

Review

The relevance of a library in the 21st century: Students' perception

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There have been several arguments on the relevance of the library in the 21st century. In fact, some scholars have argued that the Internet has taken over the library information services. This paper therefore highlights general comments on the relevance of a library in the 21st Century from secondary literature and the perceptions of 60 Accounting 200 level students of Bachelor of Science/Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (B.Sc./ICAN) conversion programme at Babcock University who offered Use of Library and Study Skills during the 2012/2013 academic session. To ascertain their views, a question titled "Library is the haven for learning, teaching and research, discuss" was posted on the blog <http://omesknowledgeboard.blogspot.com/>. All the 60 students responded, given a total response of 100%. From their comments, it can be deduced that the relevance of a library to the society cannot diminish even in the years to come; hence all the respondents indicated that library has impacted the lives of students, researchers, businessmen and women, and will continue to impact future generations. Furthermore, their responses showed that library was very relevant in promoting and supporting learning, research, habit formation, rehabilitation of prison inmates, information resource sharing, knowledge and heritage preservation, collaborative research, publishing and free access to information.

Key words: Library relevance, 21st century, students' perception, Babcock University, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the library as a gateway for information provision in this era of Information Communications and Technology (ICT) has been an issue of debate. This perhaps was what informed the fifth UNESCO/CONFITEA meeting held in Hamburg in 1997 for a declaration and to adopt a mandate that "UNESCO should strengthen libraries, museums heritage and cultural institutions as learning places and partners in the lifelong learning process and modern citizenship" It may also be the reason why a resolution for IFLA to take a more active role in strengthening the libraries' role and to live up to what is stated was also one of the manifest in the IFLA UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.

According to Häggström (2004), the library, the local

gateway to knowledge provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. The Hamburg declaration became the starting point for the project on 'the role of libraries in lifelong learning'. The project started in 2000 and ended by the IFLA Berlin Conference in 2003.

The broad mission of every institution is to achieve set goals and objectives. The satisfaction derived from the services and activities of the institution will give credence to those behind the achievements and clearly testify the strategies used to pursue their purpose. The role that libraries play in the lives of people is not in doubt as most people have attested to having achieved success in their

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careers as a result of the positive impact of the library on them.

Many have attributed the advent of ICT as potential threat to eliminate the importance of the library, its resources, personnel and patronage. However, Lichterman (2011) upholds that the Internet has radically altered the way people interact with information and redefined the library's place in academia and society.

The issue about the library as a haven for learning, teaching and research is actually an extended debate, but this argument has met responses from information professionals who argued in the light of the transformational position of the library in this era. Libraries all over the world serve their parent institutions. Despite the type and where a library is situated, their roles remain the same; to select information resources in both print and electronic formats, acquire, organize, disseminate the resources to the immediate users and beyond and to educate the users how to use the resources. Until users are satisfied with the resources and of course the manner and means with which it was presented, library is bound to re-strategize and perhaps change its methods of service delivery to its clients.

Library is a place for knowledge creation and sharing. It is a storehouse for knowledge in different formats (print and electronic). Libraries anywhere in the world are major providers of information services. The staff of the library renders assistance to all kinds of registered library users both the physically challenged people in the society to access information. Libraries also extend her services to the incarcerated people in order to impact their lives. Such services are a core part of library's missions, the "institutional obligations," to serve all members of 'our particular constituencies' (IFLA, EIFL, ICA and German Library Association, 2012). Such services according to Webb (n.d.) keeps library apart as a key player to impact people's lives through the provision of information. Besides, their basic role seemed to be as a place for knowledge creation. Web (n.d.) further stated that the library is helpful to students and learners for attaining success at school.

The advent of ICT is a boost to the library services since librarians are harnessing the potentials of ICT to reach out to the teeming library users. Halder (2009) strongly affirms that with the development and application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the library environment has shifted from the traditional library to hybrid library; from there to automated library and then digital and virtual library. Presently it has shifted to Library 2.0. Academic libraries across the world are presently installing servers, creating repositories and databases to deliver digital contents, e-resources and research outputs across the world.

