JATLIM *International*

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGIES IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

http://www.jatlim.org

Managing Technology and Cultural Diversity in Public Libraries in The Digital Age

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Abstract
This paper discusses managing cultural diversity in public libraries with the help of technologies in the digital era. It conceptually examines cultural diversity and technology in managing public libraries in digital era. The concepts of technology, librarianship and cultural diversity were explained in some detail and were linked together to make the study robust. Challenges associated with managing cultural diversity in the public library are highlighted. The paper recommends among others that managers and heads of public libraries should fully take advantage of modern technologies to deal with cultural diversity and ensure that their employees are valued for their contributions and worth and protected against prejudice.
Keywords: *Cultural Diversity, Librarianship, Technology, Public Library, Digital Age*

1.1 Introduction

Today's cultural moment has thrust into full view the importance of managing cultural diversity in the workplace especially public libraries. For librarians looking to prompt students and library users to explore their vast array of information resources, it has never been a better time to learn how to promote and manage diversity in public libraries. As public librarians help students develop their digital and information literacies, they can also provide an opportunity to allow library users to see themselves represented in the library selection and provide an opportunity for clients to discover and explore unfamiliar perspectives. Information should be gathered, arranged, preserved, and distributed to those in need as part of librarianship. Librarians serve the strategic objectives of an organization as well as the requirements of individual constituents by assisting them in finding and utilizing information housed in a collection of diverse kinds, sizes, and resources. Organization, administration, and distribution of information are all aspects of the librarianship as a profession and working environments for librarians include academic, special, and public libraries. They must select, acquire, arrange, and make information resources accessible. Additionally, librarians help users with research and references**.**

As more types of information and technologies become available, the discipline of librarianship changes to reflect the prevailing situation. To keep abreast with emerging trends, librarians need to be flexible and open to learning new things especially in the area of technologies. In keeping with the fifth law of librarianship, libraries also incorporate the use of computers and other technology into their daily operations in an effort to adapt to change and expansion. As a

result, manual processes of tasks like acquisition, cataloguing, and classification in many modern libraries have been replaced with automated ones. Technology in the field of librarianship brought with it a number of innovations including development of notions and terminologies such as digitalization, e-libraries, and e-resources. The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes is known as technology.

Technology is a diverse subject and can be found in all areas of human endeavour. Some of the popular areas of technology include: medical technology, electronic technology, mechanic technology, military technology, information and communication technology (ICT) among many others. Librarianship as a field of study has been profoundly impacted by information and communication technology (ICT) in all departments of operations. Information and communication technology has been defined by Tan et al. (2009) as the application of technology tools including computer network, software, and hardware required for internet connection to enhance library services. Akawang and Usoro (2021) argue that these technologies such as hardware, software and middleware communication signals play the role of unified systems which enable libraries to create, store, transmit, manipulate and disseminate information and data to a wide range of users in the digital era.

Diversity is essential in the library because it helps users develop critical thinking skills at the same time that they develop different literacies. Moreover, diversity encompasses several themes of identity, including race, ethnicity, disability, gender, class, religion, types of family and sexual orientation. With a focus on these different identities, libraries are uniquely equipped to lead the charge in celebrating diversity among library users and texts. Cultural diversity is referred to as diversity in public library activities and collections. Common traits that characterize a person's way of living, thinking, and making meaning are part of their culture. These traits include cuisine, attire, language, conventions, traditions, and rituals. Libraries may continue to innovate and enhance services and adapt to the demands of the country's changing populations by bringing together the viewpoints and experiences of many diversities, including age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, and more (Galda, Liang, and Cullinan, 2017). Libraries have the ability to remove obstacles to access by offering activities and materials that faithfully and genuinely represent the cultural viewpoints of many populations.

2.1 Literature Review

Conceptual Explanations

The following concepts, Information technology, librarianship, managing and workforce diversity, will be examined within the context of cultural diversity in public libraries

2.2 Information Technology and Cultural Diversity in Public Libraries

Information technology which can also be interchangeably used as information and communication technology (ICT) consists of tools in hard and soft formats that are applied in virtually all spheres of life to speed up services and make developmental activities easier. The tools may include computer hardware and software, hard and soft data, programming languages and information storage facilities. These tools highlighted above and more have been applied in many facets of human endeavour to give humanity better life. They have been deployed in the field of education, medical practice, agriculture, engineering, architecture and building; environmental sanitation, politics, legal practice, military

warfare; library and information management among other fields of life. These information and communication technology tools have been found to be impactful and relevant to modern libraries. According to Uwakwe, Njoku & Mbagwu (2016), they have brought about unprecedented and transforming changes in information handling that are now prevalent in all library operations and services arguing that prior to the emergence of ICT, the operations of public libraries were cumbersome, time-wasting and frustrating. No wonder, many scholars and professionals have referred to ICT as a game-changer.

