

# **TRAINING NEEDS FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN DIGITAL LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT IN NIGERIA**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*This study focused on the training needs for Academic Librarians in Digital Library Environment. The research objective set for this study is to identify the training needs for academic librarians in Nigeria. The study utilized the library research approach which relied on secondary data sourced from articles, journals and publications for analysis. Findings showed that the training needs for Academic Librarians in Digital library Environment include interpersonal communication, management knowledge, professional (traditional core skill of Librarianship), Technical skills, Information Technology (particularly on Computer and Communication Network Technology) and acquisition of digital facilities in the library. Finally, it was recommended that academic librarian should have up-date knowledge to meet with the current library trends on digitalization in order to enable effective delivery of digital services to clients in the libraries and also library management should mandate all Academic librarians to undergo ICTs Digital training particularly in computer and communication network technology.*

**Keywords:** Academic Librarian, Digital Library Environment, Training Needs

## **Introduction**

Academic librarians are those who are constantly and intellectually curious and conscious of how they could apply those curious efforts so as to increase the knowledge base of the institution for research, teaching, and learning (American Library Association, 2020). Academic librarians manage, organize, evaluate and disseminate information, providing support to members of an academic community including students, researchers and academic staff (Prospects, 2020). However, the gradual change of library from traditional to digital environment was as the result of the present ICT revolution that has led to the adoption of ICT application in Academic libraries which have many benefits in information works. The new digital library environment required librarians to acquire new skills and abilities to succeed in the environment. For example, internet skill is required for the adoption of web 2.0 technologies for the library services.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) literacy skill is indispensable to functioning effectively in the environment. ICT literacy skill comprises of computer and internet literacy skills. Therefore, librarians needed to acquire skills to enable them to be creating and updating library websites working successfully with co-workers and interacting with users (Ezema, Ugwuanyi & Ugwu, 2014).

Librarians as information gate keepers are in charge of selection, development, organization and maintenance of library collections and provide advisory services for users. Rubin (2004) noted that they are involved in the acquisition, organization of library materials and dissemination of same to library users. Librarians are professionally trained persons responsible for the care of a library and its contents including the selection, processing, organization of materials and the delivery of information resources, instructional materials and loan services to meet the information needs of its users. Rao and Babu (2001) identified the role of librarians in internet and web environment as intermediary facilitator and end – user trainer, website builder, researcher, interface designer, knowledge manager and sifter of information resources. Librarians responsible for information resources in digital environment are known as digital librarians. Screenivasulu (2000) defined a digital librarian as one who manages large amount of data, preserves unique collection, provides faster access to information, facilitates dealing with data from more than one location and enhance distributed learning environment. Thus, digital libraries emerged as a result of information explosion and the use of ICT in management and organization of information. These are libraries with digital resources and specialized staff for the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. Fox (2012) in his view, pointed out that digital library is an organization, which might be virtual, that comprehensively collects, manages and preserves for posterity digital contents and offers to its

user communities specialized function on content of measurable quality according to codified policies. This study identifies the necessary training needs by academic librarians in digital library environment, and the strategies to improve these needs by academic librarians in digital library environment in Nigeria. Secondary data sourced from articles, journals, periodicals and publications was used for analysis in this study.

### **Concept and Features of Digital Library Environment**

A digital library environment means where all functions and services offered are provided to the users electronically. It is a networked online information space in which users can discover, locate, acquire access to and, increasingly use information. In digital library environment, books, journals, paper-based archives, video, film and sound recordings are as visible in the digital library environment as well as online catalogs, finding aids, abstracting and indexing services, e-journal and e-print services, digitized collections, geographic information systems, Internet resources, and other electronic holdings (Singh, Kapila, & Rajive, 2009).

According to Seema, (2014), digital library environment promotes the concept of free flow of information in a portable form and helps in resource sharing among knowledge societies. It provides digital resources for usage thus helps in saving time and space. The aim of digital library environment is not simply about access to and use of information alone, but also supports the full range of administrative, business, and curatorial functions required by the library to manage and ensure fair use of its collections whether in digital or non-digital formats. The digital library environment integrates information repositories that are characterized by open access shelving, high density book stores, availability via interlibrary loan, including data services and digital archival repositories. It manages information about collections and items throughout their entire life cycle. It incorporates patron, lending, other databases, integrates appropriate

procedures for user registration, authentication, authorization, and fee transaction processing (Daniel, 2000).