According to Issa (2010), libraries today have shunned the mantle of being mere repositories of books and other print materials. The advent of technology has seen the introduction of digitized and electronic services making

the library presence felt in the present age. Library has continued to remain the pacesetter in the provision of current and timely information to her users with unprecedented record of research outputs and the closure of lacuna in knowledge.

B.Sc./ICAN Conversion Students at Babcock University

The B.Sc./ICAN conversion programme was initiated by Babcock University in September 2011. The programme was moderated by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and National Universities Commission (NUC). Babcock University was used as a prototype for the programme which has witnessed great success. Admission into the programme requires a candidate to be chartered by ICAN and/or with HND or MBA as additional requirements. The programme becomes necessary as chartered accountants are required to have a B.Sc. for advancement in their chosen careers. The programme was domiciled in the Accounting Department of Babcock Business School.

TEACHING ROLE OF A LIBRARY

According to Somi and De Jager (2005), the library engages the users in activities intended to make them critical thinkers, problem solvers, independent information seekers and lifelong learners. The library teaches the library users how to access, store, retrieve and use information. Users are also taught how to carry out cross-referencing to access information and cite bibliographies for proper referencing.

Training to acquire relevant skills should be the focus of librarians and information professionals of today. This will enhance the development of structured databases with proper indexing of information for easy access in the library and on the Internet. Lichterman (2011) asserts that the school of information is training the next generation of information professionals with the skills to manage and preserve information in the age of the Internet. The respondents commented that,

"A library facilitates the planning and implementation of learning programmes that will equip the students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a constantly changing social and economic environment. Through resource-based programmes, students acquire skills to collect, critically analyze and organize information, solve problem and communicate their understandings."

"Library provides a contact point and physical place for teachers and learners to meet outside the structure of the classroom, thus, allowing people with different perspectives to interact in a knowledge space that is both

larger and more general than the one shared by any single discipline or affinity group”.

“If you need knowledge or awareness on a variety of topics visit the library, with the help of library staff you can be introduced to books on the topics in which you can study and learn.”

“Researchers, teachers, and students increasingly rely on global networks for the creation, storage and dissemination of knowledge. This is made possible by the library”.

“A researcher needs to investigate or make inquiries into particular fields of endeavor. Library materials will assist a great deal.”

“A library serves as a wealth of resources for researchers: a research scholar may never be able to successfully conduct his investigations and researches without the help of library resources either in a digital form or otherwise. It is a place to rub mind with notable and renowned authors and researchers.”

“Libraries often provide quiet areas for studying, and they also offer common areas to facilitate group study and collaboration hence provide a conducive environment for learning and research.”

“Libraries are one of the few places where young and old, school children, college students and adult learners can all participate in learning.”

However, in affirmation of the role of the library in teaching and impacting knowledge, the respondents' comments are in support of Somi and De Jager (2005)'s view that the library engages the users in activities intended to make them critical thinkers, problem solvers, independent information seekers and lifelong learners.

RESOURCE SHARING AND LIBRARY NETWORKS

Resource sharing and networking is a viable method of communicating information resources among libraries in this era. Okeagu and Okeagu (2008) argued that no library, no matter how it is funded can acquire all the materials needed by her users; therefore, the way to achieve cooperation among libraries is through the establishment of consortiums – a syndication arrangement which enables libraries to work together more effectively and efficiently. Using ICT made it possible for libraries to communicate and share resources. Ezeani (2010) posits that digital publishing technologies and global networking have given rise to the development of wide variety of digital libraries all over the world. Ezeani further noted that the creation, sharing and usage of digital content and services are far greater in this generation than ever before.

