HARNESSING LIBRARY RESOURCES TO ENHANCE TEACHING, LEARNING AND RESEARCH: THE ROLE OF FESTUS AGHAGBO NWAKO LIBRARY

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Abstract

The paper traced the historical development of library resources. It also identified the various components of library resources and examined their roles in information delivery for academic purposes in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library. Recommendations for improvements on the library services were also proffered.

Keywords: Library Resourses, Librarians, Internet, Festus Aghabgo Nwako Library.

Introduction

The *New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language* defines a resource as "that which is resorted to for aid and support"… "a supply that can be drawn on". Similarly, *Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus* defined it as "sources of help"… "wealth" or "assets". Library resources can therefore be defined as all valuable sources of information in all formats available to a library for use of its patrons. *Harrod's Librarian's Glossary* thus defines resource centres as "collections of books and non book materials of all kinds which are relevant sources of information and instruction in schools. Resources refer to collections, data, facilities, personnel, etc. Resource sharing therefore refers to activities emanating from formal or informal agreement among library consortium or network to share their resources for the benefit of their users in order to reduce cost of collection development.

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines harness as "to tie together". In the context of this study, harnessing means to bring together all sources available to a library for the purpose of giving timely and efficient information service to library users.

Historical Development

Library resources have interesting antecedents, inextricably tied with the origin of libraries. They came into being as early as the 3rd millennium B.C. when man felt the need to keep records. The earliest materials were in the form of clay tablets kept by the Babylonians. The Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal also collected about 20,000 clay tablets and fragments, though these collections of pseudo libraries can hardly be referred to as library materials in the real sense of the world. The first libraries as repository of books were those of Greek temples and Greek Schools of Philosophy in the 4th century B.C. Other notable collections in the ancient world were those of Aristotle, the Alexandrian Library which held thousands of papyrus and vellum rolls and that at Pergamon which had works on parchment, the Bibliotheca Ulpia in Rome and the Imperial Library at Byzantium established by Constantine the Great in the 4th century AD.

Greek and Roman literary works as well as christian literature were preserved in Constantine's library and in libraries of monasteries in the beginning of the 2nd century. China also had a long tradition of record keeping and book collections. The Libraries of European Universities established in the 13th century held more

significant collections.

Recent Development

Library resources have undergone tremendous changes over the centuries especially in the 21st century. As the number of libraries increased astronomically, the media they employed in recording information grew and changed significantly. Collected knowledge moved from clay tablets to papyrus, to parchment and to paper. Recently libraries have housed audio recordings, games, interactive educational materials, videos, and many other forms of digitized information that can be downloaded and accessed using computers, smart phones and other devices. As a result of this development, clients now use the library differently especially young people who have grown to be familiar with digital media. There is now a focus, on the concept of digital libraries that organize materials in a way that make information easily available.

Libraries are consistently adding digitized content including audio visual, electronic journal, web pages, and databases to their collection for use on their premises and at remote locations. Downloadable digitized books, self service functions such as book renewals and interlibrary loans and electronic reference services delivered through e-mail or instant messaging offer patrons new levels of convenience and effectively extend these libraries beyond their physical confines.

Libraries are also taking advantage of innovations using a wide range of web 2.0 technologies including social networking platforms, podcasts, mashups, and gaming to maintain their relevance in their communities and ensure interactive learning. Libraries have also taken advantage of the popularity of My Space, Flikr, Wikipedia and YouTube to develop new forms of library programming to extend their walls and enrich their content with opportunities to create knowledge and enhance digital learning in a way that matches their patrons different lifestyles and reach out to people the world over.

Stakeholders in Library Resources Management

The task required in providing access to library resources and services is organized around a set of core functions, referred to as technical services, public services and management. Technical services identify, assess, procure, catalogue, classify, prepare and maintain the materials that constitute the collection. Many of these activities are aided by automation systems and cataloguing facilities. Public services include reference services, bibliographic instruction, readers' advisory assistance, circulation services and other services that involve interaction between staff and library users. Management functions include marketing, planning, financial management and human resource development. The size of the library, the content and complexity of their collection determine the size and quality of staff who perform these activities.

Human Resources

Chu (2003) drew attention to the perceived concentration of library studies on library materials and users. Chu's main concern was on librarians who occupy the space in between the content (collection) and the users? That space in between marks the future of librarianship. The same view was held by Sutton (2001). Felix Chu was laboring to underscore the essential role of the librarian in shaping the course of librarianship in the 21st century. In his view, the librarian of the future must function as a filter between the reader and the torrent of books, if one thinks of the book in a generic sense as a symbol of all information and information sources available to a library patron, then the mission of the librarian becomes that of an intermediary between the patron and the library collection including those available online in different formats.

