

NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES PATRONS' INFORMATION NEEDS IN A RECESSED ECONOMY: ELECTRONIC RESOURCES TO THE RESCUE

Amaka Raymonda Obiamalu
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Ogungbeni John Igbekele
Lagos State University, Lagos
&

Obiora Kingsley Udem
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

Over the past years, academic library collection development specialists have been coping with the dramatic changes brought about by low budgetary allocations and decreasing purchasing power. As a result, it seems that the needs of the patrons are not being met. This study examines how academic libraries in Nigeria are trying to cope with the information needs of their patrons within the context of economic recession. The study is a qualitative research based on survey of existing literatures on academic library patrons information needs, collection development and resources in academic libraries. The study reveals that many academic libraries do not have needed resources that will take care of their patrons information needs. Therefore the study recommends that academic libraries in Nigeria should take advantage of the huge amount of resources available in the open access platform of electronic resources to meet the information needs of their patrons in this period of economic recession.

INTRODUCTION

Patrons of academic libraries require information for their research and developmental activities. They also need other forms of information such as social, economic and health information. These patrons' needs and expectations in our world today emanate from the drive to access relevant and accurate information to satisfy the changing information needs in current fields of knowledge (Nyamache, Munyao, Songok, Nyambura & Nyamboga, 2015). If the need is urgent, the search may be pursued with diligence until the desire is fulfilled. Information needs is thus a requirement that may drive library patrons into an information-seeking process to meet their information gaps (Norbert & Lwoga, 2013). When a patron has information needs, he or she is seeking an answer to a question or a solution to problem.

Libraries are institutions established for acquisition, organization, presentation storage and dissemination of information in various formats to meet the needs of their patrons. Academic libraries offer various types of services to the user community and spread knowledge derived from research. They have the task of disseminating information from their collection as well as making it available from the other institutional resources. Collection development is very important for the growth of the library in accordance with Ranganathan's fifth law which states that library is a growing organism. Academic libraries in Nigeria have evolved in terms

of scope and formats of information resources they acquire, process and disseminate. Today, digital information resources are regular part of the collections of academic libraries in Nigeria. The assemblage of books and non-book information materials in the required quality and quantity depends on resources development activities of the academic library. Collection development is a planned, continuous and cost effective acquisition of quality and relevant materials to meet the needs of users of an academic library (Nnadozie, 2006). It is very important for the resources of the library to meet the criteria of currency and relevance. Horava (2005) stressed the importance of collection development in the promotion of library services. For example, a regular and relevant update of the new arrival shelves is an invitation to more patrons into an academic library. Library patrons' interface with the library is at the collection development department, it is therefore one of the vehicles through which libraries activities and services can be measured by their users (Adesanya, 2015).

A major reason for poor collection development is low budgetary allocations to academic libraries. The devaluation of the naira, which is partly responsible for rising cost of print materials most especially foreign books, is a contributor to inability of academic libraries in Nigeria to acquire needed materials. The rising cost of raw materials for the local printing industry has affected the capacity of local authors to produce books. These problems are the resultant effects of Nigeria economy in recession.

A survival strategy for academic libraries in Nigeria in a recessed economy could be to explore the opportunities inherent in the adoption of electronic resources. Electronic resources are the digital materials created, acquired, processed and disseminated on or without a network by the academic library. The library should have good number of resources for teaching, learning and research work. E- Resources offer creative possibilities for expanding access as well as changing learning, teaching and research work. Contents of e-resources can be accessible, at any place regardless of time, to be read on mobile devices and personal computers. E-resources can also provide adequate and wide range of materials needed by academic library patrons within the context of a low budgetary allocation. This is possible through a lot of resources available on the internet which has become a huge information resource. Access to research knowledge comes at a high price. In Germany alone the libraries of universities and research institutes spend around 200 million euro annually on subscriptions. Internationally, a total of 7.6 billion euro is paid to publishers in subscriptions (Max, 2017). The price increase imposed by the three major international specialist publishers and their profits are outrageous. Quasi-monopolistic structures engender an imbalance of power in the negotiations by developed and developing nations, and it is essential that we redress this imbalance. The open access movement that is gaining support across the world has made good progress in addressing the imbalance. Some academic subscription databases make access available to academic institutions in developing countries at little or no cost. The channel of open source is also one that provides opportunity for academic library to meet their patrons' information needs.

There is no gainsaying that information need of academic library patrons as a result of the advent of information technology have changed drastically. The issue is whether, academic libraries managers are not discouraged by dwindling financial resources in meeting these needs. Are they taking full advantage of the opportunities that are inherent in e-resources? The increase in the amount of information available and the improvement in its accessibility have had a huge impact on academics' information behaviour. In the view of the authors of this paper, it is important to investigate these changes both in order to redefine the collections and services provided by academic libraries and to improve the technological platforms that make electronic contents available to academic library patrons. This paper is set to reveal the opportunities that are hidden in the adoption of electronic resources in mitigating the challenges of dwindling budgetary allocations to academic libraries in Nigeria.