The impact of ICT to achieve networking and resources sharing has greatly been felt in most Nigerian libraries, however, a research carried out by Siddike (2012) indicates that the 25% of the respondents suggested that efforts should be undertaken promptly to facilitate

efficient resource sharing systems among the libraries through better management and installation of state of the art technologies and advancement. The result also shows that 20% of the respondents were unaware about library networking and resource sharing. The respondents were amazed at the merits of networking and resource sharing and expected the library to take necessary initiatives to actualize it. Therefore, information professional should wake up to their task of improving services to library users to remain relevant in this century.

The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) created an online forum to share ideas and resources. This forum has greatly impacted new librarians to learn and be acquainted with the trends in librarianship. Current issues and trend in the information profession are made known and ideas are shared among members on the forum. In this study, some of the respondents also commented on the invaluable role of the library by bringing to them viable platforms that enhance sharing of resources amongst students and teachers.

“Library enhances the sharing of resources: library serves a practical role in sharing expensive resources needed for every course offered in a university. It makes learning easy by providing resources (books and non book) for patrons.”

“Library serves as a knowledge sharing centre and also serves a practical role in sharing expensive resources.”

“Libraries also provide the services of librarians who are experts at finding and organizing information and interpret information needs.”

“Libraries serve social and intellectual roles in bringing together people and ideas, thus allowing people with different perspectives to interact in a knowledge space that is both larger and more general than that shared by any single discipline or affinity group.”

“Libraries help to connect with other researchers thereby enhancing the value of the library's services.”

“The library also provides resources for research and avenue to publish research findings. If a researcher wishes to publish a book or his findings in journals, the librarians can help him to locate the most appropriate journal, or publisher to approach.”

The comments by the respondents above confirm what Ezeani (2010) stated that creation, sharing and usage of digital contents and services are far greater in this generation than ever before. An interesting aspect of this study was that the respondents were not students of library and information science but were only introduced to the use of library and study skills. They however identified the course to have contributed meaningfully to their study as learners and researchers. The respondents were of the opinion that a library is haven and last recourse for learners, with the following assertions,

“A learner is a student who needs library materials to complement lecture notes and other materials given by

the teacher. The academic library will be very useful for this purpose because the library materials will be tailored towards meeting the requirements of the students."

"In order for a learner, teacher or researcher to have rest of mind in his academic pursuit, the library is a place that must be visited. This is because about 90% of materials which are useful for learning, teaching and research are found."

"Library serves as a support to people that cannot purchase extensive collections of books. It is a learning 'zone' where facts and information can be obtained in a wide variety of contexts with an enhancement of active study skills."

"The continuous growth of high-quality research materials available online and in hard copy has made the importance of information literacy increasingly apparent in our time. This would not have been possible without a designated place for such material called the "Library" which avails us continuous opportunity of accessing these materials in a timely and flexible manner at little or no cost."

LIBRARY AS SOURCE FOR GOOD HABIT FORMATION AND REHABILITATION

"A library plays very important role in promoting the progress of knowledge. It is very useful for both rural and urban youths' development. If youths take to reading they will be able to refrain from evil habits such as loitering, stealing, smoking and gambling." Slowik (2012) affirms that smoking can be stopped. And this can be done by reading literatures that educate on its danger. He opines that to stop smoking is a personal matter and that only an individual knows what he/she has to give up, and how the benefits of smoking can be weighed against the benefits of stopping.

Madukoma and Haliso (2011) strongly believe that information sources and services are essential to the modern correctional objectives of reformation and rehabilitation of the juvenile in remand home. Identifying the relevance of library as a correctional institution of prisoners, Lehmann (2000) upheld that every institution shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and the prisoners shall be encouraged to make use of it. In this vein, some respondents noted that,

"Libraries are capable of imparting new knowledge (teaching), modifying existing knowledge (learning) and providing research resources."

"Library provides and promotes quality fiction to develop and sustain in students the habit and enjoyment of reading for pleasure and to enrich students' intellectual, aesthetic, cultural and emotional growth."

A library as a place for the correction of bad habits;

imparting new ideas and improving knowledge was emphasized by the respondents. This confirmed Madukoma and Haliso (2011)'s and Slowik (2012)'s claims that information sources and services are very essential to refrain from bad habits and also capable of reforming and rehabilitating individuals.

