



LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE DIGEST

Volume 12

June 2019

Article

The Changing Roles of Librarians for Research Support Services in Evolving Landscape of Higher Education in Nigeria.

Ibrahim M. M. Furfuri

University Library, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria. ibrahim.furfuri@ssu.edu.ng

Promise Ifeoma Ilo

University Library, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria.
promise.ilo@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract

The roles of librarians are ever-changing in response to the new service demands and expectations of researchers, resulting from the rapid advancement in technology. The new technologies and methods of service delivery are available for deployment in libraries, thus helping librarians to remain relevant in the evolving landscape of higher education in Nigeria. The traditional roles such as acquisition, organization, and preservation played by librarians in higher educational institutions are no longer adequate to support teaching, learning and research activities. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to explore the emerging challenges encountered by researchers in Nigerian higher institutions of learning. Some of the challenges include poor search skills required for harnessing information resources to support research process, and difficulty of access to research data, non-inclusion of librarians among decision making bodies. The paper also highlights the changing roles of librarians in meeting specific researchers' needs. Such roles include emphasis on embedded librarianship, increased visibility and integration of librarians into research and publication decision making bodies, knowledge creation and dissemination of scholarly initiatives and focus on service delivery that can meet the potential researchers' needs. The argument in this paper is that librarians will always remain relevant if they develop their skills to be able to meet the needs of the 21st century library clients. The paper therefore, recommends the need for librarians to repackage their services in line with present demand as and global best practices.

Keywords: Research support services, Researchers' needs, Librarians changing roles, Higher Education

Introduction

The importance of research in the development and productivity growth of nations cannot be overemphasized. Hence, governments of different countries provide funds for carrying out researches through established research agencies or awarding of grant to researchers. In the higher educational institutions, particularly universities, research is critical to the systematic advancement in knowledge. In this regard, therefore, research is one of the primary responsibilities of academic staff in any higher educational institution. However, the impact of any research conducted in higher educational institutions depends on the quality of its outputs.

Libraries of higher educational institutions play indispensable role in providing information resources and services to support teaching, learning and research functions in such institutions. Indeed, the major objective of any library in higher education institution is to contribute significantly to the satisfactory performance of the parent institution (Omekwu & Ugwuanyi, 2015). As such, librarians in these institutions should not be mainly concerned with developing and maintaining collections of information resources, but they should equally pay attention to strategies for provision and access to information resources and services that reflect the changing needs and expectations of the users they serve.

The rapid advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized the roles of librarians in providing services to their users. As a result of this development, academic libraries are facing new challenges in terms of providing support to meet the needs of researchers in

their parent institutions. A study had shown that the contribution of library services to teaching and research is perceived as higher by the librarians than by the academic staff. The academic staff, on the other hand, believe that the library fulfils their teaching needs, but they expect more in various aspects of research support services (Gabbay & Shoham, 2017). In this regard, therefore, research activities in higher educational institutions in Nigeria require the librarians' attention so that the research support needed by the academic staff can be met. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to explore the emerging challenges encountered by researchers in higher education institutions in Nigeria and highlight the changing roles of librarians in addressing them. Research support is an emerging service delivery intended to bridge the gap between libraries and the researchers.

The Challenges of Research in Evolving Landscape of Higher Education in Nigeria

The features of higher education landscape are fast evolving in Nigeria and have given rise to emerging challenges in carrying out research. From the perspectives of literatures, experiences and observations of the authors of this paper, the following factors can be among the major challenges encountered by the researchers, which contribute to hindering research outputs in Nigeria higher education sector.