Collection Development by Academic Libraries in an Economic Recession

The process of identification, selection, ordering and procurement of library materials is referred to as collection development (Adewuyi, 2005). In developing the collections of an academic library, library administrators must be aware of potential library users and what their various needs are likely to be. According to Olojo and Akewukere (2006), a good understanding of the user population also affects library organizational structure, the need for special reading materials and accommodations for particular user groups. All these must be factored in when the collection development librarian is to make decision on the materials to be acquired into the library. Collection evaluation is an important component of collection development. According to Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu (2015), collection evaluation is done from time to time to ascertain the collection's validity in relation to the library's objectives. Collection evaluation is done to determine the scope, depth and usefulness of the collection, test the effectiveness, the utility and practical applicability of the written collection development policy, assess the collection's adequacy and hence highlight its inadequacies and strategize to identify areas where weeding is required.

In the task of developing their collections, academic libraries especially in developing countries encounter a number of problems thereby making evaluation processes difficult and stressful. Eze and Eze (2006) pointed out that it is usually impossible to procure materials published overseas without obtaining the appropriate foreign currency. Presently, getting foreign exchange in the country poses a lot of problems and when one succeeds, the rate is often very high. The implication is far-reaching. It means that libraries that want to acquire foreign books must have to convert a lot of naira into the foreign currency that the book is priced. This is usually detrimental to academic libraries in developing economies. In addition, poor management of library votes, financial mismanagement by the academic administrators and library managers pose serious problems in maintaining adequate collection (Eguavon, 2002). Consequently, the library is handicapped when it comes to improving both the stock and staff strength.

Furthermore, inarticulate collection development and acquisition policies are also a major problem. Most academic libraries in Nigeria do not have written or articulate acquisition policy. It is important that libraries should have these policies. Moreover, communication services in the country are nothing to write home about. Our roads are in deplorable conditions. All these make the process of procuring library materials very cumbersome and time consuming. Scholars like Ogbonna (2000) pointed out some problems which include underdeveloped book industry, Government fiscal measures, censorship, poor communication infrastructure, publication explosion and literature scatter, preservation problems, accommodation, poor funding, lack of collection development policy, lack of written development policy, lack of equipment and facilities and unavailability of standard bibliographies. Libraries have certain obligation to fulfill and these obligations cannot be totally fulfilled unless there is adequate fund for the Library. The attitudes of potential library users toward the various types of formats used to package and distribute information and those potential users' ingrained habits of seeking information must influence collection development planning and evaluation (Magrill, 1989).

Osborne (1992) pointed out a number of problems affecting collection development which include: number of employees to be served (including full-time consultants and outside users); need for end users to access information when the library is not present; physical working space and supplementing the collection with on-line information resources. Other problems facing collection development are identified by Rohan and Mogbe (2014) as finding out what is available, evaluating the sources available and acquiring and servicing the sources required. The attitude of the public towards education generally and towards libraries specifically can create either opportunities or frustration for those librarians engaged in collection development evaluation. When the public feels good about education and is willing to support it financially, library materials budgets usually benefits; when the public loses confidence in the quality of educational leadership, librarians may find their collection decisions being questioned.

Academic Libraries and Patrons' Information Needs

Information need is an urge that makes people to seek information. The need of information evolves from something missing, which necessitates the seeking of information that might contribute to understanding and meaning. Library and Information Centers are playing a vital role by providing the information required by patrons for their research and developmental activities. The libraries offer various types of services to the user community and spread the knowledge. The main task is that of disseminating the information from the collection as well as making it available from the other institutional resources. The traditional services provided by the libraries like inter-library loans, selective dissemination of information, bibliographic listing, reading room, book borrowing were mainly based on the library collection, but due to application of information and communication technology, the trends in academic libraries are also shifting towards modernization. The methods and practices used are also changing and the value added services are emerging as key elements in the new library environment.

Globally, and most especially in developing countries, libraries are facing challenges due to the introduction of information and communication technology in the profession and the escalation in the number of publications; whereas the user demands are getting very pinpointed and specific. Studies conducted over the last decade indicate that for their academic assignments, academic library patrons tend to use Internet search engines more than searching library resources (Currie, Devlin, Emde, & Graves, 2010; De Rosa, Cantrell, Hawk, & Wilson, 2006; Graham & Metaxas, 2003; Kim & Sin, 2007; Thompson, 2003). In their academic searches patrons turn first to their easiest, time saving, familiar and accessible option (i.e., Internet search engines) rather than the library's qualified academic sources (Lee, Paik, & Joo, 2012).

Accessing academic library resources seems to patrons as taking much more time and is therefore reserved for larger projects such as research assignments. Accessing information on the Web is much faster, and although it may be less reliable and credible, it offers patrons the answers they need to review information quickly (Biddix, Chung, & Park, 2011; Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Pérez, 2008). The electronic Publishing has further changed the mode of services expected from the traditional libraries. The traditional mode of library services was based on the print media, whereas the present mode lays emphasis on digital information resources, web and Internet resources for providing the services Users Expects from the Academic Libraries the following aspects; Comprehensiveness, Accessibility, Immediate gratification, Follow ability of data, Ease of use and multiple formats and

Electronic resources, Open Access and Academic libraries collections

According to Olanlokun (1993), acquisition of books, reference materials, pamphlets, government publications, audio visual materials and database can be enhanced by automated library processes. Ifidon (2006), wrote that it is absolutely essential for a library to possess the resources that will enable it to meet its goals. Those beautiful buildings, well trained staff and modern information storage and retrieval system can best be appreciated if excellent services are given to users. This can be achieved faster with acquisition of electronic resources (e-resources).

