

Innovative and Creative Skills for the 21st Century Librarian: Benefits and Challenges in Nigerian Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The paper discusses innovative and creative skills that are required by librarians in the 21st Century in order for them to perform optimally in academic library. The paper highlights creativity and innovations in Library and Information Science, skills needed by creative and innovative librarians in academic libraries for service delivery, and benefit of creative and innovative services in academic libraries. The paper finally discussed challenges associated with creative skills and innovative services in the academic library as well as proffered solutions to the challenges discussed.

Keywords: Innovation, Creative Skills; 21st Century Librarian; Academic Libraries.

Introduction

As technology continues to impact on the delivery of information services, traditional academic library systems have continued to experience changes. These changes affect both the library and librarians. To the libraries, the age of information technology has brought about information explosion which has resulted in revolution in the entire library operations while on their part the librarians are now faced with challenges of being creative and innovative, this is necessary if they are to remain relevant in the society. Zaid and Adetoun (2012) pointed out that there have been important developments in library and information services for long time although creativity seems to be neglected in the library and information science profession. However, with modern librarianship there is a general shift in emphasis. Academic libraries for example have evolved from focusing on the management of physical resources and related services to transforming resources and services into digital formats to support teaching, learning and research. There have been developments in library and information services for a longtime, but creativity seems to be neglected in the library and information science profession. This scenario cannot be generalized among libraries and librarians in developed and developing nations. This is because a lot of changes, innovations, improved services and latest technologies are seen in libraries in developed nations from the architectural design and aesthetics of the building to a space that allows for the provision of traditional routine services and the use of ICT to enhance the services.

Information Impact:

Journal of Information and
Knowledge Management
2018, Vol. 9 (2) Pg 113 - 120
ISSN: 2141 – 4297 (print)
ISSN: 2360 – 994X (e-version)

Also, changes in areas of teaching and learning influenced and enabled by technology, as remarked by Ifidon (2006), have impacted on academic libraries. For example, the creation of new knowledge products such as subject portals and subject specific websites to support teaching and learning; or the re-purposing of physical spaces and the expansion of virtual spaces to support new pedagogies and changes in the teaching and learning process. With these changes in library and information science field, there is the need for acquisition of new skills by the library staff. This paper was therefore, conceived to outline the necessary skills the present day librarians need to provide the necessary changes and impacts in library and information services especially in Academic Libraries.

Creativity and Innovation in Library and Information Science

Creativity is the bringing into existence something new. It is new idea that can be used to solve a problem (Zaid, & Adetoun, 2012). All the new ideas that are introduced in the library may be referred to as creativity because it is through these ideas that a problem is solved. Creativity involves applying new methods to more familiar ways of reaching users and need not involve fiercely original ideas but simply new ways to approach a well-known service with some fearlessness as just having access to technology is not enough. Creativity in libraries therefore entails ability of library staff to develop and put into use new services and products especially with the use of modern day technology, while innovation is the implementation of new ideas to produce a new service or product (Zaid, & Adetoun 2012). Creativity and innovation are different from each other, but they are interrelated in one way or the other. Basically, creativity is about thinking of methods to improve on our old products and services and putting the ideas into practice is an innovation. Innovation is also modifying or improving the existing services or products. In our rapidly changing library environment, we can expect to see more creativity and innovation.

The weight and responsibilities expected to be shouldered by the 21st century librarians call for some descriptive insight into what ideal personal attribute, personality and characteristics ought to be. According to Daniel (2014), characteristically, the library and information professionals of 21st century will assume different attributes and device new approaches to library operations in order to fit into the 21st century global audience. Consequently upon the foregoing, one is apt to portray the 21st century library and information professional in the following light as regards his stamina, outreach, performance, outlook and veracity. Librarians by this view are expected to be innovative and creative in the quest for information service delivery. According to Emeghara (2014) great and vibrant libraries are now

measured by the level of automation, Internet connectivity and accessibility to other libraries on real time basis, subscription to reputable online databases as well as quality of collection.