The digital library environment may also evolve into a networked learning space, providing access to a curatorial home for, distance and lifelong learning materials. The digital library service environment is in sum, an electronic information space that supports very different views and different uses of the library. It is designed for the library's patrons as well as for its professional staff with an eye on the needs and capacities of those who supplied it with information content and systems. It is built in the full knowledge that information technologies will continue to change rapidly as will our understanding of how they can be used to support education and cultural engagement (Daniel, 2000).

Digital library environments are growing in popularity. According to Seema, (2014), the shift from traditional libraries to digital libraries is not merely a technological evolution, but revolutionizes the paradigm by which people access and interact with information. Some of the features of digital library environment include:

- i. They help to facilitate systematic and efficient access to and sharing of information resources and overcome the barriers of time in accessing the required information. The same resources can be used at the same time by a number of people;
- ii. They give solution to the main challenges of traditional libraries, such as shortage of space, management of materials. When a library has no space for extension digitization is the only solution;
- iii. It helps in storing of digital resources in appropriate repository in a networked environment for hosting in intranet, extranet and internet;

- iv. It also helps in managing searches that are not practical manually. We can also preserve unique collections through digitization;
- v. It also helps to manage contents from multiple locations;
- vi. It creates a single user interface and a gateway for digital resources;
- vii. Original copies of documents are preserved and used at any number of times in digital library environment without any degradation in quality;
- viii. Networking is very easy as digital library environment can provide link to any other resources of other digital library environment and helps in integrated sharing.

### **The Role of Librarian In the Digital Library Environment**

In recent times, with the shift from traditional library environment to digital library environment, librarians can no longer be information providers or the keepers of knowledge. With the arrival of digitization in the library environment, they no longer need to wait for users to ask for assistance in finding information inside the library. Their new role makes it imperative for them to provide services and instructions regardless of place, time or format. Furthermore, the multimedia nature of digital library will require the service of a digital librarian that must ensure that there is effective and efficient flow of information from the generators to users of information in the digital library environment (Sunday, ND).

A digital librarian is information professional who engages in managing and organizing digital library. He combines functionality for information storage, organizes, data curation, metadata creation, knowledge mining, digital reference services, electronic information services, distribution of information, coordination with aggregators, discovering and accessibility of information on the web, Internet-based World Wide Web (WWW), multimedia access and retrieval. The main goal of a digital librarian is to ensure and facilitate access to information just

in time to satisfy the critical needs of end users at global level (Sreenivasulu, 2000). According to Singh, (2019), librarians and information managers have active roles in developing, organizing and managing digital libraries and digital information resources systematically so as to ensure that the right information are disseminated to the users in the required format and at the right time. They enable management of very large amount of data, preserve unique collections, provide faster access to information, facilitate dealing with data from more than one location, and enhance distributed learning environments. Nonetheless, they help to do searches which are manually not feasible and in most cases offer to protect the content of the owner's information (Husler, 1996) in (Sreenivasulu, 2000).

### **Need for a digital librarian in a digital library environment**

In the age of science and technology, and with the innovation of Information communication technology (ICT), the outlook of information management and library services have changed from print to digital services thereby changing information needs and changing information seeking behavior of the users. For instance, the coming of WWW in the digital environment has created ways for the rapid proliferation of electronic information resources and how it is stored in various electronic equipment like computer hard disks, digital video and audio tapes, flash memories, CD/DVD media, zip drives, databases, online journals, e-books, e-zines, etc. Therefore To manage the digital information explosion, librarians have a greater role in identifying the information resources and how it can be exploited for optimal use of information resources by users. (Seema, 2014; Singh, 2019). This necessitated the need for a digital librarian where they are trained to be experts in information management, selecting, acquiring, organizing, preserving, repackaging, searching, sharing and disseminating in the digital environment.

According to Sreenivasulu, (2000), to manage huge digital libraries which are emerging as a knowledge warehouse, digital librarians are expected to:

- i. manage the digital libraries;
- ii. organize digital knowledge and information;
- iii. disseminate digital information from the computer-held digital information;
- iv. provide digital reference services and electronic information services;
- v. provide knowledge mining from the emerging knowledge warehouses;
- vi. handle the tasks of massive digitization, digital storage process, and digital preservation;
- vii. provide universal access and retrieval of digital knowledge, ultimately access to all;
- viii. catalogue and classify digital documents and digital knowledge.