Ogunbeni (2015) highlighted examples of e-resources to include e-books, e-journals, e-databases, e-magazine, e-theses and dissertations, e-reference materials and online public access catalogue (OPAC). According to Rohan and Mogbe (2014), an e-database is an organized collection of large information, of a particular subject or various subject areas. Contents include books, journal articles, newspapers articles, books reviews and conference proceedings, and so on. Writing on the advantages of electronic resources, Dadzie (2007) opined that electronic resources are invaluable research tools that complement the print – based resources in a traditional library setting. Their advantages, according to her include: access to information that might be restricted to the user due to geographical location or finances, access to more current information, and provision of extensive links to additional resources related contents. The finding of Tenopir (2003) shows that electronic information resources have been rapidly adopted in academic spheres, though behaviour varies depending on the discipline. A study by Olle and Borrego (2015) confirmed the upward trend in the amount of journal reading among academics due to the increase in the number of electronic journals available and the improvement in the tools to locate and access this information.

A very important concept that has enhanced the introduction of electronic resources to the academic world is Open Access. Open Access implies free access to scientific knowledge for everybody. In the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, the term scientific knowledge is defined as “original scientific research results, raw data and metadata, source materials, digital representations of pictorial and graphical materials and scholarly multimedia material” (Max, 2017; p3). Traditional journal subscription denies access to all whose institution cannot afford to pay yearly subscription fees. Bertelmann and Sitek (2014) explained Gold and Green models of Open Access. According to them, Gold Open Access describes a business model for journal publishing which gives free access to all potential readers and sees other models to cover expenses for a publication. Although there is a broad range of models, a majority of notable Open Access journals rely on publication fees, also known as article processing charges (ACP), which are often also referred to as author fees. These sums are usually paid by the author’s institution. Open Access journals differ only in terms of the publisher’s business model from subscription-based journals; they pass through the same peer review processes as the traditional journals and there are no differences regarding the quality of the published articles. The Green Road of Open Access stresses the possibility of authors to deposit their articles, which are primarily published on publisher’s sites, additionally on another server. Usually an institutional or a subject-based repository is used for this purpose. In many fields, journals are the main channel of scholarly communication; therefore Open Access has especially developed in this sector.

According to Alma (2010), some of the advantages of Open Access include: free to use, free of restrictions, access to the peer-reviewed literature and data, not publishing without going through review process, not articles without rich academic content, moving scholarly communication into the Web Age, research moves faster and more efficiently, greater visibility and impact, better monitoring assessment and evaluation of research, and enables new semantic technologies (text-mining and data-mining).

Conclusion

Information selection and acquisition are determined first by the official policy statement, which explains the manner in which the library is to go about the business of collection development. Academic libraries in Nigeria should develop and operate policies that would ensure that their libraries collections consist of well balanced stock among other general materials: books, journals, newspapers, government publications, pamphlets and suitably selected reference works both in the paper and electronic formats. Policies should address the application of modern catalogue and electronic resources to satisfy the information needs of their patrons. It will not be out of place for budgetary allocations to the library to be skewed in favour of acquisition of facilities for accessing electronic resources. From available literatures, many academic library patrons assume they know the best way to access the information they need. However, some of the information they get from surfing the internet have been discovered to be unreliable and from questionable sources. It is therefore pertinent for academic librarians to do more of information literacy trainings to enable their libraries

patrons acquire the appropriate skills for searching databases and search engines. The trainings will also empower academic library patrons to be conversant with the various electronic resources available in their libraries.

Recommendations

Acquisition librarians can now make use of emerging technologies to help build up the library resources and services. They are popular social networking sites, Such as; Facebook and twitter, Blogs - Web Logs, RSS - Rich Site Summary (an XML), Wiki - Web page which can be viewed and modified by anybody with a web browser, Podcast - used for online delivery of v ideos, Web Conferencing, IM - Instant Messaging

Profiling of patrons which has always been part of academic libraries activities should be done electronically. The starting point is partnering and engaging patrons and responding to their needs by doing a reflective analysis of what we do and how we do it will cater for a space for user profiling and improve service quality in academic libraries.

Academic libraries in Nigeria should be harvesting Open Access databases and making them available to their patrons. This is to enable them have access to electronic resources that will meet their information needs in a recessed economy. Nigerian academics should join in the propagation of Open Access. Academics should begin to picture a situation in which they would be able to publish all their thoughts, results, conclusions, data, and such as they occur, openly and widely available to everybody. The Internet already provides tools that could make this possible (microblogs, blogs, wikis, and others.).

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