal officer, I participate as expected in development and implementation of policies as well as all aspects of university management.	3.6(Accepted)	3.5(Accepted)	3.5(Accepted)
As a member of University Senate I am given opportunity to make input on university academic matters	3.8(Accepted)	3.4(Accepted)	3.8(Accepted)
As university librarian and member of management I am given opportunity to participate actively in University budget preparation and implementation	3.1(Accepted)	2.8(Accepted)	3(Accepted)
As a university librarian, I participate in all decisions concerning institutional development	3.1(Accepted)	3.2(Accepted)	3.1(Accepted)
I am given free hand to manage the university library budget which translates to effective operations and services in the library	3.0(Accepted)	3.3(Accepted)	2.7(Accepted)
I am allowed the responsibility to collaborate with faculty in selection and acquisition of information resources in the Library	3.6(Accepted)	3.6(Accepted)	3.7(Accepted)
I am a key member in the decision for procurement of library resources and facilities	3.6(Accepted)	3.7(Accepted)	3.4(Accepted)
I get a lot of support from the university management, the Vice Chancellor and other principal officer who pay regular visit to the University Library.	3.2(Accepted)	3.2(Accepted)	3.1(Accepted)
I am not involved in key decision in the University.	1.7(Rejected)	1.5(Rejected)	1.6(Rejected)
I am allowed free hand to manage the university library thereby introducing state-of- the art operations and services in the Library	3.4(Accepted)	3.3(Accepted)	3.2(Accepted)
I am not allowed to make input in the recruitment of professional staff for the Library	1.4(Rejected)	1.4(Rejected)	1.7(Rejected)
The position of the University Librarian is diminished by the University which affects the operations and services of the library	1.3(Rejected)	1.5(Rejected)	1.8(Rejected)
The Budget meant for the management of University library is not released to the University Librarian	2.2(Rejected)	2.1(Rejected)	3(Accepted)
Funds are not released to the University librarian to enable provision of effective access to information resources for teaching, learning and research.	2.1(Rejected)	1.9(Rejected)	2.3(Rejected)
Recommendations for library staff development is usually turned down by the Vice –Chancellor	1.9(Rejected)	1.7(Rejected)	2.4(Rejected)
University Faculty do not consider the library important for academic excellence hence do not refer students or visit the library for research.	1.8(Rejected)	1.8(Rejected)	3.2(Accepted)
Students are discouraged from using the library due to poor facility resulting from lack University management support	2.1(Rejected)	1.8(Rejected)	3.2(Accepted)
University Librarian is not given free hand to develop and implement library policy	1.8(Rejected)	1.5(Rejected)	2.7(Accepted)
University librarian is not given opportunity to integrate her/his staff into other areas of relevance in the university.	1.8(Rejected)	1.5(Rejected)	3.2(Accepted)

Ways of Renewing University Library's Relevance for Effective Enhancement of Information Access Enterprise

In spite of the views of the majority of the university librarians that they do not have policy, financial, recognition , overall library management encumbrances , it is worrisome that Nigerian university libraries have not being performing optimally in the area of providing diversified access either from indigenous resources(repository) or subscription to globally acclaimed standard databases. Hence, they were required to response to perceived or already implemented efforts university librarians will/are putting in place to renew libraries relevance for effective information access in Nigerian universities. The result of their positive responses ranges between 65% and95%.This shows that they all agreed that the presented items could renew the university library relevance. The perceived /already existing efforts as put in place by Nigerian university libraries are raising the profile of the library by participating in university wide project, effective/ cordial relationship with faculty, innovative library services delivery beyond the traditional approach, putting in place strategic plan and library policies as well as mission and vision to reflect the changing environment and provision of on demand & strategic reports of library support for academic excellence to management. They also positioned continuing development of staff who will support the new roles and impact performance evaluation. Included as part of their suggestive approach are discussing library operations and services whenever opportunities call for it, lobbying informal management structure of the university to support the cause of the library, being visible outside the library in other to contribute outside the traditional views of the library expectation, networking with peers to seek advice, demonstrating knowledge of the university system and how the library can support academic excellence and creating forum to expose library staff to the activities of the university. Other ways of renewing relevance according to them include internationalizing the activities of the library , embracing change within the academic portfolio, positioning the library as engagement centre, engaging higher authorities on issues concerning the library, understanding the workings of the university from time to time, positioning the university librarian as a university leader rather than the library leader as well as demonstrating some expertise and rare leadership skills/attitude.

