The Evolving Roles of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges

Emmanuel Smile George CLN, MNLA
Dame Patience Goodluck Jonathan Automated Library,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni – Port Harcourt, Nigeria
E-mail: emmanuel.smilegeorge@iaue.edu.ng
Phone: +2348039587963, +2349093005414

Victor Wagwu Ph.D CLN, MNLA
Dame Patience Goodluck Jonathan Automated Library,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni – Port Harcourt, Nigeria
E-mail: victor.wagwu@iaue.edu.ng
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Abstracts

This paper examines the evolving roles of academic libraries in the 21st century: Opportunities and challenges. The objectives of the study were to identify the challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century and ascertain the strategies to enhance effective service delivery in the 21st century. Descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. The study population consists of 13 librarians in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education library while census sampling technique was used. The instrument was a self-structured questionnaire. The instrument was subject to face and content validity by the supervisor and two other lecturers in library and information science department. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings of the study revealed that the development of libraries in the digital era is a magical solution to meet the information needs of library users in the digital society, showing great sensitivity to the use of new technologies. It also explores new trends in providing information that librarians can use to re-establish the academic library to provide effective services. It was recommended that libraries should invest in robust technological infrastructure and stay updated with the latest advancements, libraries should integrate library systems, automated cataloging, and user-friendly interfaces to enhance accessibility and ease of use for patrons.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, 21st Century, Opportunities and Challenges

Introduction

Libraries have undergone major changes in recent years. This change, caused by Information Communication Technology (ICT), has affected the way information services are delivered. Traditional means of disseminating information have given way to electronic means of communication. In the development and application of ICTs in library operations, dissemination and access to information have improved and are also exempted from new roles in the provision, distribution and transmission of information. The librarian no longer plays a negative role in discharging their duty, because the advancement of ICT has made it easier to satisfy the information use of users irrespective of time or location. No longer a keeper of books, it is the gateway to a variety of sources of information. Haber (2011) assumes that the

supply of books in recent centuries is an independent function of libraries, but that their offerings have evolved with the digital age, to meet the changing needs of their clients.

Academic libraries in Nigeria are not separated from this technological revolution. As information providers, they are constantly under pressure to provide sources of information relevant to their immediate communities Hayati and Jowkar, (2018). People have to change the way they work and believe they work effectively in an automated environment. This means that academic libraries must integrate digital resources to be at the forefront of the provision and dissemination of information. Today, students and teachers have developed a stronger preference for electronic information than manual systems. The increasing availability of digital information has led students to find other learning and research opportunities through laptops and mobile phones. Digital technology has reduced the importance and use of libraries in developing countries.

The digital era is the age of information. It is also considered an era of explosion of sources of information. New work patterns and business practices have evolved and new skills are needed. Librarians in the digital society must be able to quickly find, evaluate and search for new information to meet the needs of their users. Librarians must communicate with others. They must be adaptable, creative and creative and able to understand things as a system or level of public image (Ramzan, 2014). In the digital society, ICT has resurfaced as a library. Printed documents are no longer sufficient to store information. CDROM databases, electronic document delivery, automated cataloging, and online trading and retrieval systems Open Access Catalogue (OPACs) are common. Iguavuen (2011) stated that the Internet, digitization, and access to office and research documents from remote areas caused radical changes at the end of the 20th century. Ramadan (2014) argues that developments such as expert systems, wireless networks, virtual groups, interactive Web interfaces, virtual reference services and personal web portals have brought important changes since the beginning of the new millennium.

The twenty-first century information professional must possess skills in selection, content management, knowledge management, organization of information, research services, developing and maintaining digital libraries, and bringing information resources to the desktop. People with the right skills are crucial to the success and competitiveness of contemporary information environments (Ciatt, 2019). The librarians' jobs have become more competitive with similar professions, such as information technology. Library professionals must acquire the relevant skills and expertise to be competent in a digital culture.

