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Academic Library in Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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Abstract

What is today seen as academic library in Nigeria is the effort of several metamorphorical advancements that begin many years ago outside of the country. Yesterday it was merely a house that houses books for the purpose of protecting them. While today it is a physical building that provides knowledge and information to researchers and students of it home institution, tomorrow it is expected to be an intellectual vitality for mankind across institutional and national boundaries. By implication, the academic library is changing with technological advancements. This paper therefore makes every effort to provide an overview of the history of academic library as well as highlight some recommendations to strengthen academic library relevance in the twenty-first century advancement of information technology.

1. Introduction

As stated in the national policy on education, one of the goals of university education is to acquire both physical and intellectual skills to enable individuals to become self-reliant and useful members of the society (FME, 2004). From the librarian point of view, the national policy on education in its statement above was actually referring to the library; as this is what the library is known for. The libraries are known for acquiring information resources and making them available for their users. In the words of Nwezeh and Shabi (2011), libraries have information dissemination as their predominant function. Specifically, Olanlokun and Salisu (1993) sees the library to engage in the collection, processing, preservation and dissemination of recorded information in the various formats most convenient to its target users. Considering this function of the library therefore, behind the mission and vision of the education is the library.

No wonder a library is always found in any institution of learning. This without doubt indicates that the success of any institution depends on the library as well as the condition it is. In this regards, the tertiary institution finds it necessary to come up with what is now referred to as the academic library. The academic libraries are special libraries found in educational institutions and whose main purpose is to the special purpose of serving the special needs of the specialized or homogenous clientele (Khanna, 1987). Ajibero (1995) saw a university library as the heart of the university using the human and material resources at its disposal to support teaching, learning and research objectives of the institution. Academic libraries according to Akporhonor (2005) are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes. In the view of Singh and Kaur (2009), the main mandate of academic libraries is the preservation and access to knowledge and information as well as supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is teaching and research. In a recent article Oyegunle (2013), posted that academic libraries are information centers established in support of the mission of their parent institutions to generate knowledge, equip people with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the well being of mankind. An academic library is therefore a library that is attached to tertiary institutions, serving the teaching and research needs of her users. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the school's curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students (Oyegunle, 2013). Hence, the academic library is very significant if

tertiary institutions are to meet its purpose.

In addition to the above stated qualities of the academic library indicated in the definitions from several authors, the academic library was describe as the nerve centre or the hub around which scholarship revolves (Yusuf and Iwu 2010) and as an indispensable instrument for intellectual development, being a store house of information to which user; specifically students as well as lecturers, may turn to for accessing information. Aguolu (2002) noted that the university library is the heart of the university and according to Oyegunle (2013), the academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depends largely upon the state of health and excellence of its library which is its lifeblood.

The definitions, importance and personifications attached to the academic library by the authors here in presented above paint the academic library that one can barely remember when it's all started and how it got to its present state. In fact, the present paradigm shift in academic library services since the twenty-first century is an indication of its metamorphorical advancements that begins many years ago. According to Abubakar (2011), the global trend is now characterized with a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to an e-environment where emphasis is placed more on the acquisition of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals as well as online databases. Etim (2004) cited in Okon (2005) observed that the rapid pace of development in the field of information technology and the advent of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the Library and Information Sciences profession. It is therefore the aim of this paper to provide an overview of the history of academic library as well as highlight some recommendation to strengthen academic library relevance in the twenty-first century technological advancements.

2. History of the Academic Library

Much of what is documented in this paper on the history of academic library was from the report by Oyegunle (2013) as only a few literatures exist on the days gone by of academic library. While paucity of literatures subsisted on how it begins, it can be trace that libraries and academic institutions initially existed outside of each other for hundreds of years by the following few sentences. According to Oyegunle (2013), at the time the method of teaching revolved around a professorial lecture and student recitation, sometimes a lecture may be turned over to the university to be copied and purchased by students. As more lectures were copied and more copies of older lectures were reproduced, a storehouse for these materials took shape.

By 1338, what is considered to be the first academic library; the library at Sorbonne in the University of Paris, evolved and contained over 1700 volumes of lectures. As time pass by, more writing became available and universities saw the value in having books that could not be included into the course of studies. In this regards, Sir Thomas Bodley; a benefactor of the University of Oxford, took it upon himself to fund the library collection and travel the continent to buy books on many subjects (Budd, 1998). By 1605 it was noted to have contained more than 5000 books and manuscripts.

As the number of universities aided by the advent of printing continued to grow and their curriculums broadened; reflecting a rise in literacy and a trend towards scholarship, during this period, the Harvard University was established. In 1638 John Harvard donated £800 and 300 books to establish what is known as the first state-side academic library and in 1667 Harvard's first librarian was appointed. During this period, use of the library was limited to senior members of the university and the library was only open between 11 am to 1pm (Budd, 1998). Access was limited as no catalog system existed until 1723 and even then they were usually arranged by size or donor. In 1766 Yale University had approximately 4,000 volumes, however, access was restricted to faculty members and a few students. In 1849, Yale was open 30 hours a week, the University of Virginia was open nine hours a week, Columbia University four, and Bowdoin College only three. Students instead created literary societies and assessed entrance fees in order to build a small collection of usable volumes often in excess of what the university library held. From the story above cites in Oyegunle (2013), it can be deduced that the priority of the academic library was to protect the books, not to allow patrons to use them.

By the beginning of the 20th century there was a shift in the collection and preservation function of the academic library to utility. This lead academic library to start granting access to more users and hence the need for more services, extended hours and more staff. In this regards, Institutions took a more active role in funding library collections and creating comfortable facilities and by this, the academic library became less of a place to store dusty books to more of a place for dynamic learning.

