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Momoh, Emmanuel Omeiza

*University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, momohomeiza8@gmail.com*

Folorunso, Abubakar Lanre

*National Institute for Sports, National Stadium, Surulere- Lagos State, Nigeria, abubakarainn@gmail.com*

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# THE EVOLVING ROLES OF LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Momoh, E.O.

University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

E-mail: [momohomeiza8@gmail.com](mailto:momohomeiza8@gmail.com)

&

Folorunso, A.L. (PhD)

National Institute for Sports,

National Stadium, Surulere- Lagos State, Nigeria

E-mail: [abubakarainn@gmail.com](mailto:abubakarainn@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*The role of libraries and librarians in the present century has generated heated intellectual arguments among different people. This to a large extent is due to the increasing amount of information available especially on the internet, and the use of information and communication technologies for library activities and operations. As a result of this, there have been assumptions, theories, laws and assertions that have sought to question the existence of the library, librarians and information science profession.*

*In the light of this, this study seeks to bring to the limelight the roles of libraries, librarians and other information professionals in the present century with a view to arouse the interest of people and make them see the relevance of libraries and librarians in the current information society.*

**Keywords:** Libraries, Librarians, Library and Information profession, Information and 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In time past, libraries were seen as stores where books both used and unused were kept, to prevent them from being stolen or damaged. Apart from this, many students in tertiary institutions of learning as observed by Momoh (2018) used the library as reading rooms during examinations. This was because many saw the library as a place void of distractions which could in the long run enhance faster understanding and assimilation.

The last century brought about rapid development and changes in terms of technologies that aided operations both in the general world as well as in the world of librarianship. This made the discipline of librarianship gain more recognition. Consequently, the roles of librarians shifted from mere book keepers to record and information managers. Therefore, concepts such as knowledge management, data science and digitization evolved. Also, abiding with the fifth Law of Library Science, (Ranganathan 1931), that states “library is a growing organism”, many libraries have adopted and use computers and other technologies in their operations with a view to meeting the needs of their 21<sup>st</sup> century users. It may not be far from truth to conclude that the aforementioned factors are responsible for the change in the name of the discipline from library science to library and information science and more recently to library and information technology (Momoh, 2018).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the review of primary and secondary literature such as journals, internet articles, conference proceedings and seminar papers.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- **LIBRARY**

There are different explanations about the term or concept known as library. The concept can be seen from different perspectives which are a library as a building, or a library as an organization. Both perspectives are interrelated and interwoven. Historically, a library was seen as a place for preservation of information materials. However, Adeniran (2017) observed that the introduction of ICT which brought about the introduction of new formats of information has given the concept of a library a new definition. As such, she defined a library as:

*“a place where information resources are accessed and information services are rendered by professionals who specialize in identifying, collecting, organizing, processing information sources as well as interpreting information needs”.*

She however, noted that the word “place” could refer to an erected structure or a collection. From a basic point of view, a library is a place housing information materials (print and electronic) and which gives access to a target audience to make use of these materials for their personal usage. Access to these materials could be limited or unlimited. Hence some libraries are accessible through subscription.

Libraries are places for knowledge creation and sharing. They are store houses and repositories of knowledge in different formats (print and electronic). The role of any hitherto library therefore, is to disseminate information to a target audience. This audience however, varies from one environment to another.

## **WHY DO LIBRARIES EXIST?**

The question of why libraries exist in any environment has continued to be the center point of discussions among people especially those who don't have close links with the library and information science profession. This has created two schools of opinions. One school argues in favour of the establishment of libraries, while the other school argues against it. In the academic and research environment, libraries exist to provide current information materials to its clients. Apart from this, they assist users in find relevant information materials for their use. In the social environment, libraries serve as bridges to build repositories of knowledge and develop human mental capacity. This is through the provision of relevant and current information resources that could quench the thirst of illiteracy and nourish the human mind.

Although, many people have debated the existence of libraries; this is due to the invention of the internet, social media, and internet search engines such as Google, yahoo etc. Notwithstanding, the role of libraries and librarians in any society cannot be overemphasized.

## **COMPARISON ON THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE LAST AND PRESENT CENTURY**

The roles and functions performed by libraries and librarians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be adequately explained. Corroborating this statement, Omeluzor et. al (2013) submitted that the relevance of a library cannot be summarized on few pages of paper. They went on further to say that the advent of information and communications technology (ICT) as a tool for information accessibility and

dissemination did not relegate or diminish the importance of a library. Rather it has given the image of the library a boost.