Statement of the Problem
The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the way information is accessed, utilized, and disseminated, significantly impacting the role and operations of libraries. Libraries, traditionally revered as bastions of knowledge, are now confronted with a myriad of challenges as they endeavor to deliver modern library services in this rapidly evolving digital era. By delving into the intricacies of these challenges, we aim to provide insights that empower libraries to adapt, innovate, and strategically position themselves as indispensable repositories of knowledge and essential community hubs, ensuring their continued vitality and relevance in the 21st century. This paper examines the evolving roles of academic libraries in the 21st century: Opportunities and challenges.

Objective of the Study
The following are the objectives of the study
1. To identify the challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century.
2. To ascertain the strategies to enhance effective service delivery in the 21st century.

Research Questions
1. What are the challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century?
2. What are the strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century?

Hypotheses
1. There is no significant relationship between challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century.
2. There is no significant relationship between the strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century.

Literature Review
Concept of Academic Libraries
Academic libraries according to Akpohonor (2015) are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes". "Academic Library", as stated by Yusuf and Iwu (2010), "is the nerve centre or the hub around which scholarship revolves. It is an indispensable instrument for intellectual development, being a slave house of information to which users (students as well as lecturers) may turn for accessing information". The library has a unique position as a potential educational force in the university community of staff and students of different levels especially in this era of information communication technology which can facilitate the library's capability to reach out to direct users as well as remote access users.

The academic libraries are the focal point around which serious and intense intellectual development and scholarship are birthed. It is a critical component, as well as an indispensable instrument of intellectual, cultural and socio-economic symbolic and mutually beneficial relationship that exists between the academic library and the academic community. The academic library is indispensable, as it will best serve when it is well stocked to serve as the storehouse of information which users could resort to for data or information. It is also in this critical role that Aina, (2011) argued that for centuries, academic libraries have been playing critical and important roles in supporting research in all subjects and disciplines within their host universities and colleges. Aina (2004) in his views on the importance of the academic library opined that the main purpose of an academic library is to support the objectives of an academic environment in the areas of learning, teaching, research and services.

Taking a conceptual approach to the critical role of the academic library, Ezell (2009) opined that academic libraries are established, owned, and funded by universities and colleges to provide support services in the areas of research, learning and teaching. Therefore, it could be inferred from the views expressed thus far that the primary aim or objective of an academic library is to offer those who may be said to constitute its primary clientele (the faculty students and academic staff of the university or college) the academic and research services in support of the programmes of the university of which it is part. The major functions of academic libraries are derived from Obunadike's (2010) definition of the function of a library as "to enable inquirers to identify library materials relevant to their inquiries and to supply them with copies of the materials for their use". It is in line with these views that Ajibero (2015) viewed the materials library as the heart of the university or college. Thus, the functions of the academic libraries can be summarized as:

- To fulfil both the needs of the instructional programme of the parent institution and the research needs of the students, faculty staff members and people outside the academic community through the collection and acquisition of knowledge in all formats;
- To organize knowledge for easy storage and retrieval, the technical processes, which include ordering, receiving, accessioning, cataloguing, classification and preparing

materials for their students and faculty, the academic libraries provide maximum access to collections;

- Making resources accessible to users and preserving knowledge for posterity. In supporting the instructional research needs of their students and faculty, academic libraries provide maximum access to collections.

However, the traditional functions and services provided by the academic library are being threatened and challenged by newer innovations and inventions in the areas of information dissemination, storage and retrieval. The emergence of newer mobile devices and their influence and impact on the behaviours of information seekers is too conspicuous. In recent years, studies have revealed that students' information-seeking behaviours and habits have changed remarkably. Utilizing the increasingly ubiquitous internet and powered by ever-improving search engines, the World Wide Web (www) became the world's largest and easiest-to-us storehouse of information.

