Article

CHANGING WORK AND CHANGING ROLES OF PUBLIC LIBRARIANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper the changing roles of public libraries and librarians in and the implications of such changes to the Nigerian public librarians. The various specific areas of library work and how technology and the new information environment of the 21st century addresses such areas as readers' services and readers' advisory services, teaching of information literacy as part of library work, Collection development, technical services, management amongst others. The redefined roles of librarians in this scenario of the Internet and the digital era were also examined as facilitators, researchers, educators, knowledge managers, website builders, interface designers among others. The paper went further to look into the emerging challenges posed by the changes to Nigerian public libraries and librarians and subsequent ways of addressing these challenges especially through staff training.

Introduction

The concept of the "library" itself is changing, physical building include electronic, digital and virtual collections that could be accessed from anywhere. For our public libraries and librarians to cope with the challenges of the 21st Century integration and use information communication technology facilities in the library. The appearance of ICT on the global scene which is the major revolution that unveiled the information has caused a revolution in libraries and all service providing industries.

Nwachukwu (2004) clearly observed that with all the changes in information and the processes of access, storage, transmission, and reproduction, libraries and librarians must adapt to new roles and skills to cope with change. In the information society as seen in advanced countries like America, library collection now includes digital resources are no longer accessed only within the library's opening hours.

Technology is driving change across the entire range of library work. Youngman (1999) noted that, librarians are moving into dramatically different roles as new services are implemented.

The age of technology is driving change across the entire range of librarians' responsibilities. Traditionally, librarians have been information providers for centuries. They now have the opportunity to use modern tools to provide quicker, more complete and more sophisticated service to the users. According to Grodzin-Lipow (1997), acquisition librarian for instance still selects and purchase books and traditional journals but they must also deal with many "access without ownership issues involving leased electronic databases, full-text journal article and other services virtually. Cataloguers now process not only books, but also CD-ROMs, computer discs and multi-format items. As technology advances, the reference librarians are increasingly involved as teachers of "information literacy" (Osorio (1997).

Specific areas of change
The work of librarians are increasingly varied as the library expands to keep up with the flow of information and technology of this information age.

1.   **Readers services**
      The information age of the 21st Century has changed the definition of "the reader" in services. Modern communication devices let librarians help people from around the globe. Public librarians still find ways to make information useful, but now technology gives them more options. In every library, the work of readers' services department – reference, reader advisory, teaching and collection development according to Youngman (1999) and Crosby (2001) has changed dramatically over the last decade.

      Just as the reference service is vital in the internet era when sear… can bury the variety of public library users under mountains of unfiltered data, public librarians are there to help patrons sharpen their questions and pinpoint their needs. Technological tools have made the hunt for information more interesting.

Librarians still scour materials in their own collections, but now they also search private, online databases, the texts of hundreds of magazines and journals, the World Wide Web and the on-line catalogues of other libraries. Internet is not the only new tool in librarians' reference arsenals. Learning about other new innovations like the one noted by Crosby, the Geographic Information System (GIS), which combines digital satellite maps with data about population, demographics, natural resources, and other factors that vary from place to place. Librarians might use GIS to help businesses choose new locations or families choose new neighbourhoods. Many corporate librarians now use electronic information sources almost exclusively – search on-line databases, newswires, journals and associations' websites.

Reference librarians have recently been experiencing double jeopardy. Retting (1999), noted that, while continuing to serve patrons from service points in the library, many reference librarians are now also supporting a growing clientele of remote – access patrons. Grodzins-Lipow (1997) believes that reference department may be experiencing the greatest variety of new roles. In the words of Osorio (1999), as technology advances, reference librarians are increasingly involved as teachers of information literacy.

i) **Readers' advisory service:**
   Readers advisory service which is a reference work with a more personal touch, traditionally involves helping readers to decide and choose which books to read. This is a long-standing role for librarians especially in the public and school libraries. This has taken on new dimensions as librarians create web pages to advice such users from afar.

ii) **Teaching**: Just as Osorio (1997) noted that, librarians in the information age are now teachers of information literacy, Crosby maintained that librarians are bringing the information revolution to the public. Often a person's first exposure to the internet could be in a public library or school media resource centre. Fishel (2000) agreed that one of the jobs that come with technology is training people to use it. This involves teaching computer basics; like how to use a mouse to more complex subjects and also teaching library users and researchers how to source and synthesize information. In the words of Francis-Swanson (2010), the teaching of information literacy skills by the librarians is one of the roles that come with technology in the information age. The internet has added new challenges to the librarians in all these.

