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Digitalization of academic libraries: a response to the blended mode of teaching in private higher learning institutions in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries are being encouraged to digitalize their services. This idea has been supported with the advent of COVID-19 where health measures are encouraging social distancing and avoiding hand to hand distribution of documents and the limit of face to face contacts. Encouragement is being made to have a full online lectures or blended mode of teaching where there is a mixture of face to face with online courses. The main challenge in this process is that most of core books related to academic courses in libraries are in printed format and accessible only by visiting the library. It is to note that private higher learning institutions in Africa are still facing challenges related to inadequate resources as they do not get governmental finance support. This study aims to review literature on the role of digitalization of academic libraries as a response to the blended mode of teaching. The objective of the study is to investigate challenges faced by academic libraries in private higher learning institutions in Africa that limit them to satisfy their users' needs through digitization of the library and to propose strategies that can be adopted in order to overcome those challenges. Literature reviewed found out that: The digitalization of library has a great role to play on library users' needs satisfaction; That academic libraries are facing challenges during the digitalization process, challenges that limit fully adoption the use of internet and the digitalization of libraries in order to satisfy library users' needs.The study recommends: the management to avail adequate resources to libraries; hiring new personnel and deploying/retraining existing staff in ICT related to library digitalization; Training of library users on the access and use of digitalized library resources; To embrace new technology and move from printed documents accessed physically to digitalized documents accessed through internet in order to meet the users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education.

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Introduction

Higher learning institutions, in different areas of Africa, are being encouraged by the ministry of education to digitalize education. This idea has been supported with the advent of COVID-19 where health measures are encouraging social distancing and avoiding hand to hand distribution of documents and the limit of face to face contacts. Encouragement is being made to have a full online lectures or blended mode of teaching where there is a mixture of face to face with online courses. In this process academic libraries in those institutions must not be left behind because, as we know, the library goes hand in hand with education. We cannot think about the quality of education without thinking about the quality of library. The academic library is an integral part of a university. It exists to meet the information needs of students, staff members, researchers and other users in the community. The library supports the teaching, learning and research activities of academic institutions. Thus, the provision of services in academic libraries has to change and be adapted to the changing of teaching system in higher education. Library services now need to be provided to users regardless of location, program or mode of study in order to meet the changing needs of library users (Nakitare, Sawe et al., 2020).

The digital age is here to stay with us and for African university libraries the pressure to go digital has never been more apparent. There are still many challenges, though, facing African university libraries in the implementation of digital library projects, especially regarding funding, human resources training and retention of skills, Internet connectivity, telecommunications infrastructure (Chiware, 2007). It is in this regard that the researchers want to make a study on "Digitalization of academic libraries, a response to the blended mode of teaching in private higher learning institutions in Africa".

Methodology

The research methodology used in this study was to review existing literature on the study in order to draw conclusions and strategies that can help academic libraries in private higher learning institutions in Africa to improve the quality of services and satisfy their users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate challenges faced by academic libraries in the age of digitalization of education in private higher learning institutions in Africa that limit them to satisfy their users' needs satisfaction in order to propose strategies that can be adopted for future service delivery improvement.

Specific Objectives

Objectives of the study are:

to find out the role of digitalization of library resources in the age of digitalization of education;

to discover challenges that are facing academic libraries and their impact on library users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education in private higher learning institution in Africa;

and to propose strategies that can be adopted in order to overcome those challenges for future service delivery improvement.

Research Questions

What is the role of the digitalization of library resources in the age of digitalization of education?

What are challenges that are facing academic libraries and their impact on library users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education in private higher learning institution in Africa?

Are there strategies that can be adopted in order to overcome those challenges for future service delivery improvement?

Review of Literature

The researchers reviewed existing literature in order to be informed the role of digitalization of library resources in the age of digitalization of education; to discover challenges that are facing academic libraries and their impact on library users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education in private higher learning institution in Africa; and to propose strategies that can be adopted in order to overcome those challenges for future service delivery improvement.

Role of digitalization of academic library resources

In this age of digitalization, library customers have high expectations from libraries to access the right information and knowledge in the right format and at the right time from wherever they are without moving to library (Chutia, 2015). In the traditional libraries, the academic librarian stood in between the user and the information resource or service. It was absolutely necessary for the users to pass through them to get information or service. The adoption of information and communication technologies in academic

libraries has revolutionized and challenged the state of the intermediary services. Today, the academic librarian has to move from the central position of being between users and information to a position of Apo mediation of standing by and supporting the users as they seek to access information. Academic libraries now have to digitalize their collections, services and infrastructure to support lifelong learning, research, scholarly communication and archiving (Nakitare, Sawe et al., 2020). Technological changes and the use of electronically stored and retrieval information systems have changed the way library users are able to access, retrieve and use information. The instantaneous access to information through the Internet has made vast amounts of information and data available to anyone with a computer. Digital information is changing the role of librarians radically: No longer are they to wait for library users to ask for assistance in finding information in a place called a library. Librarians are no longer simply information providers or the keepers of knowledge. Their new role makes it imperative for them to provide services and instructions regardless of place, time or format (Obadare, 2010).