Interview with the NLA President and AULNU Chairman show further that many university librarians are already acting along that line by innovating their services, interacting with each other especially using social media as developed by AULNU. According to them many university librarians are taking leading roles in university wide training, and taking

active part in confirming the acceptability of postgraduate theses/dissertations by the university. University librarians in some cases like University of Jos act for the Vice-chancellor in his absence. Representing the Vice-chancellor in academic programmes outside the university is a role the university librarian plays effectively. The issues of strategic plan and policy is given as all Nigerian university libraries must present their policy as part of the package to access TETfund library intervention. Many university libraries in Nigerian have opened up their libraries as engagement and learning centres where users engage in variety of activities including games and technology innovative activities (Makerspace).

The NLA president also noted that Nigerian university libraries/librarians are exploiting the opportunities of the Librarian Registration council, NUC and NLA to push for issues that negate the progress of libraries and librarians. Such was the opportunity created when NUC invited one of the members of the Governing Board of IFLA (Dr. V. Okojie) to speak to Nigerian Vice-chancellors on issues bordering on management and their relationship with university libraries/librarians as well as the challenges university libraries are facing. The need for such interaction was captured by the AULNU chairman who insisted that "there are very good librarians who can bring university libraries to the global map but the problem is that university management is diminishing their capacity". The NLA President emphasised that though the challenges which weigh down the professional duties of the university librarians are more prevalent in the south east universities, the university librarians must not be confrontational rather loyal to the chief executive as well make effort to play the local politics and use the informal management structure to push the library's cause across.

Discussion of findings

The result which presented the university libraries as devoid of listed challenges and the contravening views of the NLA President and AULNU Chairman is an indication that either the librarians are naive and do not want to accept the challenges or that interviewees are reporting from the facts as noted by the minority opinion (Gibbon, n.d and Okojie, 2017) or based on relative experiences of the Librarians. The latter is likely to be scenario since the responses from the university librarians from south showed lack support for use of library by students and university librarians are not given free hand to manage the library. This is contrary to what obtained in the response from university librarians from the North. The statement from the NLA President that university librarians of UI, UNILAG and OAU are signatory to library budget implementation on the approval of the Vice-chancellor also confirms relativity of the challenges.

It is possible that renewed and continued relevance of university libraries in Nigeria will be more prevalent in libraries with limited challenges than those of the south east. Library development is likely to be skewed based on the opportunities the librarian has to manage the library. It is also possible that where the university librarians are not challenged and the renewed relevance towards effective access is not fully implemented, the university librarian may be consider unreactive and incompetent.

The responses on the ways university library should address some challenges is in line with the views of Toole (n.d); Gibbons (n.d), Bevan (n.d) and Fraser-Krauss (n.d). It also confirms position of the AULNU Chairman that many university librarians are already doing one thing or the other to address the diminishing condition university management has situated university libraries and librarians.

Conclusion

University library remains the focal point of academic excellence in the university with a lot of misunderstood transformational roles as perceived by the university management. This university management misunderstanding which is relative tend to affect library's ultimate role of providing global access to information. The university librarians need to take steps including innovative activities, stepping beyond the bounds of library through formal and informal activities to ensure that the transformational role of global access does not elude Nigerian university libraries.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this paper, it is recommended that, university librarians should analyse and brainstorm on the formal and informal mechanisms to decide how to apply them in view of the prevalent challenges faced by the individual university libraries.

The university libraries should not sit back and be onlookers, rather they should initiate practical innovative activities such as the creation of the learning commons capable of attracting users especially the undergraduates to the library to have access to authoritative information.

The university librarian should himself be an astute researcher alongside the faculty members, this will earn him respect and thus the library. He should make himself available

when he is needed, this will create greater confidence in the library system. He should take decisions appropriately.

The university librarian should be innovative and adopt all social channels to reach his users, this will help him to democratise information services; and the university management to create awareness of his activities and earn their support.

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