With the advent of ICT, today ICT has brought about digital library, which changed the nature as well as job profile of librarians and information professionals bringing about new demands and expectations both from library users and librarians (Adebayo and Adekunjo, 2013). Today academic libraries all over the globe are embracing advancement of the twenty-first century information and communication technology. Different countries are at different stages in this advancement. When ICT was introduced into the library, carrying out information services was powered by analog data, today there is a shift from manual ways of carrying out information services powered by analog data to electronic ways of accessing and retrieving information powered by electronic gadgets such as the World Wide Web (WWW) and handsets. This shift was indispensable because for the academic library to be where their users are, they have to fully recognize the fact that the world is living in virtual realities as was indicated by Omekwu and Echezona (2008) where library services will be in the web and not affected by opening and closing hours. Users of academic libraries now expect to be given what they need, when they need it and from which ever location they may be (Ajogboye, 2010).

Specifically, the history of library automation in Nigeria according to Bichi (2008) is not long when compared with libraries of developed countries. According to some scholars, university libraries started automating their services in the 80's (Nok, 2006) and it is still at some stages. Commenting on the history of library automation in Nigeria, Akinyotu (1976) stated that "the first significant application of the computer to library function in Nigeria was recorded in 1975, with the production of the first issue of the University of Ibadan library computer catalogue of serials". It is however argued that serious application of automation to library processes started in 1990's as stressed further by Agboola (2000), who stated that "serious application of automation to library processes started in Nigerian university libraries in the 1990's. Individual efforts at library automation such as the one by the University of Lagos, University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the mid 1970's and 80's failed largely because of lack of technical knowhow relating to software development and maintenance of hardware. Also stressing the progressed recorded in library Automation in Nigeria, Aguolou and Aguolu (2002) lamented that; "library automation seems to have remained in pioneering stage for over two decades".

It is the seek of academic library to in the future provides an active learning space and diverse services as well as 24/7 access to print and online resources to meet the various needs of students, staff, alumni, as well as individual and group instruction to become lifelong readers, learners and leaders. What a wonderful philosophy as the world look forward to the vision of the academic library.

3. Discussion

Academic libraries all over the World are established to support their parent institutions in actualizing their objectives of teaching, learning and research. However, study has shown that there is a decline in the use of library physical collections and services which may jeopardize the reason for the establishment of the library in the first place and negatively affect the quality of teaching, learning and research in institutions. In support of this fact, Grimes and Boening (2001) posited that many library users by pass library resources and to the Web for information. Similarly Connell (2008) posited that majority of library users visit a library's virtual website more often than its physical location. Based on these facts from Grimes and Boening (2001) and Connell (2008), it is very vital for the library to utilize the use of the web by designing and deploying an effective library website if it must continue to play its role in providing relevant and accurate information.

Although the advent of ICT has affected the role and services of libraries including the academic libraries, it has also brought about some revolutionaries in the library as well as the academic library. In fact, according to Etim (2004), the rapid pace of development in the field of Information Technology (IT) and the emergence of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review

of the library; specifically the academic library and information science profession. While the developed countries are far in front, the developing countries including Nigeria is still far behind with much more work to revolutionize the academic libraries in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the academic libraries are said to be at a crossroads due to the fact that they are operating in an era of dwindling financial resources that are not forthcoming and thus affects the efficiency and effectiveness of their functions. The libraries especially the academic libraries have need to adapt to the e-environment in line with the indications of Kumar (2009) if they are to remain relevant. Academic libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies and e-resources necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiatives (Okiy, 2005).

Rapid expansions in information and communication technologies (ICT) have brought revolutions to the roles of libraries and the academic library is not left out. The application of ICT in Nigerian academic library is therefore justified if it is to remain as the power house of the institution and continue to provide access to learning resources, information and knowledge. While the changing nature of information resources had subjected libraries to new challenges, to date, despite the paraded development by government, inaccessible by reason of distance, resources and the availability of relevant technology still remain high among most of the institutions. Without wasting time many including librarian will blame it to ICT. However, according to the European Commission "the importance of ICT lies less in the technology itself but in its ability to create greater access to information and communication" (Cited in Elisha, 2006); which is what automation should addresses. The challenge now faced by many academic libraries is the working condition of the WWW used by academic libraries. Where academic libraries made attempt to adopt technologies for improved services, efforts has been reported in Nigeria (Womboh and Abba, 2008; Fatoki, 2005; Etim, 2006; Ani et al, 2005). However, very little success has been recorded due to poor funding; lot still needs to be done.

Why should this not be the case when considering the fact by Ifijeh (2011) citing Mordi (2008) that between 2000 and 2008, the Nigerian Federal Government allocated an average of only 9% of its budget to education? With such low funding, institutions of higher learning are handicap to operate academic libraries with first-class services. The expected are the inadequate facilities and information resources that have resulted in students using the libraries as a study space and according to a recent article by Momodu et al. (2014), the tendency to flout library rules and regulations has become a common phenomenon amongst library users and the resulted varying degree of criminal behaviors in the use of library resources (Momodu, 2002) faced by academic libraries. According to Ojuade and Ochai (2000), funding is the major crisis facing the Nigerian academic libraries.

Conclusively, if the Nigerian academic libraries are to

meet the expectations of the planned vision of the library, the government will need to pay attention to education by improving her commitment in education. In addition, the need for periodic training for librarians and library staff cannot be overemphasized. These recommendations will in addition set the country's direction towards the 'education for all initiative'. Achieving this can be much more attainable when with well-funded academic library and information services, trained librarians capacitated with strategies to provide services through e-resources in physical as well as remote locations forms.

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