According to Igwesi (2010), improved library services, increased access, and speedy retrieval of documents are the major purposes for digitization of library resources. It improves speedy access to library materials where several users can access the same information materials the same time without hindrance and it eliminate the problem of distance, and improve library visibility. Improved library services have made this become one of the major impetus for change in academic libraries in the digital age for the adoption of ICT and digitization of library resources (Oni, Abu & Ekeniyere, 2018). Digitization of library resources has been found to be a key developmental factor in the present day libraries especially in an academic environment. In order to remain relevant in the present digital environment, libraries especially in developing countries should make every effort to digitize their local content for preservation and easy access. All these efforts are in response to the global need for nations to preserve their local contents and make them available over the Global Information Network (Igwesi, 2010).

Challenges faced by African Academic Libraries in the Digital age

a) Inadequate financial resources

Private higher learning institutions in Africa are still facing challenges related to inadequate resources as they do not get governmental finance support. Pri-

vate higher learning institutions are relaying on schools fees of students and few available resources are used to other academic programmes like paying staff salaries, buying educational equipments and libraries are left behind. According to Igwesi (2010), the lack of planning and funding were among the major problems militating against digitization projects in libraries. The implication is that if the library administrators do not adequately plan for digitization by developing an institutional policy, ensuring adequate budget and funding. Libraries in Africa are more affected by the lack of adequate technology compared to libraries in the developed countries because of factor of inadequate budgets and funds (Alabi & Omoike, 2020). This idea is supported by Owusu-Ansah & Takyi (2015), saying that many African institutions and academic libraries in developing countries are focusing and channeling significant financial resources into planning and setting up digital libraries.

b) Inadequate library staff's skills

Library staff in private academic libraries is still lacking enough skills to embrace digitalization process of library resources. The success of any digital library endeavor significantly depends on the human capital of the implementing organization. According to Owusu-Ansah & Takyi (2015), the main hurdle for many of these efforts is the human resource capacity of staff expected to implement these projects as several studies show a considerable skills gap in many digital library projects leading to sustainability challenges. A combination of skills required for a successful implementation of digitization were found to be somewhat lacking among librarians in university libraries (Adeleke, 2014). What is traditionally defined as the digital age, millennials are highly dependent on technology for their social and, increasingly, educational needs (Nakitare, Sawe et al., 2020). The general library environment is gradually changing from analogue to digital and/or hybrid environment. Some university libraries in Africa have started digitization project but there are still some impeding factors militating against the effective digitization of library resources because librarians still lack skills on digitization. The implication is that if librarians are not well trained in digitization and other ICT skills, they will not be able to face the present challenges in the digital library environment (Igwesi, 2010).

c) Fear of competitors

According to Obadare (2010), some librarians are seeing internet as a competitor to libraries where they are risking losing their posts where they will be

replaced by computers, others by Information and communication Technology specialists if they are not well informed on new inventions in ICT. The profession parades an array of people from diverse backgrounds such as engineering, communication, computer, electronics and other fields. Librarians can team up with other professionals to develop new technologies. More than ever before, librarians must make themselves more relevant in this Digital Age.

d) Inadequate ICT facilities

ICT infrastructure is an impediment to access of information. The infrastructure include components such as high-speed local networks and fast connections to the Internet, relational databases that support a variety of digital formats, full text search engines to index and provide access to resources, a variety of servers such as Web servers and FTP servers and electronic document management functions that will aid in the overall management of digital resources. Libraries need to enhance and upgrade current ICT architectures to accommodate digital materials especially with the rapid changes in technology (Ringera, 2007). Academic libraries are still facing challenges related to inadequate ICT infrastructures including inadequate internet connectivity, computer for staff and students due to shortage of financial resources from both academic libraries and library users where students who are struggling to get school fees cannot have extra money to buy ICT infrastructure like laptops or smart phones; and inadequate electricity. All these challenges limit them to embrace fully the use of internet and the digitalization of libraries in order to satisfy library users' needs satisfaction (Murphy, 2012).

e) Copyrights

Digital age is posing another important challenge for libraries which is to protect the intellectual property rights in a networked world. The use of library networks for access, copying, and printing of a copyrighted material without permission can have serious repercussions for that library. In the digital age it has become difficult to protect the intellectual property rights, because of the lack of understanding among users that copying of a stream of bits without necessarily reducing the availability of that stream to other users, can potentially be considered as the breach of intellectual property rights. Globalization of virtual networks has further complicated the situation. There is still lack of a global legal framework that can be enforced in any part of the world in case of breach of intellectual property rights. The concept of "fair use"

can be helpful in determining the common grounds for the enforceability of the copyright laws in the digital age. Under the concept of "fair use" a user can reproduce from a copyrighted material, for non-profit, educational, or personal reasons, depending on purpose of use, nature of work, part being copied, and work's marketability. However in order to develop the common grounds for the enforceability of law, there would be a need to educate the users as well as the librarians about the importance of ethical and moral behavior (Al-Suqri & Afzal, 2007).