1. Low quality Research Proposals

In many developing countries the landscape of higher education is changing rapidly and disruptively because of new technologies. Both academic staff and postgraduate students can carry out research without visiting the physical libraries because

information is becoming more accessible to them regardless of their location or time constraints. However, in the landscape of higher education in Nigeria, research output is constrained by so many factors. In spite of the increasing channels of accessing information for research, the performance of academic staff in this regard can be said to be below expectations. This low research outputs was asserted by Bogoro in Daily Trust (2019) that in most Nigerian tertiary institutions there is the inability of senior academics to access fund for impactful research due to poor quality research proposal. Bogoro further argued that the observed low capacity to write fundable research proposal is attributable to poor research governance and inadequate mechanism for learning how to manage research activities, especially in Nigerian universities. Baffa (2017) in an earlier remark also asserts that the research output from these educational institutions is still of low quality:

Since its establishment (Tertiary Education Trust Fund - TETFund) in 2009 with the seed fund of N 3 billion, about N1.72 billion has so far been disbursed to finance researches in different thematic areas, and additional N 1 billion was allocated in 2016 to beef up the intervention [but] one of the key concerns of the TETFund in respect of the implementation of this intervention is quality of research proposal that are being submitted by applicants. (Para. 3).

The above statement indicates the perceived low performance in higher education institutions regarding their research output. There was also a call for nomination of scholars with highest number of published articles in first and second quartile journals as well as those with highest number of citations so that Tetfund can give them award for quality research publications.

Therefore, the implementation status of research in our higher education sector suggests two major areas that require stakeholders' attention. First, to identify the emerging challenges being encountered by the researchers as hindering research outputs in these higher education institutions, and secondly, to identify the gap between the roles of librarians and research practices in these institutions.

2. Information Search Skills of Researchers: In this era of information technology, research has become a digital skill oriented task. Njuguna and Itegi (2013) argued that the skills acquired through past experiences have enabled researchers to identify, locate, read literatures, and employ the methodology for carrying out intensive and skills oriented research. However, the accumulated experiences of the researchers in higher education institutions are no longer adequate for accessing relevant information resources for research. Effective planning and implementation of research requires specialized skills and knowledge of information research from specific databases and subject contents. Report of a study by United Kingdom (UK) Research Information Network (2011) revealed that researchers in UK Universities are over confident in their awareness, understanding and ability to identify the reference resources that are relevant to their specific research needs. Lack of skills for tracing and quick access to up-to-date literature and archives of special repositories often pose challenges to planning and implementing research in the higher institutions in Nigeria.

3. Access to Research Data: Accessible and reliable data is fundamental to quality research outputs. However, poor access to research data can also be considered a serious challenge to planning and implementing research in higher educational

institutions in Nigeria. A study on quantity and quality of research outputs by these institutions in Nigeria reveals that research projects are truncated or poorly conducted due to poor data management or archiving platforms (Nwosu, 2013). In developed countries for example, access to research data is facilitated by libraries and research agencies or even obtaining the data readily available through information marketing services. But for many libraries in developing countries, marketing of library services is still an initiative on which librarians and researchers have not focused their attention. A study by Nhendodzashe and Pasipamire (2017) confirmed that providing access to research data is an emerging development in higher education institutions in Africa, and if not given attention, it will continue to pose great challenges to research outputs in the continent. Thus, the lecturers and other researchers will continue to discharge their academic responsibility amidst frustrations and difficulties, and consequently their capacity adjudged below expectations.

4. Collaboration in Scholarly Communication Initiatives: Scholarly communication provides the means through which authors can communicate research outputs to global audience. The process of scholarly communication involves collaborations for exchange of information with other researchers and relevant stakeholders like librarians throughout the research lifecycle. Therefore, lack of collaboration among stakeholders in research is a serious challenge to improving research performance in Nigerian universities. The academic information for scholarly communication includes peer reviewed journal articles, research reports, conference papers, etc. Currently, the Institutional Repository (IR) / Open Educational Resources (OERs) provide a

more effective alternative than the traditional academic channels of collaboration among researchers for disseminating scholarly research outputs. However, in many African countries the visibility of local research outputs is low because it is largely documented as grey literature in print formats and preserved in university libraries (Dulle, 2011). It is closed to a decade since the debut of OERs but from experience the visibility of research outputs in top ranking journals is still low. Findings from the study by Oguiche (2015) indicated that the potentials of scholarly communications are yet to be harnessed adequately in Nigeria due to challenging issues that include low awareness of scholarly communications among researchers, inefficiency of ICT infrastructures, lack of sufficient ICT skills among the researchers, erratic power supply and inadequate funding. Hence, the local contents of research outputs are often not uploaded for global access by other users. Oguiche further argues that even though Nigeria has the highest number of journal titles (216) in AJOL, followed by South Africa (91), but only 61 are made available as open access scholarly publications. Therefore, this lack of adequate visibility of scholarly communications of the research outputs from higher education institutions in Nigeria is another serious challenge that requires more attention from the stakeholders, especially the librarians.