Conceptualizing the 21st Century

The 21st century is an era of information explosion output and information sources. It is the millennium of information. This era is known as the beginning of the knowledge age. As a result of the information age development, it has come up with new patterns of work and new business practices. New kinds of work require new and different skills. This century has changed the meaning of knowledge, it is no longer what is stored in the minds of experts or represented in books and classified in disciplines. Knowledge is now viewed as being like a form of energy, as a system of networks and flows or something that does make things happen. In the knowledge age, change not stability is a given preference. Knowledge-age workers need to be able to locate, access and present new information quickly. They need to communicate this to others. They need to be adaptable, creative and innovative and be able to understand things at a system or big-picture level. In the 21st-century academic library, the emergence of information and communication technology (ICT) has redefined the library's role.

Print materials are no longer sufficient to store information. CD-ROMs, databases, electronic document delivery, automated cataloguing, circulation systems and Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) have become the order of the day. This century has also witnessed a dramatic change in users' information-seeking patterns.

The 21st Century Librarian

As the traditional custodian of information, librarians in the 21st century need to be aware of these significant changes and as such employ their technological know-how and intellectual masterpiece to retain the leading role of the libraries in supporting teaching, learning and research. This means that the 21st-century librarian will have to be armed with competent skills that will enhance the provision of effective library services to meet client's changing information needs.

Literature abounds on the competencies and skills needed for the 21st-century library professional. Tennant (2019) identifies important personal traits: the capacity to learn constantly and quickly; flexibility; innate skepticism; propensity to take risks; abiding public service perspective; good interpersonal skills; skill at enabling and fostering change; and capacity for and desire to work independently. Omekwu (2013), mentions basic knowledge of computers and their capabilities; Competency with search engines; internet facilities; e-mail; internet navigator tools, web browsers and web file formats; database software; internet development and management know-how. Also, some of the 21st-century skills according to Krishnan (2011) include communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, media literacy, ICT literacy, flexibility and adaptability. The

skills aforementioned are familiar to us; the challenge is how to harness these skills for effective library services.

The librarian of the 21st century is changing with the changing environment which is a consequence of ICT. Moghaddam (2019) notes that one of the vital elements of success and dynamism is specialized human resources viz librarians. LaRue et al., (2012) firmly believes that the library's most powerful asset is its professional staff. According to him, librarians have the power to change lives and build community- but to do this, they have to leave their desks, leave their buildings and show the community what a powerful tool they are. Tanawade (2011) observed that it is time to publicize ourselves, our professionalism, and the skills we have to offer. From the foregoing, the librarian of the 21st century is no longer one who sits behind the reference desk answering mere reference questions but rather an active marketer who sells the library's products and services to his community at every opportunity. He packages current information sources and delivers on point. This strategy serves as his bait to attract clients and by doing so; he according to Tanawade (2011) ─fixes the idea in their minds that the library is the source of incalculable value." The 21st-century librarian is an information warehouse, one with a desperate zeal to impact positively on his environment. He is at home with modern technological infrastructure. If librarians are to continue to make substantial contributions as information disseminators, they will have to understand and exploit ICT infrastructure and emerging technologies in delivering services to their clientele.

The evolving roles of academic libraries in the 21st century: opportunities and challenges
Academic libraries in the 21st century are undergoing significant transformations, driven by technological advancements, shifts in educational practices, and evolving student and faculty needs. Below are key opportunities and challenges they face:

Opportunities
Digital Collections and Resources: With the rise of digitization, academic libraries can offer vast collections of e-books, journals, databases, and digital archives, making information more accessible than ever before. This broadens access to knowledge, particularly for distance learners and researchers who may not have physical access to the library.
Information Literacy Education: Academic libraries are increasingly involved in teaching information literacy, helping students and faculty develop critical thinking and research skills. This includes identifying reliable sources, understanding scholarly communication, and effectively utilizing digital resources.
Open Access and Open Educational Resources (OER): Libraries are playing a crucial role in promoting open-access publishing and the development of OER. This helps reduce the cost of educational materials for students and democratizes access to knowledge, fostering equity in education.
Support for Research and Data Management: Librarians are becoming essential partners in supporting research, from guiding copyright and publication to helping with data management plans and compliance with institutional and funding body requirements.
Innovative Spaces: Many academic libraries are transforming their physical spaces into hubs for collaboration, innovation, and creativity. Makerspaces, media labs, and study rooms equipped with modern technology enable students to engage in hands-on learning and interdisciplinary collaboration.
Curation of Digital Scholarship: Libraries are helping to preserve and showcase digital scholarship, including research data, multimedia projects, and digital humanities initiatives. This allows institutions to archive and highlight their academic contributions in new and dynamic formats.

Community Engagement and Collaboration: Libraries are becoming key players in fostering collaboration within academic communities, as well as with external partners, through workshops, public lectures, and digital forums.

Challenges

Budget Constraints: Many academic libraries face reduced budgets, making it difficult to maintain subscriptions to costly academic journals and databases or to invest in new technologies. This forces libraries to make tough decisions about resource allocation.

Balancing Physical and Digital: Libraries must navigate the balance between maintaining physical collections and expanding digital resources. While digital collections are increasingly important, many users still value access to print materials, and libraries must cater to both preferences.

Rapid Technological Changes: Keeping up with emerging technologies, from AI-powered search tools to virtual reality, can be daunting. Libraries need to continuously update their systems and train staff to handle these innovations effectively.

Intellectual Property and Copyright Issues: As libraries increasingly deal with digital resources, navigating copyright laws, fair use, and licensing agreements becomes more complex. This challenge is particularly pertinent when providing access to open access resources and digitizing materials.

Data Privacy and Security: With greater access to digital platforms comes increased responsibility for protecting user data and ensuring that systems are secure from cyber threats. Libraries must be vigilant about privacy issues and safeguard the personal information of students and researchers.

Changing User Expectations: Today's students and researchers expect instant access to information, personalized services, and seamless integration with digital tools. Libraries must continuously evolve to meet these expectations while maintaining traditional roles of resource duration and support.

Staff Training and Development: The evolving roles of librarians require ongoing professional development. Staff must acquire new skills in data management, digital literacy, and instructional design, among others, to meet the demands of modern academic environments.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. The study population consists of 13 librarians in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education library while census sampling technique was used. The instrument was a self-structured questionnaire. The supervisor and two other lecturers in library and information science department validated the instrument. The instrument was subject to face and content validity by the supervisor and two other lecturers in library and information science department. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions with a criterion mean of 2.50.

Result/Findings
Demographic Information of Respondents
Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Respondents (F)	Percentage
Male	5	45.5%
Female	6	54.5%
Total	**11**	**100%**

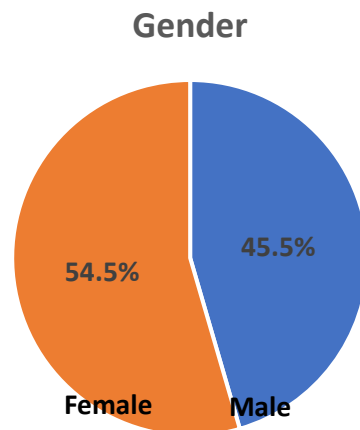**Sources:** Field Survey 2023

Gender

Fig 1.1: Shows the Gender of Respondents

Table 4.1 shows that out of 11 respondents used in this study, 5(45.5%) were males while the remaining 6(54.5%) were females. The result from this table implies that the female are more than the male librarians.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Respondents	Percentage
21-30yrs	-	-
31-40yrs	4	36.4%
41-50yrs	5	45.4%
51 & above	2	18.2%
Total	**11**	**100%**