### **Training needs for academic librarians in Digital Library Environment in Nigeria**

The explosion of information resources on digital formats have resulted in the gradual adjustment from the traditional library setting to digital library environment. Most libraries across the globe ensured that they provided necessary ICTs digital facilities and employed staff with required skills as well as training of the librarians to provide digital services to clients mostly in academic environment. Specifically, huge sums of money have been invested to install ICTs Digital equipment and facilities in the Nigerian Academic Libraries. This has shown the need for training the academic librarians in digital library environment in Nigeria. Devi, Vikas and Devi (2006) pointed out that, in the emerging digital environment, the library and information workers are required to possess enhanced managerial, professional and technical skills, adequate knowledge and the right kind of experience. Partridge, Lee and Munro (2010) noted that, librarians 2.0 required transferable skills and interpersonal skills together with attitudinal change and way of thinking towards ICT. CARL (2010) maintained that, for librarians

to thrive well in digital environment, they must have traditional knowledge of librarianship, management skills as well as information technology skills. This was also supported by Gulati and Raina (2006) when they argued that LIS profession in digital environment needed to have the traditional core skills of librarianship, know the basics of IT, particularly in the area of computer, communication and networking technologies. In the same vein, Feret and Marcinek as cited in Nanthscumjane (2011), categorized needed digital library skills into the following: communication and training skills, IT skills, managerial skills, commitment, subject knowledge or profiling, teamwork skills, public communication skills, project management skills, leadership qualities, knowledge of the international standards, commitment to the profession and the flexibility.

Updating of librarians' skills is an aspect of professional development and human resource development. Updating of librarian's skills/competencies include all the processes and mode of teaching, training, skill acquisition and learning. It entailed the form of formal, informal and in - service training in information communication technology vis-a-vis information management and library services. (Ezema, Ugwuanyi & Ugwu, 2014). More overwhelming, Choi (2006) noted that digital libraries are the future of academic and research institutions. Therefore, digital professionals were required to have more breadth and depth of knowledge and skills across the dimensions of traditional library knowledge, technology and human relations. In his survey on what was needed to educate future digital librarians, he found out that there were needs to pay more attention to additional education in interpersonal and communication skills, practical skills in addition to having experience in digital collection management and digital technologies into the curriculum. Chiware (2007) stressed that there are two ways of approach to training in the present digital age. She equally noted that formal digital library education should



be incorporated into LIS course contents for the sound theoretical knowledge and formally through continuing education programmes (workshops, short courses and conferences) visit to other libraries and on- site visits by experts.

Skill goes with knowledge, therefore, the awareness of the available online resources and services through promotion and marketing will help in bridging and removing the digital gap. It is evident from the Ezema, Ugwuanyi & Ugwu, (2014) findings that librarians require several interpersonal, leadership & management and information technology skills. Findings revealed that the most important interpersonal skills are adaptability, flexibility and eagerness for new knowledge. Apart from this, librarians highly require advocacy and negotiation skills. This finding is in line with the requirement of the new information environment. It also corroborated with the opinion of Singh and Pinki (2009) who argued that academic libraries should focus attention in the development of new technologies. The trend in the library practice is changing on a daily basis and there is a need to develop the skills that would follow these changes and possibly canvass support for the changes.

## **Conclusion**

The findings showed that the training needs for Academic Librarians in Digital library Environment include: interpersonal communication and management knowledge, professional (traditional core skill of Librarianship) and Technical skills and Information Technology (particularly on Computer and Communication Network Technology) and acquisition of digital facilities in the library.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

- i. Academic librarian should have up-date knowledge to meet with the current library trends on digitalization in order to enable effective delivery of digital services to clients in the libraries.
- ii. Library management should mandate all academic librarians to undergo ICTs Digital training particularly computer, communication network technology.
- iii. Libraries across the globe should ensure that they provided necessary ICTs and digital facilities for service delivery
- iv. Libraries should also employ staff with required skills as well as training of the librarians to provide digital services to clients.
- v. Huge sums of money have to be provided to install ICTs and Digital equipment and facilities and other required services in the Nigerian Academic Libraries.
- vi. There is also need for training the academic librarians in Nigeria on the maintenance of digital library environment.

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