5. Impact Factor Issues and Selection of Publication Outlets: Researchers in some developing countries are facing pressures in publishing their research outputs in journals that have higher Impact Factor (IF). According to Murray and Clobrige (2014) publishing in IF journals tends to tilt towards more consideration for developed countries because the value of research outputs in African countries are determined

at the periphery even when the subject matter is authoritative and of importance to local needs. It is only equitable therefore, that researchers from African countries get their research outputs published in IF based on its authoritativeness, quality of contents and local needs. In fact, if a research output is not subjected to peer review based on the already established evaluation criteria, the indexing and abstracting service bodies will not recognise such output for publication. Therefore, it appears a hindrance for researchers to publish in IF journals because the librarians are often not involved as partners in the research process. This lack of involvement could be due to inability of the librarians to market themselves and their profession very well.

It is obvious that, most scholarly publications in developing countries are often motivated by reasons such as career growth, tenureship, promotion and financial gains, while the postgraduate students find it difficult to publish from their theses and dissertations due to inadequate requisite skills or due to the fear of criticisms by peer reviewers (Ocholla, 2011). According to Anjana (2018), despite the ongoing debate on quality research by both academics and professionals, the process of conducting the research must be all encompassing in terms of its design. The study design is largely used to judge quality of research by focusing on “the match between the methods and questions, selection of subjects, measurement of outcomes, protection against systematic bias, non-systematic bias, and inferential error^{1, 2, 3, .}” (Anjana, 2018). Anjana further reported that a group of fifty five (55) professors of different grades from two universities in India conducted an online study and identified useful criteria for assessment of quality research in sequential order as follows: 1. Citations, 2. Journal impact factor, 3. peer review, 4. Criteria of

selection of experts referees by the editorial board, 5. Standardized research reporting, 6. Ranking of journal, 7. Dialogue and Discourse, and 8. Journal in first quartile of its area. In this regard, the librarians are expected to provide leadership and expertise on information skills and appropriate use of the information for quality research. Hence, this situation make it imperative for the researchers to seek the assistance of librarians in planning and implementation of the research procedure as well as dissemination of the research outputs.

6. Non-inclusion of Librarians in Research Teams and Related Matters:

The librarian is a key collaborator in research life cycle. This is because researchers need the librarians’ support at different stages of their research. For over a decade, The Research Information Network (2011) has outlined these stages that require the inclusion of librarian in the research process as follows:

- i. Generating and developing new ideas for writing research proposals
- ii. Seeking, securing and managing fund for the research,
- iii. Carrying out the research
- iv. Disseminating and publishing the research findings

In the light of the above, experiences and observations have shown that librarians are often not given full recognition as stakeholders in research in some academic institutions in Nigeria. Librarians should be considered as integral part of research decision making in their respective institutions. In all matters relating to University research clusters, University journal publication committees and other decisions relating to University research and

publications, librarians must blend themselves as change agents. However, despite their professionalism, librarians are in most cases only considered at the point of depositing complimentary copies of the research for preservation and use by their patrons. This trend therefore, usually poses a challenge towards enhancing research outputs in universities.