2)   Technical services

Technical services librarians organize and manage information. They form the backbone of the library. If they do not do their job well, the public services librarians cannot do theirs. Technical services workers identify and classify books and materials. The internet has carried technical work out of the shadows into the limelight. Information management is more visible as people search digital databases and on-line collections. The technical services most affected by new technology are cataloguing and information architecture.

Cataloguing

Cataloguers in public libraries classify books, videos, CD-ROMS, and other materials so as to enable users find what they are looking for. Cataloguing has grown more important as search log on to on-line catalogue from home. Technology has made cataloguing more efficient. In the words of Youngman (1999), cataloguers are moving into new roles as they attempt to provide enhanced access to the new resources. They now process not only books, but also CD-ROMs, computer discs, and multi-format items. Cataloguers add the records they create to a shared international database. It is known that librarians have been sharing catalogues for a long time, but electronics and the internet have made it easier. As a result of on-line access, making catalogues easy to use is more critical and more possible. Crosby (2001), affirmed that using computers, librarians are starting to create different catalogues for different kinds of readers. A catalogue designed for casual browsers for instance, she said, might display summaries of each book while the one designed for preschoolers might use more graphics or might not rely as heavily on putting things in alphabetical order.

Cataloguers in public libraries for the 21ˢᵗ Century, are required to and must make informed decisions on matters such as linking to electronic journals and managing holdings to various databases. Cataloguers today create records that accommodate multiple means of accessing a particular resource. Library patrons are coming to expect records that include print holdings, microforms, and direct links to an electronic version of the item. Cataloguing the internet itself is a task that has fallen on librarians, affirmed Youngman. Application of the Dublin Core metadata tag systems is a skill that did not exist just a few years ago but is now rapidly growing in importance as an additional role for librarians. As Chepesuik (1999) earlier noted, "it is not a metadata element set to replace MARC, rather it is going to evolve alongside it." Crosby (2001) further confirmed this, by saying that some librarians are helping to organize the internet as they are setting their sights on digital information. Many pieces of materials on the internet have digital tags that describe them so that search engines can find them more easily. These tags are metadata tags which can say who wrote the material or what the

material is all about. So they organize books, but that is rarely done with card catalogues rather they use databases and digital metadata tags. Another typical feature of today's library is the Online Public Access Catalogue which is database containing the library's collection that can be accessed by anyone on-line (Francis-Swanson; 2010).

Information architecture

Some technical services librarians according to Crosby now work with computer experts to create websites and intranets. This is information architecture. According to a study by the Association of Special Library, librarians now use information architecture to organize their library services.

Roles of librarians redefined in the Internet and digital scenario

The Internet is very powerful and has brought so much ease into searching, retrieving and disseminating of information (Rao and Babu; 2000). In another way, the rise of digitized information is an opportunity to elevate the role of librarian and leads to the emergence of a new breed of librarian: "the Cyber Librarian" or "Cybrarian" – a specialist in locating information on the Internet (Hathorn, 1997). It has been postulated that librarians would play a more dynamic role than at present as guides to the information seekers. Rao and Babu (2001) enumerated other key areas where librarians play strategic roles in the Internet and World Wide Web scenario as –

Librarians as search intermediary

Citing Ingwersen (1992), Rao and Babu described an intermediary as a person or mechanism placed physically between information retrieval systems and actual user, with the purpose to transform interactively requests for information to query formulations that suit the retrieval components of one or several information retrieval systems, to model and support the actual user as to his information need and underlying goals. Research in his field is directed towards implementing non-human intermediary through user interfaces and system setting. In addition to more efficient and more effective searches by librarians, research has determined that a single librarian or information professional can save the equivalent amount of time of three, or four, or even five end-users. In other words librarians are more efficient and effective than end-users are at performing their own information searching activities (Griffiths, 1995). This, probably, is an important point which continues to play a role in the newly emerging digital information world.