Proposed Solutions

Availing funds for library

Critical decision has to be made to rescue libraries from the current state of dreams into real activities with a vision. Therefore a call is being made for a policy from which planning becomes effective and realistic. African librarians consequently need to have strong consortia guided by policies and guidelines to influence standardization and continuous accessibility of both formal and informal electronic resources to at least meet user's needs (Alabi & Omoike, 2020). But, the vision and planning without realization is a problem. The planning and budget done by libraries must be implemented by universities management by availing needed financial resources because libraries do not have their own and independent budget. They depend on parent institution funds. Libraries can also, where possible, seek ways of strengthening their financial base by being involved in generating income, libraries have embraced this practice and have used their facilities and skills to generate some income through photocopying, binding, word processing services, internet services (Micheni & Murumba, 2014).

Having adequate ICT facilities

Alternative power supply should be provided such as procuring high capacity generators and the use of solar electricity in order to leverage the problem of epileptic power supply in African countries (Igwesi, 2010). The management should also seek to equip the libraries with reliable internal and external connectivity systems, establish appropriate policies to manage information within the digital libraries, and acquire friendly and interactive library management systems (Ringera, 2007).

Training of librarians

For the academic librarians to serve this type of users, they need effective interpersonal competencies like practical customer service innovativeness, dyna-

mism, pragmatic problem-solving skills, as well as effective technological competencies (Nakitare, Sawe et al., 2020). The skills required for the digital age in African university libraries should be on skills to handle resources and the technology and context for digital interoperability (Baro, Oyeniran & Ateboh, 2013). Technology is not static but dynamic. Thus, as new technologies emerge, library staff involved in digitization should be trained continually. Workshops for the training of library personnel should be organized. The training programme must also address issues related to copyright law in a digital environment and how digital libraries can address copyright issues. Librarians should also have the skills to actively promote the benefits of publishing in the local digital libraries (Amollo, 2011).

Conclusion

The study found out that the digitalization of library has a great role to play on library users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education. The study found out that improved library services, increased access, and speedy retrieval of documents are the major purposes for digitization of library resources. The study was informed that the digitalization of library resources improves speedy access to library materials where several users can access the same information materials the same time without hindrance and it eliminate the problem of distance, improve library visibility. In order to remain relevant in the present digital environment, libraries especially in developing countries should make every effort to digitize their local content for preservation and easy access. However, the study was informed that academic libraries are facing challenges related to inadequate financial resources, inadequate electronic library resources, inadequate ICT infrastructures including inadequate internet connectivity, shortage of computers for library users, inadequate electricity, fear of internet as a competitor, copyright laws and inadequate ICT skills and knowledge for both library staff and library users. The study found out that all these challenges limit them to embrace fully the use of internet and the digitalization of libraries in order to satisfy library users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education.

The study found out that academic libraries in private higher learning institutions in Africa can overcome challenges they are facing in the age of digitalization of education by availing adequate resources to libraries; hiring new personnel and deploying/retraining existing staff in ICT related to library digitalization; training library users how to access and users digitalized library resources; and acquiring required ICT infrastructures adapted to digitalization of

library resources including inadequate internet connectivity, shortage of computers for library users.

Recommendations

The study recommends to the management of private higher learning institutions in Africa to avail adequate financial resources to libraries. The study recommends private higher learning institutions in Africa to have alternative power supply should be provided such as procuring high capacity generators and the use of solar electricity in order to leverage the problem of epileptic power supply in African countries. The study recommends that the management of African private universities should also seek to equip the libraries with reliable internal and external connectivity systems, establish appropriate policies to manage information within the digital libraries, and acquire friendly and interactive library management systems. The study recommends to private academic libraries to hiring new personnel and deploying/retraining existing staff in ICT related to library digitalization and copyright laws. The study recommends to the library to train library users on how to access and use digitalized library resources. The study recommends to private academic libraries to embrace new technology by acquiring adequate facilities and move from printed documents accessed physically to digitalized documents accessed through internet in order to meet the users' needs satisfaction in the age of digitalization of education.

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