Societies comprise different types of people originating from diversified ethnic groups. Each ethnic group is constrained by its specific values, behaviors, and social norms. Therefore, a culturally diverse society enables and empowers different contributions that different people make from various ethnic backgrounds. A Public Library, according to Ashikuzzaman, (2018) is a unique institution that stands as a beacon of knowledge and accessibility for the public. It is funded through public sources and operates with a mission to serve the people, by the people, and for the people. With a rich history dating back to the civilization of mankind, public libraries hold a significant role as custodians of human culture, knowledge, and social customs. According to UNESCO, a public library serves as the local gateway to knowledge, providing the foundation for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, cultural development, and social cohesion within a community. Public libraries exist in most nations of the world and are often considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population. A typical public library can be referred to as the representative of the society especially judging by the mixture of persons that are permitted to access its collections and services. Nwokocha (2012) asserts that public libraries are known to offer

services to all irrespective of race, sex, creed, education, political leaning, social or economic class. This is therefore the genesis of the diversity that is prevalent in public libraries with its attendant challenges which technologies are helping to combat.

Essentially, cultural diversity is the act of inclusiveness; that is, acknowledging people from different cultural backgrounds and creating an enabling environment that recognizes and values the social behaviors of others. Cultural diversity indicates how quickly a nation or any business adopts new technologies (Barak, 2016). Both internal and external forces can alter culture; for instance, innovation and dissemination are responsible for the modern society we live in. Numerous cultural elements, such as power dynamics, individualism versus collectivism, gender and sex, attitudes about time, and monochronism against polychronism, influence how technology adapts. According to Agars and Kottke (2004), individuals in developing countries often have polychronistic cultures because of the widespread conformance in a variety of behaviorsas long as they do not negatively impact interpersonal relationships. One such behavior is multitasking with ICTs. The idea of collectivism is particularly suited to collaboratively oriented interactive social media such as Web 2.0, online chats, and blogging.

As used in the library and information science context, diversity is defined as "inclusiveness with regard to differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, and ethnic, racial, or cultural background within a given population." (Reitz, 2014). Diversity is a term that has recently been used so frequently that it remains an issue that is crucial to the success of public libraries. Cultural diversity stands out as a way of accepting and appreciating other people's way of life, thus promoting a peaceful understanding as people live together in

society. Cultural diversity is essential since it enhances togetherness in society regardless of ethnic background. Cultural diversity is referred to as diversity in library activities and collections. Common traits that characterize a person's way of living, thinking, and making meaning are part of their culture. These traits include cuisine, attire, language, conventions, traditions, and rituals. People who belong to the same cultural group typically have traits in common. According to Clark (2014), culture is a multifaceted concept that encompasses everyday experiences shaped by a variety of social aspects that are specific to a community or area as well as broader national influences. It goes beyond meals, festivals, dress, and folklore. A person's culture is influenced by their ethnicity, race, family structure, ancestry, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic situation, language proficiency, citizenship status, preferred religion, age, gender expression, degree of education, and place of residence.

Librarians encounter culture through books, television shows and movies, music, video and computer games, digital apps, and other print and digital media. They also encounter culture through the values and customs of their users, through the people they interact with on a daily basis at school and in the community, and through the stories and characters they come across in these media programs that are culturally sensitive help people accept and comprehend differences on the basis of physical attributes, sexual orientation, immigration status, language proficiency, culture, and ethnicity. But other librarians might not know how to provide these kinds of programmes, instead, they can try to encourage global awareness and cultural competency by using the "tourist approach," which is a frequent strategy in many diversity-focused library programs.

Language diversity of the internet affects cultural diversity in a digital world.

Translation, especially with the use of English-dominated human language technology, can guarantee the latter. Smaller languages are therefore at a disadvantage since they have limited or no access to linguistic data, even if the majority of the technology is produced in the United States and other English-speaking nations. In terms of language technology, several efforts have simplified the process of uniting disparate linguistically divided populations and this is what public libraries should take advantage of when serving their clientele in culturally diverse society such as Nigeria. There are numerous Apps that public libraries can adopt to keep abreast of the needs of their users from different cultural backgrounds including Chatbot AI GPT, ChatBox, AI Chat etc. They can apply Neeo Messenger which is a fast and secure app with an HD video calling feature with real-time chat translator. It affords users the opportunity to translate chat and audio conversations in more than hundred languages. These AI facilitated apps have the capacity to translate most languages with over 85% accuracy. With this, public libraries can overcome the challenge of cultural diversity especially in the area multilingualism.