CREATIVITY – INTRODUCING NEW TOOLS AND TEACHING SKILLS

Technology cannot work in isolation without a professional to manage it. In the face of advancement in information provision, it is important that libraries and librarians evolve and be innovative. According to Halder (2009), the new roles of LIS professionals include advocate, consortia manager, consultant, content manager, facilitator, guide/teacher, intermediary, knowledge manager, researcher, sifter and web designer. Lichterman (2011) opines that the University of Michigan's library has taken steps to move more of its resources online through a partnership with Google to digitize its collection of books and continues to increase the number of online databases available to students and faculty. Utilizing the internet to reach out to the library users will continue to remind the users of the relevance of the library in the society.

The respondents in this study may have benefited and gained similar experience as stated by Halder (2009) and Lichterman (2011) and therefore identified the library as a citadel for independent learning and self development. Their views are as follows,

"Library provides opportunities for independent reading and studying; library is a resource and location for independent reading, personal exploration, project research, and individual assessment."

"The library enables the individual to obtain spiritual growth, inspirational, and recreational activity through reading, and therefore the opportunity of interacting with the society's wealth and accumulated knowledge."

"Library caters for differences in learning and teaching styles through the provision of information and equality of access to a wide range of materials, fiction and non-fiction, print, audio, video and digital resources."

"Libraries promote learning as exploration and self-development."

"The library provides a school-wide programme that addresses information literacy and ICT literacy skills development across key learning areas; by providing training opportunities for teachers in the use of new information resources and ICTs and their use in curriculum contexts."

"A library is a knowledge center that is dynamic, where not only the librarian, the "books" (whether real or virtual), and the users engage in an interchange of ideas — but the library architecture acts as not only a surrounding

framework, but also as a healthy "space" where ideas can flourish, live, grow and even be protected."

"The school library provides relevant, dynamic and responsive collection of information resources to support the school curriculum, and facilitates access to information through school library systems and services"

LIBRARY SOFTWARE/APPLICATIONS

The libraries of the 21st century have devised means of reaching the library users beyond the library walls. The world over, libraries have adopted systems and software to ensure availability and accessibility of information resources to users. Today, users can access library collections through their systems (and often from home). According to Omeluzor et al. (2012), automating a library is a unique decision that makes the library activities easy for prompt service delivery to the users. Introduction of software to enhance the various functions of the library is a breakthrough in this era as those software include library 2.0. The researchers further opine that library 2.0 technologies were built into library software to ensure that library users and librarians interact to accelerate service delivery to adequately satisfy users' needs.

The Fuller David Allan Hubbard Library (2013) laments the failure of the library to keep up with the innovations in the web technology arena after embracing the Web in its earliest years with online catalogues being among the first information resources on the Internet. However, it is evident that libraries are waking up to the task and lots of innovations are into library services as to keep to the pace of users' needs; this is because new software are being introduced. This also brings to the fore why effort to address the current limitations of the legacy catalogue and to offer users more powerful searching tools is shifting libraries to use the new generation user-centered solutions.

According to Fuller David Allan Hubbard Library (2013), next-generation library catalogue that has both commercial and open-source versions has a new interface that makes use of federated searches and deep indexing to search beyond local collections and discover electronic content as well as digital collections. In addition, the next-generation library catalogues offer user-centered features such as social networking integration, faceted browsing and relevancy-ranking.

Another current solution to ease access to resources on the next-generation catalogues is the Discovery interface. According to Bradley (2010) and Fuller David Allan Hubbard Library (2013), Discovery interfaces present a new search experience for library uses, including tagging, book reviews, enlarged scope, integration, relevancy ranking, faceted navigation, user-centered features, search term recommendations and syndication with web search engines. Bradley (2010) further opines that Discovery layer software seeks to provide a search

experience that is simpler to use, but at the same time gives users more options to refine their searches and browse library resources,

"Libraries promote and exploit new technologies and new models of scholarly communications"

"A library provides a platform for continuous education which improves an individual. It provides facilities that enhance online research (that is, computer, internet connection and access, etc)."