From the foregoing, it is clear that librarians are enthusiastic to incorporate electronic resources into the library collection hence; Aina (2004) advised academic libraries to position themselves to support e-research and other new services in a bid to preserve knowledge. Aina (2004) goes on to emphasize that knowledge preservation necessitates:

- Ensuring the quality, integrity, and curation of digital research information;
- Sustaining today's evolving digital service environments;
- Bridging and connecting different worlds, disciplines, and paradigms for knowing and understanding; and
- Archiving research data in a data world.

In recent times, the library and information science field has witnessed rapid changes notably due to development in technology and subsequent information explosion. Specifically, libraries have invented various services to compliment these developments. On their part librarians especially those working in academic libraries have become more creative in their field and also use their ideas to become more innovative. This is because of their role in the development of research and learning is the backbone of the development of any nation. In most of the academic libraries there are certain services and products that demand creative and innovative skills from librarians.. These services which are mostly technology driven include:

(a) Virtual learning/e- library services

Virtual or e-library services are innovations in today's academic libraries. These services entail using e-resources to deliver services to users. These services include e-reference and library automation. E- learning is provided in e-libraries which according to Daniel (2014) are electronic libraries that provide resources, including the specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by defined community or set of communities.

(b) Round the clock library services

In most academic libraries, opportunities are now open for twenty four hour services through Internet related services. Libraries with subscribed database make them available to users round

the clock. Users of academic libraries can now search and download information anywhere anytime.

(c) Instant Messaging

Instant messages to users by libraries is a creative services innovated by library staff in academic libraries. These messages include SMS and e-mails to library users as it regards overdue and new information available in the library.

(d) Digital preservation and co-operation

Such as the provision and availability of physical and digital collections, digital repositories, inter-library provisions and relationships and increasing demand for the library to serve as multipurpose *learning commons*

Skills Needed by Creative and Innovative Librarians in Academic Libraries for Service Delivery

The changing nature of the profession of librarians coupled with their role in corporate influence upon information management and knowledge management makes it necessary for library and information professionals to learn acquire and develop some necessary skills. This according to Okiy (2014) will ensure that they remain relevant in the society in which they live. For academic libraries the evolutions of information and communication technology (ICT) capacity have significantly impact on their nature of services and service delivery. Accordingly, library staff in academic libraries through various means developed some skill to match the new trends of change which include innovation and creativity in libraries. This is a responsibility and an entitlement and it makes for a learning-centered community – the pupils are learning and so is the staff.

Consequently upon the current development in the field of library and information profession and the needs of information in the society generally, there is the need for librarians to possess some skills. These skills according to Nilson (2003) include:

- (a) Leadership skill**, including skills in influencing others. This skill is to enable library and information science professionals to demonstrate their ability to lead others in discharging their duties especially in dissemination of information. Leadership skill is important as good quality leadership help libraries and librarians create new services.
- (b) Interpersonal relationship skills**, focusing on collaborative skills of working with others to achieve common goals which include creating new products and services. This skill is important as it enable library staff to collaboratively work together as a team. In this age of information technology interpersonal skill is needed for development of libraries especially academic

libraries.

- (c) **Technological awareness and understanding skills**, including experience as a user of new software, hardware, online services, and electronic performance support systems. Library and information science professionals need to understand the current technological advancement in information field. In this era of information explosion librarians must brace up to use the technological appliances for creation and innovation of new services and products.
- (d) **Problem-solving skills**, especially the analysis skills of identifying gaps in people's performance and facilitating the closing of them with a view of making library and information professionals more proactive, productive and innovative.
- (e) **Systems thinking and understanding**, including an understanding of the effects of "double loop" systems
- (f) **Knowledge of interventions Skills**, including demonstrated ability and skill at choosing and using a variety of personal and procedural interventions across the organization to close performance gaps

From the above it is clear that librarians have an uphill task ahead in their effort of becoming creative and innovative. Despite this however, Daniel (2014), noted that professional and other library staff should also possess the following skills to enable them to function adequately in the new dispensation. These skills are professional and personal competencies. Professional competencies here relate to the specialized librarians' knowledge of information resources, information access, technology, management and research, as well as his ability to apply this knowledge to provide information services. In the same vein personal competency refer to asset of skills, attitudes and values that spur librarians to work professionally as good communicators, who are focused on the central theme of continuous lifelong learning throughout their careers; demonstrating the value added nature of their contributions; and the survival in the global village setting.