2.3 Managing Cultural Diversity in the Digital Age

Information technologies have revolutionized many facets of our everyday life, interpersonal relationships, and worldview. Around the globe, cultural organizations and individual practitioners are utilizing digital technology to make up for lost time. More and more, culture enthusiasts may enjoy live performances of plays or concerts, or discover the rich cultural resources of a foreign museum or historical site without leaving their homes (Barak, 2016). Digital age, in the view of Nwokocha & Horsfall (2020), is an evolution in information and communication technologies and has brought

about tremendous technological changes which have shaped the pattern of transmitting and receiving information across the globe. Digital age is centrality of computerization and the application of information and communication technology (ICT) in every operations and services. It is often used interchangeably as Information Age, Digital Era, Computer Age, Knowledge Management Age and New Media Age among other similar terms.

Digital platforms are transforming the job of archivists and curators at cultural institutions, while social media has created new avenues for public outreach. Changes to the cultural value chain have changed the way artisans, artists, and many other cultural professionals go about their everyday work. In addition to the more well-known web platforms and social media, this "cultural digitization" also encompasses the quickly developing fields of robotics, virtual and augmented reality and artificial intelligence. These fields have the potential to completely transform the ways in which we produce, preserve, access, and engage with culture (Dike, 2013). It is anticipated that the introduction of 5G, AI, and Big Data would bring about more changes in the next decade than any other technology has in the previous three decades. Akwang (2021) asserts the characteristics of WEB 2.0 as including "open communication, decentralization of authority, rich user experience, user perception, dynamic contents and user control…." She further highlights that, "the big idea behind the adoption of WEB 2.0 is "its ability to support a continually-updated service, … create network effects through architecture of participation…" thus allowing the librarian to offer an intuitive, immersive and diversely apt portfolio of library resources that would suit the purposes of peoples of all divides.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its related global shutdown, hastened the rate of change especially in the area of attending meetings, conferences and office activities virtually without having to appear physically. One estimate puts the COVID-19 pandemic's three-month progress at five years. Preserving access to culture through digital platforms was one of the top concerns during a gathering of over 130 ministers of culture that UNESCO organized virtually in April 2020 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2020). In fact, there was a sudden and quick surge in the usage of digital technology during the epidemic, with everything from local groups presenting living cultural practices of dance, music, crafts, and cookery to well-known artists giving free performances from their living rooms.

Theaters and concert halls are broadcasting performances online, and major institutions have also made content available on their platforms. The online traffic of the world's most visited museum, the Louvre in Paris, increased tenfold during regular business hours. But at the moment, not everyone is benefiting from the digital revolution. Nearly half of humanity is still being left behind, according to estimates from the Broadband Commission, of which UNESCO is an active member, which states that 53.6% of the globe currently has access to digital technology (ITU/UNESCO 2023). Significant disparities also exist between and within nations: women use the internet at a rate 12% lower than males worldwide, and digital penetration falls to 19% in the Least Developed Countries. It is evident that the level of access disparities to digital technologies has significant effects on culture: whereas online cultural consumption has skyrocketed in the majority of nations, patterns of cultural creation and consumption clearly reflect the digital divide. For instance, the percentage of museums with an internet presence in Africa and the Small Island Developing States is approximately 5% (Thiel 2014).

Diversity is essential in the library

because it helps students develop critical thinking skills at the same time that they develop different literacies. Moreover, diversity encompasses several themes of identity, including race, ethnicity, disability, gender, class, religion, types of family and sexual orientation. Bedi, Iakra and Gupta (2014) state that "diversity is essentially concerned with the similarities and differences among the organization's employees in such characteristics as age, gender, ethnicity, heritage, physical abilities and disabilities, race, and sexual orientation. "With a focus on these different identities, libraries are uniquely equipped to lead the charge in celebrating diversity among users and staff. Every organization, including the library, has team members that collaborate to make sure that the objectives of the organization are realized. The workforce is the collective term for these individuals. The entirety of the workers in a company is referred to as the workforce, according to Hornby (2005). When it comes to a library, the workforce is the group of individuals employed by the organization. Conversely, diversity is defined by Dike (2013) as the awareness, comprehension, and acceptance of individual differences regardless of one's color, gender, age, class, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and so on. According to Dike's definition, variety encompasses all elements that demonstrate distinctions between or among individuals.