Chu holds that if this assertion is right, then our mission has not changed. It is just that technology has changed. He further stated that even though the mission has not changed, what has changed and keep changing is the environment that determines the social construction of what we call information. We catalogue not only books and journal articles but also online resources to increase access. Librarians must be sensitive to the environment to be able to bridge the gap between the creation of access points and time of need.

Hall (2003) further stressed the unavoidable need for human resources in the library environment. He argues that although the information landscape is changing and there are many resources people can access at home any time, they still need some training to use these resources more effectively. He puts the point more succinctly by asserting that:

> *undoubtedly there are uniformed people who assume that the Internet replaces libraries. There are also occasions when a library patron needs the skilled help of a librarian whether using traditional print sources or searching the Internet.*

Human resources in the library comprise librarians, library officers, technical personnel, library assistants and subordinate support staff who carries out library service related chores. These staff performs various activities depending on their training and placement in the staff stratification.

State of Practice in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library

Reference Services

A considerable amount of e-referencing is offered at the Digital Department of the Library as shown in the statistics of use kept. However, the traditional one-on-one personal reference services are offered in the Reference Department of the Traditional Library. Referencing by e-mail and other instant mailing is not yet practiced. Updating of reference sources has not reached the desired level.

Circulation Services

Automation is at its primordial stage. There is serious attempt to automate services especially with the installation of KOHA software which will fast track recording and access to information and data. The OPAC component will definitely enable self service and also enable the public catalogue function effectively as a finding tool and a useful tool for interlibrary cooperation. Meanwhile cards are now produced electronically and more staff are engaged in card production. The public card catalogue is being reorganized and records built, preparatory to full automation.

Shelving and shelf reading is given more serious attention. However, book shelves are in short supply which has made it difficult to achieve proper display of materials to enable user access. There is attempt to extend opening hours to ensure library use at night. Meanwhile circulation chores are done manually. The electronic facilities being installed are not yet operational.

Serial Services

Journal subscription is in arrears and serial management is done manually. There is also short supply of display equipment. Electronic management of serials is being considered in the general plan of automating the entire library activities. Newspapers and magazines are regular and heavily used.

Project Unit

The project unit holds a considerable quantity of students' intellectual output in the form of undergraduate projects, theses and dissertations. These have proved to be very useful source materials which are heavily used, but cannot be borrowed for home use.

Digital Department

The digital library assets include 16 online

databases many of which are free as well as 8 offline databases. These are complimented with social media subscribed in a bid to satisfy diversified interests. Access is free to registered users. Local sources are digitized and made available to faculties. There is however need to increase subscription to databases and make more electronic books and journal available. E-reference services are offered.

Involvement of Human Resources

Professional staff is in very short supply. The library has 12 librarians which represents 13.6% of the entire library staff. It also has 8 library officers representing 9.09% of the entire library staff. There are altogether 20 professional and paraprofessional staff representing 22.7% of the entire library staff. This number is grossly inadequate to give the level of professional service desired in an academic library. There is also serious shortage of library assistants.

In spite of the shortfall, professional librarians man the essential services such as Acquisition, Cataloguing and Classification, Reference and Circulation, Serials Management, Digital Services, Information Literacy, Institutional Repository and Zik Research Centre. Staff training is ongoing. All these staff collaborate to ensure that information is processed and delivered.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for improvement of information service delivery.

1. Marketing strategies to reach out to users to be initiated and sustained eg. talk shops, book displays, readership promotion campaign.
2. Intensified procurement of current books and journals to ensure that what users need is stocked.
3. SDI through electronic facilities as a means of current awareness service.
4. Teaching of library use by librarians.
5. Referral and user advisory services as well as library cooperation to be given more attention.
6. Purchase of book shelves and other display equipment.
7. Subscription to more databases.
8. Recruitment of more professional, paraprofessional and library assistants.
9. Full automation of library operation and services.
10. Regula publication of the library bulletin to publicize activities of the library.
11. Display of current accessions.
12. Sustained training of staff at all levels.

Conclusion

The library is established primarily to support teaching, learning and research activities of the host institution. Harnessing library resources for that purpose is indeed a summary of all activities of the academic library since it is an aggregation of the collaborative effort of professional and support staff towards achieving that goal. The efforts of the various departments complement one another. It is the business of management to coordinate the various activities as well as providing the enabling environment and facilities to achieve the ultimate goal, that is, provision of adequate information appropriate to the needs of the clients. These activities as practiced in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library have been examined and suggestions for improvement proffered.

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