The respondents indicated that libraries are utilizing the computing powers of ICT to promote communication and dissemination of information resources as opined by Bradley (2010) and Fuller David Allan Hubbard Library (2013).

NIGERIAN LIBRARIES AND USERS

Libraries all over the world are consistently making effort to ensure that information needed by library users are made available and freely accessible. The libraries in Nigeria are not lagging behind to meet the demands of the users' community. While users expects the library to meet their needs, most of the libraries have created repositories, OPACs, social network sites, blogs, digitalized contents to keep with the pace of users' needs. In Nigeria, some libraries have made marks, for example, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka with URL <http://koha-library.unn.edu.ng:8081/> and Babcock University Library, Nigeria with URL: <http://library.babcock.edu.ng/> are among libraries that made their collections and databases freely accessible to users. Libraries of today must be aggressive to provide access to information for users either within or outside the library through viable systems.

This was why some of the respondents because of their experiences especially after going through the use of library and study skills course at Babcock University and perhaps after using the library resources categorically stated that library was an authoritative source for free access to information with the following comments,

"The lack of books and non-book materials are increasingly becoming a thing of the past as the library has greatly played a role that guaranteed the availability of these resources."

"Libraries provide easy and free access to high-quality content which is a key foundation for good research."

"On the internet you can not be too sure if what you are reading is true but in a non-fiction book, it is more reliable than the internet."

"The best feature of a library is that it either makes no charge upon the readers or collects a negligible membership fee for making available to them newspapers and

journals.”

LIBRARY AS A PRESERVATION CENTER FOR KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

A library serves a great deal to preserve culture and heritage. Idowu (2007) opines that libraries constitute a major part of memory and reflect the diversity of Arts, languages and cultures of that society. Ekwelem et al. (2011) also noted that libraries are source for preservation of documents and cultural materials which affirm the views of the respondents,

“Library stores, preserves and promotes the scholarship of faculty and students through the school’s digital repository.”

“Libraries serve a cultural role in preserving and organizing artifacts and ideas. Great works of literature, art, and science must be preserved and made accessible to future learners. Libraries preserve objects through careful storage procedures, policies of borrowing and use, and repair and maintenance as needed.”

“Libraries are a physical manifestation of the values of an entity.”

“Libraries serve a cultural role in preserving personal, organization and a nation’s memories. Great works of literature, art, and science are preserved and made accessible to future learners.”

CONCLUSION

The relevance of a library can not be summarized on few pages of paper. However, the questions posed on the blog has to a certain degree established the fact that library can not be underestimated on her contributions and roles to the society. Library is connected to other institutions that are relevant to the well being of a nation. All aspects of human endeavour feel the impact of a library. The advent of ICT as a tool for information accessibility and dissemination did not relegate the importance of the library but rather boost her services. The librarians are also working hard to keep to the pace of the ICT while bringing in innovation and introducing new skills to support library users within and beyond the library wall.

Library as a citadel for learning and hub of every academic activity is not debatable. All accrediting teams to an institution of higher learning world over accredit a course based on available information resources in the university’s library that are useful to the staff and students. Emphasis is also laid on print and electronic resources acquired and subscribed by the library and made available to the users. Libraries also provide resources like projector and computers that makes learning interesting, fun and encouraging. In addition,

libraries are strong advocates against illicit drugs. All forms of addiction – smoking, gambling and stealing to mention a few could be stopped through reading. Resources abound in the library both in physical and electronic formats that are helpful to change bad habits.

In another dimension, existence of a library lends credence to the memories of our past scholars. Mobile library has its place, but can not take over professionals’ touch and input in the provision of selected, acquired and organized information resources.

Finally, the relevance of a library extends to the fact that those who are unable to access information online, and perhaps lacks capability due to lack of fund can walk into a library to read current books, periodicals, newspapers etc. without a charge and by so doing make meaningful contributions to the society.

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