Librarian as a facilitator

In this scenario, it is imperative for the traditional librarian to acquire necessary skills in the effective use of modern gadgets and associated software to locate and retrieve the

widely dispersed information in the cyberspace. Not only has he has to acquaint himself but also gain a degree of proficiency to effectively guide and train the information seekers in their usage. The traditional librarian has to play the role of facilitator in identification, gathering and arranging information infrastructure such as network access, software access, licenses and passwords to use charged resources. The facilitator does solve the total information problems of users. He addresses the communications and information needs of the users in the way or another underlining the resources for fulfilling the needs of users.

Librarians as end-user trainer or educator
The number and variety of information source available, locally or remotely via the Internet have increased greatly, and users in many cases have not been able to keep up with all of the choices open of them. Few users of the public libraries are effective and efficient in accessing information resources.

However, no matter how sophisticated interfaces and search engines come up in future information access systems, users need to be educated regarding their usage. The areas in which training is given by the librarian would include not only the use of electronic primary journals from many different publishers, but also the use of abstracts and indexing databases, databanks, CD-ROM publications and document delivery services. End-user training aspect of the librarian would also include organization of information resources, search strategies, tools, information searching skills, awareness of resource constraints and alerts to users on new resources in their subject area. The librarian therefore, has a critical role in the digital library of the future as educator or end-user trainer.

Librarian as web site builder or publisher
The traditional skill of a librarian in locating, evaluating and organizing the information would be of immense use in the creation, development and content filling of a web site for the organization and library. Web site of an organization provides access to external resources, where web pages specific to their discipline are available. The role of the librarian while creating a web page is to deliver information about the library and its services like hours of service, location of services, details of library staff, library policies, an interface to the library staff, library policies, an interface to the library Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), e.t.c.

Librarian as researcher
Librarians are supposedly highly skilled in the research process and possess a unique knowledge of the breadth and depth of information resources in various subject

specialties. Librarians are increasingly going to participate in and be critical members of research teams. By facilitating access to information– finding it, analyzing, synthesizing, and packaging – librarians would move to the beginning of the information production cycle, playing a more substantial role in the information creation process.

Librarian as interface designer
Interface design is going to become increasingly important and increasingly relevant to the way people access and use digital technologies. A beneficial way for librarians to break out of their insularity is to become much more closely involved and collaborate in the work of computer and information scientists in tasks such as design, organization, development, and maintenance of digital library repositories, interfaces, search engines, networks and Web documents. Librarians can help in the design of technology-based information services and share their intimate knowledge of what users want and need as they have years of experience in helping patrons utilize electronic media and subsequently using the Internet.

Librarian as knowledge manager/professional
Knowledge Management (KM) involves the identification and analysis of available required knowledge, and the subsequent planning and control of actions to develop knowledge assets so as to fulfill organizational objectives. Organizations worldwide are realizing the advantages of enlisting librarians in the KM system can effectively participate in the process of knowledge creation which include mechanisms for knowledge capture exploitation and protection besides the required infrastructure creation by virtue of capabilities gained as Information Managers of the organization. Knowledge professionals are the individuals in the knowledge into systems and structure that facilitate the productive use of knowledge resources. They include librarians, managers, archivists, and others.

For librarians to become knowledge managers or professionals they should possess variety of talents and perform the work with high level of skill and expertise. They should be able to extract, filter and disseminate vital external knowledge, and work side by side with users in collecting and analyzing strategic intelligence throughout the organization. Citing (Seonghee, 1999), Rao and Babu stressed that librarians, in future, would move from the background to the centre of the organization. They would shed their traditional role as a part of the support group, uninvolved in any critical functions, to a prominent position to jointly hold the reins of knowledge management with users and the technology experts. They would help steer and shape the knowledge policies, structures, processes, and systems that will nurture organizational learning.