The Changing Roles in Meeting the Researchers Needs

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that librarians more than ever before have integrated roles in supporting the attainment of the set goals of teaching, learning and research activities in higher educational institutions. In order to address the specific challenges faced by the researchers, librarians have to redefine their roles within the academic institution. This implies that librarians have to focus on new methods and services that will assist researchers to avoid frustrations and difficulties in the planning and implementation of research work. Hart and Kleinveltdt (2011) had suggested how librarians can identify and develop new roles that aim at strengthening their relationship with researchers in their institutions. They should first try to relate their current roles in line with the current needs of researchers in order to know the areas that require more attention. Secondly, they should be familiar with the major resources which are of interest to the researchers. Thirdly, librarians should device means of interacting with the researchers in order to find out their expectations from the librarians and the extent to which they are satisfied with the library services.

In fact, the immediate and end benefits on how librarians affects research in higher educational institutions in Nigeria have not been recognized fully in meeting the current needs of the researchers. Kostos (2017)

stated that academic librarians are integral part of scientific research because they can influence the benefits to be derived from such research outputs. Some of the benefits include: increased visibility and potential use of the research outputs, better research management and more motivated researchers, new research direction and generating more research income. What is required for librarians to perform well in these tasks is strategic partnership with various academic departments in their institutions. Librarians must work harder to explore and promote different platforms for scholarly initiatives. Thus, in addition to provision of better spaces and facilities for researchers while they visit the libraries, a user-friendly access to high quality resources such as numeric data, research reports and journal articles are necessary.

The report of UK Research Information Network (2011) indicated that there is a gap between the perceptions of researchers and their institutions' libraries. This is evident today considering the fact that there is a general decline of physical visits to the library by researchers including the postgraduate students. Hence, the increasing opportunities for accessing and sharing information among researchers electronically are fast threatening the traditional roles of librarians. However, the university libraries and librarians in countries like Australia are recognized as genuine partners in planning and implementing research activities. A study by Keller (2015) had identified five types of research support services which are coordinated under a research unit in the libraries with focus on offering assistance to researchers in the Australian universities. These research support services are:

- i. Institutional Repositories (IRs). The library will give support in terms of

gathering the research outputs and ensuring quality control of the metadata for global access. Thus, the academics will have better opportunity of using the repository to showcase their research outputs and enhance the university ranking on a global scale.

- ii. Open access initiatives. Librarians are expected to initiate activities that support scholarly publishing literacy so that academics will be well informed about open access, copyright and licensing, and so on.
- iii. Use of bibliometrics and almetrics for enhancing research impact. The librarians are to support the academics in the use of bibliometrics and other indicators for evaluation of quality research as well as access to range of online research tools. Thus, the academics will be well informed about current trends surrounding the contents of a developing research area.
- iv. Research support that target students. Students, especially at the postgraduate level, need different support from the librarians to facilitate their research works. The specific support programmes include: orientation on research, training workshop on research, production of research guide, advance information literacy fluency, consultation services, and provision of conducive environment as required by researchers.
- v. Research Data Management. The librarians are to help in managing the data generated throughout the research process. In other words, good management of data will assist researchers towards production of acceptable research outputs.

It is important to note that the above research support services are hardly developed and implemented fully in the higher education institutions in Nigeria. For example, a study by Okoroma and Abioye (2017) identified factors that hinder Nigerian researchers from depositing their research outputs for Institutional Repositories. These factors include non-enforcement of copyrights laws, plagiarism, piracy, and culture of massive photocopying among others. But, the new role of librarians in overcoming these challenges is to embark on programme for sensitization and creation of awareness among the academic community in their institutions.

Another area that is very significant in the discharge of new roles of librarians is embedded librarianship practices. According to Tiwari in Abbas (2017), embedded librarianship focuses on moving librarians out of the traditional library environment for a more integrated service delivery approach. Abbas investigated the practices of embedded librarianship in three Nigerian universities and the findings show that this approach is useful in bridging the gap between librarians and the researchers in the following ways:

- i. It facilitates knowledge production and dissemination
- ii. It fosters collaboration between lecturers and the library
- iii. It improves students research and information searching skills, and
- iv. It enables librarians to participate in the teaching of information literacy skills

In view of the above, it is important that librarians focus attention on embedded librarianship practices so that they can play effective roles in meeting the increasing

demands and changing needs of the researchers in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The traditional roles played by librarians in higher educational institutions in Nigeria are no longer adequate to support research activities. Research support services are required for enhancing the research outputs by the academic communities. New

technologies and methods of service delivery such as IRs, open access initiatives, and research data management are available for deployment in libraries. In view of the need for librarians to focus attention on the practices of embedded librarianship, therefore, it behoves on them to leverage on available technologies and develop their skills and services in order to remain relevant in the evolving landscape of higher education.