Sources: Field Survey 2023

AGE
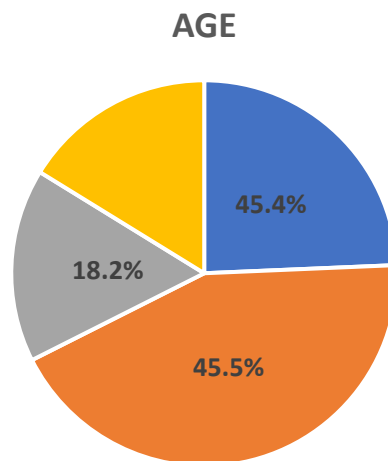
The result shows that majority of the respondents are between ages of 31-40 (36.4%) followed by 41-50(45.4%), 50 above (18.2%). In summary, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents fall between the ages of 41-50.
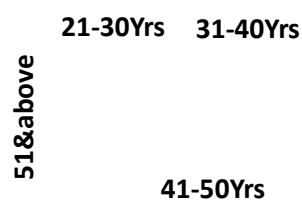
Fig 1.2: Shows the Age of Respondents

Question 1: What are the challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century?

Table 1: Shows the challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	x̄	S.D	Decision
	The challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century							
1	Libraries must integrate digital resources, online databases, and e-books to meet the needs of tech-savvy users.	5	4	2	-	3.3	3.5	**Agree**
2	Budget constraints, particularly in public libraries, can limit access to these technologies.	2	4	3	2	2.9	3.1	**Agree**
3	There is a growing need for libraries to address information literacy, helping users navigate an overwhelming	1	5	3	2	2.5	2.9	**Agree**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Decision
	amount of online data and combat misinformation.							
4	Ensuring equitable access to services, both in-person and online, as libraries must serve diverse populations with varying digital literacy and internet access.	2	3	4	2	3.0	3.1	**Agree**
5	Libraries face evolving user expectations, requiring them to offer not just books, but community spaces, learning hubs, and resources for research, education, and social services.	1	5	3	2	1.1	1.8	**Disagree**
	Weighted Mean					**2.56**		**Agree**

The challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century as analyzed in Table revealed that Libraries must integrate digital resources, online databases, and e-books to meet the needs of tech-savvy users with a mean score of 3.3 and standard deviation of 3.5. Budget constraints, particularly in public libraries, can limit access to these technologies with a mean score of 2.9 and standard deviation of 3.1. There is a growing need for libraries to address information literacy, helping users navigate an overwhelming amount of online data and combat misinformation with a mean score of 2.5 and standard deviation of 2.9. Ensuring equitable access to services, both in-person and online, as libraries must serve diverse populations with varying digital literacy and internet access with a mean score of 3.0 and standard deviation of 3.1. Libraries face evolving user expectations, requiring them to offer not just books, but community spaces, learning hubs, and resources for research, education, and social services with a mean score of 1.1 and standard deviation of 1.8.

Question 2: What are the strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century?

Table 2: Shows the strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Decision
	The strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century.							
1	A multifaceted approach that integrates technology, customer-centric practices, and continuous improvement	5	3	2	1	3.1	3.5	**Agree**
2	Leveraging digital platforms, such as automation and artificial intelligence, allows organizations to streamline operations, reduce response times, and enhance accuracy	3	5	2	1	2.9	3.3	**Agree**
3	A customer-focused strategy, involving personalized services and real-time feedback mechanisms, ensures that services are tailored to individual needs, improving satisfaction and loyalty.	2	4	3	2	2.5	3.1	**Agree**
4	Fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability within the workforce is	1	6	2	2	2.5	2.9	**Agree**

	essential, enabling employees to embrace new tools and methodologies							
5	Regularly analyzing performance metrics and customer data further supports ongoing improvement, ensuring services remain efficient, relevant, and competitive in an evolving marketplace.	-	7	3	1	2.4	2.6	**Disagree**
	Weighted Mean					**2.65**		**Agree**

The strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century as analyzed in Table 2 revealed that multifaceted approach that integrates technology, customer-centric practices, and continuous improvement with a mean score of 3.1 and standard deviation of 3.5. Leveraging digital platforms, such as automation and artificial intelligence, allows organizations to streamline operations, reduce response times, and enhance accuracy with a mean score of 2.9 and a standard deviation of 3.3. A customer-focused strategy, involving personalized services and real-time feedback mechanisms, ensures that services are tailored to individual needs, improving satisfaction and loyalty with a mean score of 2.5 and standard deviation of 3.1. Fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability within the workforce is essential, enabling employees to embrace new tools and methodologies with a mean score of 2.9 and a standard deviation of 3.3. Regularly analyzing performance metrics and customer data further supports ongoing improvement, ensuring services remain efficient, relevant, and competitive in an evolving marketplace with a mean score of 3.1 and standard deviation of 3.5.

Discussion of Findings
The challenges in delivering modern library services in the 21st century
The challenge for academic librarians is to manage services, which offer users a carefully selected mix of multiple formats and media. Academic libraries should rethink their role in the whole university community. It is imperative to support the needs of the users since the teaching and learning patterns in universities have changed. As information and research resources become more varied, this places a challenge to academic libraries. There is a serious argument that the changes in the information, research strategies and the structure of higher education are affecting academic libraries. These changes define much of the shifting context within which academic libraries must operate. Budd (1998) suggested that the changes brought by electronic media necessitate transformation in the way librarians think about their jobs, the users of information and the communication process of which they are part. Academic librarians must strive to remain competent navigators of each medium to assist library users.

The strategies for enhancing effective service delivery in the 21st century
Effective service delivery in the 21st century requires a blend of innovative strategies that leverage technology, enhance collaboration, and prioritize customer-centric approaches. One key strategy is the integration of digital transformation, which includes the adoption of automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing to streamline operations and improve responsiveness to customer needs. By using AI, organizations can provide real-time support and predictive analytics to anticipate customer preferences and needs. Furthermore, collaborative governance is essential, where public and private sectors, along with community stakeholders, work together to co-create services that are more efficient and tailored to users. This approach ensures that service delivery is inclusive, sustainable, and adaptable to diverse populations. Additionally, the importance of continuous training and development of staff cannot be overstated, as it empowers employees to stay current with technological

advancements and customer service best practices. Finally, data-driven decision-making allows organizations to monitor performance, assess user feedback, and refine services based on empirical evidence, ensuring a continuous improvement cycle that enhances the overall quality of services. According to Dunleavy et al. (2006), modern service delivery systems must embrace both technological advancements and participatory governance models to stay relevant and effective in the contemporary landscape.

Conclusions

In the 21st century, libraries are confronted with an array of challenges that are transforming the very essence of their existence. As this paper has meticulously examined, the evolving roles of academic libraries in the 21st century: Opportunities and challenges. However, these challenges are not insurmountable obstacles but rather opportunities for growth, innovation, and relevance. The library's role in society has never been more crucial. It stands as a beacon of information, a bastion of knowledge, and a hub for community engagement. To continue fulfilling this role effectively, libraries must remain agile, adaptive, and technologically adept. They must become not just storehouses of information but dynamic spaces that foster learning, critical thinking, and inclusivity.

Recommendations

1. Libraries should invest in robust technological infrastructure and stay updated with the latest advancements.
2. Libraries should integrate library systems, automated cataloging, and user-friendly interfaces to enhance accessibility and ease of use for patrons.
3. Libraries should actively seek partnerships with tech companies, educational institutions, and other community organizations to pool resources, share knowledge, and co-create innovative solutions. Collaboration fosters the development of comprehensive, accessible, and cost-effective services.
4. Library professionals and stakeholders should advocate for increased funding at local, regional, and national levels. Highlight the essential role libraries play in society and emphasize the need for sustained financial support to ensure the provision of quality modern library services.

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