2.4 Challenges and Remedies of Cultural Diversity in Public Libraries

There are challenges associated with cultural diversity and their remedies, including bias, discrimination, and disputes across cultures, stereotyping, and sectarianism. Supporting cultural diversity can help people avoid some of these difficulties. Communalism, or the fostering of narrow-minded and restricted identities based on religion, caste, or race, is one of the major challenges to Indian diversity. Communalism may cause conflicts between various religious groups, as well as social and political divides and even bloodshed. Galda, Liang and Cullinan (2017) identify several challenges associated with cultural diversity in libraries including: difficulty in achieving effective communication especially in a multilingual environment, limitation in freedom expression and hindrance to friendly association and relationship in the library among other challenges. Other challenges include the following:

Cultural Conflicts – Clash of two or more cultures is inevitable in a culturally diverse community where the cultures invariably interact frequently including in a public library setting. Culture being a way of life, it becomes therefore difficult to expect any group to abandon its culture in respect or deference to another. Additionally, employees from different cultural backgrounds avoid one another. This may impede the efficient exchange of information, expertise, and abilities, which might lead to a decline in output, team effectiveness, and company expansion.

Discrimination – this the prejudicial treatment of certain categories of persons based on certain considerations including culture, tribe, age, sex or religion among other factors. The United Nations (2008), defines discrimination as "any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person's race, sex, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, language, social origin or other status. It is expected that everyone must be considerate of the race, cultural background, beliefs, ethnicity, and customs of others in a diverse workplace including the public library. Because of this, it will not be permissible to make jokes or

comments about the unique cultural practices or beliefs of other people in a diverse workplace. People are unable to openly express their beliefs or share personal narratives at any time without fear of being perceived as discriminatory.

Stereotyping – According to *Cambridge Dictionary* (2024), stereotype is having "a set idea about what a particular type of person is like, especially an idea that is wrong" It is a common knowledge that once a stereotype is formed, it becomes difficult to erase from the mind of the person. For example in Nigeria, there are so many stereotypes about many tribes and professions. Each tribe of profession is stereotyped with one thing or the other and sticks almost permanently. The sad thing about stereotyping is that no single person is given the benefit of doubt to be different from the pack. For instance, a young man from a community that has been stereotyped as thieves, may have a challenge in the public library if he openly identifies himself to be from the community. The result may be that he is turned back at the gate of a security personnel is detailed to watch over him. This type of stereotyping can be mitigated with help of technology in the form of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) or sensor-installed computerized security door in the library which detects removal of books that have not been officially checked out. Stereotyping is certainly not good for a public library which is expected to welcome readers of all races, tribes, religions, professions, political and educational backgrounds. In order to ensure that it does not adversely affect the operations and services, public libraries must deploy relevant information and communication technologies to combat stereotyping.

Prejudice – *APA dictionary of psychology* (2023), defines prejudice as "a negative attitude towards another person or group formed in advance of any experience with that person group. Prejudice is a challenge in public libraries. The control measure should begin with the library staff who must abhor all elements of prejudice to ensure excellent services to users without negative preconceived mind. Prejudice does not only affect services to users but it also hampers interpersonal relationship among the staff of the public library. Prejudice ultimately runs down any organization including the public library and should therefore not encouraged in our public libraries. Everything, including the use of modern technologies should be deployed to discourage prejudice in public libraries by staff and clientele. Seminars, talk shops and webinars (physical and virtual) should be organized regularly in our public libraries where the evils of prejudice will be highlighted.

Sectarianism – According to *Oxford English Dictionary* (2024), sectarianism is "excessive attachment to a particular sect or party especially in religion" Roberts (2017) defines sectarianism as the existence of, within a locality, of two or more divided and actively competing communal identities, resulting in a strong sense of dualism which unremittingly transcends commonality and is both culturally and physically manifest. It is a powerful support for one religious sect or political party especially when the extreme support leads to violence and killings. This is why sectarianism is seen as a potential challenge to public libraries and should be discouraged in our libraries as in other public places. Sectarianism can be curbed with education and enlightenment with the help information and communication technologies.

Conclusion

Cultural diversity is real and exists in several parts of the world. The existence of multiplicity of cultures or traditional practices in one country or community is regarded as

cultural diversity. There are several countries that belong to this category including Nigeria, Canada, United States, South Africa, Spain, and Papua New Guinea, rated as the most ethnically diverse country on the planet. Among several others. Studies and experience have shown that cultural diversity can be a plus or a minus in nation building depending on how it is managed. Countries such as United States and Canada have used their cultural diversity to achieve development and greatness while other countries such as Nigeria and Chad allowed their cultural diversity to tear them apart and made them poverty capitals of the world. The difference made be found in the application of technologies in rendering of services in companies and offices including public libraries. The digital era has availed governments and organizations including public libraries the liberty and luxury of conducting operations and services with speed and ease. With the help of technologies, most challenges posed by cultural diversity in public libraries can be combated as discussed in the body of this paper.

In light of the aforementioned benefits and drawbacks of diversity management practices in the era of globalization, cultural diversity management practices are crucial to the success of public libraries in cultural diverse communities. For this reason, it is recommended that managers and leaders including librarians embrace diversity management practices with the help of technologies and convert cultural diversity into a tool for accelerated development and efficient public library services in the digital era.

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