Commenting on the social and cultural roles of the library, Idowu (2007) was quick to note that libraries help to preserve and organize artifacts, ideas, and great works of literature, art and science for both present and future users. This development has brought about the evolution of records and archival management which is a sub-discipline under library and information science. Ekwelem et al. (2011) also noted that libraries are sources of preserving documents and cultural materials/artifacts. Halder (2009) in his study listed the new roles of librarians to include lobbying and advocacy, consortia manager, consultant, content manager, facilitator, knowledge manager as well as web designer.

<b>S/N</b>	<b>ROLES</b>	<b>LAST CENTURY</b>	<b>PRESENT CENTURY</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Custodian</b>	<b>Selecting and caring for physical materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Providing access to electronic and physical materials</b></li> <li>• <b>Maintaining specialized knowledge of digital databases</b></li> <li>• <b>Evaluating electronic materials and acquiring licenses</b></li> </ul>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Guide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Assisting users in finding relevant materials</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Educating patrons about use of digital library services and generalized digital literacy</b></li> <li>• <b>Providing virtual services to users, often through library websites</b></li> </ul>

3.	PR OFFICER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Maintaining connections with community institutions and other libraries</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Developing relationships with database manager</b></li> <li>• <b>Hosting community events</b></li> <li>• <b>Partnering with other libraries to increase access to materials</b></li> </ul>
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**Source: [www.librarianshipstudies.com](http://www.librarianshipstudies.com)**

### **POSITIONING THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARIAN FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY**

From the foregoing, it is observable that much is resting on the shoulders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian. Many scholars believe that with the current trend and the utilization of information technology in carrying out library operations, it is necessary that librarians possess some skills that will make them relevant. Ugwu and Ezeani (2012) have listed some of these skills to include the following:

- Information technology skills
- Managerial skills
- Personal entrepreneurial skills
- Technical skills
- Information literacy skills

### **ENTREPRENURIAL OPPORTUNITES FOR LIBRARIANS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Although many are of the opinion that with the invention of ICT, the discipline of library and information science will cease to exist and as such, there will be less jobs for librarians. Galeon (2017), citing Stephen Hawking opined that intelligent

machines are taking over jobs. This will to a large extent make the discipline of librarianship irrelevant. On the contrary, Momoh (2018) in disputing this fact has listed some entrepreneurial opportunities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian:

1. Research and Data Analysis. Research has to do with carrying out investigations into certain areas, while data analysis has to do with gathering and collecting data, processing it and making assumptions which will ultimately lead to the formulation of theories and laws. Since it is believed that research is life, and that without research, the world will cease to exist, 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian must learn both the advanced and rudimentary stages of carrying out research. Research is needed in a variety of library operations
2. Information analysis. This is an evolving branch in the field of librarianship. The 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians should be able to analyze information for clients in any formats.
3. Database Management: databases are repositories which provide access to large amount of information. The 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian must therefore be girded with the skill of managing a database. Effective knowledge of keywords that can aid information retrieval is a prerequisite for effective service delivery especially in the present century.
4. Social media Management: the present century has brought about the incorporation of social media into library services and information dissemination. As such, it is important that the 21<sup>st</sup> century must have posses the skills to manage different social media accounts. These accounts include but not limited to: facebook, twitter, LinkedIn etc.



## **TECHNOLOGY AND THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARIAN**

Technology has been defined by Thiel (2014) as “any new and better way of doing things”. Without mincing words, technology has aided and made library operations easy in several ways. Vijayakumar and Vijayan (2011) have listed some of the benefits to include the following:

1. Collaboration and creation of library networks
2. Reduction of staff workload
3. Round the clock access to library services by users.
4. Efficient and effective service delivery to library clientele
5. Access to unlimited information from different sources
6. More up to date information
7. Availability of information in different formats

Based on the foregoing, the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian must be skilled in the use of information and communications technology. This will help to achieve maximum productivity and efficiency at work. The 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian should have a basic knowledge of computer softwares and operations. These include but not limited to word processing packages, graphics design, web design etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

Libraries are no longer regarded as store houses for books but as agents of change and vehicles of development in any society they exist in. Many individuals ultimately aware of the hidden potentials in the field of librarianship are setting up libraries in different communities to reduce the spread of ignorance and misinformation.

For this reason, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is one that has a competitive information provision environment. Therefore, libraries and librarians must adapt and design their various programmes and services to meet the needs of users. Since the unique selling point of librarians is the ability to provide accurate, authentic, up to date and

timely information to users in different formats, librarians must endeavour to package themselves to meet the needs and demands of their various users. This will in the long run boost the image of libraries, librarians and the discipline of librarianship in general.

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