References

- Abbas, K. D. (2017). Bridging the Knowledge Gap Through Embedded Librarianship Practices in Nigeria: What Role for Academic Librarians? In Global best practices in library and information services in contemporary era. Compendium of Papers Presented at the 1st International Conference and Home Coming of the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Nigeria Nsukka. (Pp.337-357). Enugu: Praise House Publishing.
- Anjana, R. C. (2018). Identification of criteria for assessing the quality of research. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 6(6), 592-595. <http://www.sciepub.com/journal/education>.
- Baffa, A. B. (2017). Low Quality of Research Outputs Worries TETFund. Being a Lead Paper Presented in Lagos at a National Conference on Quality Education, Access and Rights Management in Nigeria. In The Nigerian expression, 28th November.
- Daily Trust (2019). TETFund to spend N10m to train professors on proposal writing. *Daily Trust*, 47(64), April 25th, P. 8.
- Dulle, F. W. (2011). Acceptance and Use of Open Access Scholarly Communication by Postgraduate Students at the Sokoine University of Agriculture and the University of Dar es Salam, Tanzania. *African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science*, 21(1), 17-28.
- Gabbay, L. K. & Shoham, S. (2017). The role of academic libraries in research and teaching. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 49(4), December, 359 – 485. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0961000617742462>
- Hart, G. & Kleinveldt, L. (2011). The Role of an Academic Library in Research: Researchers' Perspectives at a South African University of Technology. *South African journal of library and information science*, 77(1), 37-50.
- Keller, A. (2015). Research Support in Australian University Libraries: An Outsider View. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 46(2), 73-85.

- Kostos, D. (2017). Redefining the role of academic librarians in research. Jove newsletter, <https://www.jove.com>, posted October 10th,
- Murray, S. & Clobrige, A. (2014). The current state of scholarly journal publishing in Africa: findings and analysis. Report <https://www.ajol.info/public/Scholarly-Journal-Publishing-in-Africa-Report-Final-v04c.pdf>
- Nhendodzashe, N. & Pasipamire, N. (2017). Research Data Management Services: Are Academic Libraries in Zimbabwe Ready? The Case of University of Zimbabwe Library. IFLA WLIC 2017.
- Njuguna, F. & Itegi, F. (2013). Research in Institutions of Higher Education in Africa: Challenges and Prospects. *European Scientific Journal (Special edition)*. 1, 1857-7881. <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/viewFile/>
- Nwosu, D. (2013). A Comparative study of the problems militating against quantity and quality of research by tertiary education lecturers in Nigeria. Ilorin: Kwara State University.
- Ocholla, D. N. (2011). An Overview of Issues, Challenges and Opportunities of Scholarly Publishing in Information Studies in Africa. *African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science*, 21(1), 1-16.
- Oguche, D. (2015). Enhancing Scholarly Communication in Nigeria: The Role of Open Access Institutional Repositories. *Nigerian Current Legal Problems* (NCLP), 15, 224 - 246.
- Okoroma, F. N. & Abioye, A. A. (2017). Institutional Repositories in University Libraries in Nigeria and the Challenge of Copyright. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4(15), 62-72.
- Omekwu, C. O. & Ugwuanyi, C. F., (2015). Introduction to the use of the library. In C. O. Omekwu, M. O. Okoye, & C. N. Ezeani (Eds.) (2015). Introduction to the use of library and study skills (2nd ed.). (pp. 1-20). Nsukka, Nigeria: University of Nigeria Press.
- Research Information Network (2011). Research support services in UK university libraries. <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-15.pdf>.