Benefit of Creative and Innovative Services in Academic Libraries

There are many benefits that can be derived from services being created by library staff in academic libraries. These services which are mainly due to high level skills demonstrated by library staff are mostly because of the advances in communication technologies, content generation options, increase

in number and diversity of the makeup of the community. According to Adeyoyin, (2005) academic libraries in this era need staff with knowledge of:

- Sources of information and have access to them as required.
- Strategies that will yield optimal retrieval result in less time. The information explosion of the knowledge society requires electronic manipulation of information resources to gain access to the knowledge embedded in the document.
- Services that could attract and retain customers including multimedia multi format, knowledge distillation and dissemination based services.
- System use using both technology and information to provide access to knowledge.
- Systems administration to be able to manage network connectivity and provision in the libraries without relying on computer science trained system analysts/administrators.
- Systems maintenance to be able to detect and fix basic computer hardware and software problems so as to be able to communicate on the same frequency with the system supplier.

From the foregoing, it is clear that libraries are no longer what they used to be. This implies that librarians are also no longer who they used to be. This evolution or revolution has led to the evolution or revolution of librarians' roles all over the world. There is no doubt that the infusion of ICT into all human activities has completely changed the practice of librarianship all over the world, and Nigerian academic libraries are not exceptional. The acquisition of various skills by library staff enable them to create and innovate new services especially in the application of ICT in the acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information. The acquisition of relevant ICT skills by LIS trainees enable them fit in adequately into various positions in the library and information based industries. For academic libraries of 21st century, the following are the benefits of creative and innovative services.

- (a) *Speed*. The speed with which information is harnessed presently can never be compared with what obtained in the past. With a click of the mouse volumes of information is collected for library patrons. This in a way has also improved the lot for the library professionals. Rather than walk from one section to another in collecting information for clients, librarians can search several websites with several search engines and collate needed information which may be sent to the box of a client.

- (b) *Storage.* Large volumes of information can be collected and burnt in a CD or saved in a flash for a library patron. This saves the library user carrying a lot of books home. This makes for encapsulation of information as large volumes are packaged in a small container such as flash or CDs or floppy disk which seems to be gradually fizzling out.
- (c) *Ease of use.* With the above mentioned advantages the next normal thing which ICT readily offers is ease of information search by the librarians and ease of use by the library patrons.
- (d) *Availability.* Resources belonging to several libraries can be easily shared and consortia of libraries can also be forged so that several libraries can pay for particular electronic resources such as journals and sometimes books. This is made cheaper and helps libraries within the consortia to keep acquiring up-to-date resources. Consortia help to reduce journal cost of libraries and opens up an avenue for cheaper procurement of timely quality resources.

Challenges

In the 21st century, aside from technological innovations, it is the time for librarians in academic libraries to embrace change, since change is the only thing that is constant by creating new services and improve on existing ones. Academic libraries must confront the challenges of responding to the changing nature of higher education, including moves towards an increasing ‘massification’ and widening access to higher education. These changes require skills development for effective creativity and innovations, this will no doubt influence the development and revision of course design and teaching methods, such as those now to be found in distance and virtual ICT-based learning, as well as the research trends and targets of the institution. These challenges in turn shape the design and function of hybrid library services. In this context, academic libraries not only confront challenges that require significant changes to the practice of their day-to-day functions but also to the very nature of their role and objectives. Information and communication technology has had the biggest impact on libraries. Information professionals and academic libraries are thus, continually required to develop skills for creativity and innovations in the libraries.

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