Librarian as sifter of information resources

Normally, sifter or siftware is described as "software programs to extract unknown, valid, and actionable patterns, associations, changes, anomalies, and rules from large databases". This process is also known as "Data Mining". The Internet and Web provide access to vast information resources. The term "sifter" may be used for the skilled librarian who helps users make sense and order of the resources. The future belongs neither to the conduit or content players but to those who control the filtering, searching, and sense-making tools to navigate through the expanses of cyberspace (Saffo, 1994) cited by Rao and Babu. In other words, the librarian can be a key player in the emerging scenario.

Emerging challenges for the Nigerian public libraries and librarians

One of the major factors posing challenges to the Nigerian public libraries and their ability to adapt to the new information environment is inadequate fund for operations and services. Sourcing, acquiring and installing new technologies and electronic gadgets for computerized and automated services in the library as well as maintaining required manpower through training all required manpower through training all required adequate fund. So, most of the other problems faced by the public libraries that hinder their required services all have their bases on lack of fund.

It has been well known and established that information explosion and new ways of information accessibility, retrieval and dissemination through ICT is characteristic of 21ˢᵗ Century librarianship. As Odion and Adetona (2009) put it, the role of the librarian is changing from that of merely acquiring, organizing, storing and making information accessible to users. They stressed that librarians are today, information strategists, data managers, digital operators and information dispensers.

The developments in library and information services that have come with the new information age pose reasonable range of problems for Nigerian libraries. Librarians in many Nigerian libraries, according to Ademodi & Adepoju (2009), still carry out library routines and functions manually and the few computers in most libraries are used for administrative duties by confidential secretaries. This is worsened by the fact that library schools in Nigeria are not well equipped electronically.

The need for faster, more accurate and personalized services in libraries is at hand. As Lison and Lunden (2004) said, the technology for the e-library is here, whether or not it is already implemented; and must be integrated into the classic work of libraries. They

brought up the concept of the "hybrid library" to be a library using all the instruments – electronic, virtual traditional to produce good and appropriate services needs. The hybrid library is characterized by new ways of meeting today's customer demands, new internet services, new communication lines with the customer, intelligent building, new concepts of work and a new orientation of the value of the job. The big question is 'how can the Nigerian public libraries and librarians meet the requirements of the current trend in library services and serve the users better through their work? The word is training.

Addressing the challenges through staff training

Advances in information technology and changes brought into library and information services have made it a necessity for libraries to be actively involved in staff training. Oketunji (2001), rightfully observed that library schools in our context are incapable of meeting the challenges of modern information technologies owing to lack of financial resources to procure the necessary equipment needed for training students. So the public libraries as well as other libraries need to train their librarians and other support staff in acquiring current electronic and computer skills. Such training has to be recurrent to enable them adapt to the persistently changing information environment and the use of new technologies and inventions in information services such as new software, hardware and other accessories.

Funding

Whatever the problem, challenges and strategies for improvement that concerns public librarians in Nigeria, cannot be discussed or analyzed without bringing the issue of funding into it. Inadequate funding is a major problem to the Nigerian public libraries on which other problems and challenges have their base or root. This was lamented by Nwokocha (2002). Improving funding for these libraries will bring about many changes in both traditional and contemporary services as well as remuneration of the workers.

Conclusion

Technology in the new information era has affected library work and roles of librarians in so many ways such that the very concept of library itself is changing from just a collection of books housed in a building and made available to users. These changes need to be felt in Nigeria public libraries like most of their counterparts in advanced countries and even some academic libraries here in Nigeria. This is to enable them provide relevant resources and services to their contemporary users. To address the challenges posed by this development, these libraries need to beef up the knowledge and skills of their librarians and other support staff through training. Furthermore, the

government should come in by improving on the funding of these public libraries to enable them acquire the material resources and skills required for them to meet up with the changes on ground.

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