

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORIES IN RESEARCH CENTRES LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

It is an attempt to highlight the works of research centers and the influence of their research findings on national policy. The good research output is the thrust of national development of any nation. Thus, to leave research works unutilized is a disservice to the nation. Efforts made by librarians in research libraries to bridge information gap, and preservation techniques employed to preserve the institutional memory are reviewed. The ethics of the workplace is considered a major factor. The paper clearly indicates the need for librarians to engage in effective management of electronic documents which requires standards for dissemination of research findings.

INTRODUCTION

There are many sources that could be used to generate information in any organization which cumulate in the repositories of an institution. They include research findings, oral communication, books, electronic and print media. All of these are very vital elements in the process of development because they must be made available to a wide cross-section of potential users within organizations. There is need for users and researchers to have access to accurate, reliable and up-to-date information at every stage of the research process. It is to be noted that information dissemination in Nigeria is not at its best; hence, significant efforts are required to improve the present situation. The inability of librarians to effectively manage repositories is an ethical dilemma that should be given adequate attention it requires. Professional ethics should be a topical issue in research libraries because the evolution of modern technology has increased the complexities of information profession in the electronic age. It is imperative that ethics are considered in libraries, in order to solve problems associated with fair and equal rights to information for all levels of society.

The thrust of the paper is to highlight the many viable and valuable research works that are not circulated and not utilized for national interest. It is interesting to note that these valuable works are not adequately utilized due to lack of funds and librarians that are skillful in the use of computer technologies. Briefly it points out the role of information in research and development towards advancing the cause of development of any nation. It outlines the constraints related to obtaining research results, their documentation and dissemination. Frantic efforts are made to suggest the establishment of an electronic management system for effective

dissemination. The house keeping techniques of the research libraries must change to reflect modern and acceptable practices; Mason (2009) observes that new rules are new rules were needed to govern behaviour, and to develop procedures for librarians on the front lines of the Information Age. Finks (1991) encourages information professionals to go about their legitimate duties in a way that can honestly be called professional. Research librarians must follow a clearly defined set of ethical standard relating to selection of materials and intellectual freedom to enhance management of library repositories

The Role of Research in Development

Definition: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2001) defines research as a careful study of a subject, especially in order to discover new facts or information about it. Research is an indispensable tool for development. It provides the basic facts for formulating plans and public policies as well as strategies for implementing them to avert groping and wastage of resources in development process. To promote efficiency therefore, we cannot afford to ignore research or relegate it to the background. In the course of conducting research, problems are identified, known and predictions are made in order to resolve them into their components, and also to understand their ramifications and the interplay through observation and modelling.

Ajibero (2001) believes that the generation and use of research information has been the primary goal of nations that want to develop. This is a pointer to the fact that Nigeria can really make significant strides in this millennium only through the recognition and the encouragement of research and technology to generate information as the basic tools of development. The bottom line is that research has a tremendous role to play in the search for pathways to produce developmental products. It is widely documented that a viable process for solving problems must always incorporate research as major ingredient.

The knowledge that is developed by these research institutions is referred to as scientific knowledge. This indigenous scientific knowledge prepares the pace for development by having a first look at what is available locally before venturing to source for solutions outside the local terrain. Scientific knowledge still remains an under-utilized resource in the development activities of this country. It therefore needs to be intensively and extensively studied and documented. Special efforts are needed to understand, document and disseminate research information for preservation, transfer or adoption elsewhere.

The essence of any research is to have a new way of approaching issues and solving problems, predicting possibilities of occurrence to enhance strategic planning that will facilitate sustainable development. Nigeria has many policies relating to the different sectors of our national development. These policies are to accelerate the pace of industrial development in the relevant areas of economy. Some of the policies include the following:

1. Science and technology policy
2. Industrial policy
3. The agricultural policy
4. Cultural policy

Research Centres Libraries in Nigeria

The research centres libraries in Nigeria and elsewhere are charged with the responsibility of building excellent resources that will serve both national and international community in the areas of specialization of their parent bodies. They implement information cycles that provide access to books and periodicals. However, in recent times technology has changed the ways in which organizations including libraries produce and disseminate information. Technological developments have greatly increased the capacity for generating scientific and technological information. The application of technology to information generation and dissemination of this common resource has greatly hindered the targeted users / audience. More often than not they do not have access to the information they require for their research works due to non-availability of materials. Lack of adequate funding has been identified as a major set-back for generation and dissemination of local and indigenous information. This is as a result of lack of top professionals at management levels to influence decisions in favour of library development in various research centres. This portends danger for the future growth of research libraries.

Although, Nigerian librarians and information professionals might not be able to give users access to all the external publications they require for several reasons which include costs, it is important to provide access to the information and publications produced by the parent organisations. The ethics of the profession also stipulates that information should be made available within the confines of a library and must be accessible to all people, regardless of wealth or status, race or nationality. While librarians fulfil their legitimate duties, the issue of moral obligation and collective good of the society must not be compromised.

Iloeje (2001) worried by the present state of the nations' libraries including those of research centres wonders whether the library and information professionals can efficiently provide the much needed environment for the

implementation of an information society made possible by advancement in information technology. A visit to some of them shows that the libraries have been able to provide essential services within their limited budget. With the budget constraints, the librarians have been able to follow trends in the provision and dissemination of electronic information. They have seen the needs to change strategies of how best to serve their patrons, and that is why some have embarked on capacity building for the take-off of digital projects. It is not good for Nigerian research libraries to lag behind in provision of information that will support the research activities of targeted users, whose reports are likely to dictate pace for new innovations in technological development. The consequence of this would mean retardation for development process of the nation.

Research libraries are set up based on the goal of the organization to project the global image of the parent bodies through advertorial, dissemination, and preservation of the institutional memory. The libraries have been instrumental in provision of high quality services and support to researchers, staff, students, visitors and participants in the activities of the parent organizations, but they need to do better so as to be able to remain relevant in the new information age.

Effective dissemination of institutional repositories in terms of publications and research works by visiting scientists and resource persons should be better organized in a functional database. In this aspect almost every research library has archiving policy on paper only. The current state of management of reports is nothing but deplorable, the old and outdated methods are still in use, thus making the materials to deteriorate and waste away. One is unlikely to see any benefit that will enhance any interest that worth the cost and hassle of investment into the various research works. When users have need to look at them, some of the librarians often fail, due to lack of standard practices in place to make retrieval easy and to facilitate effective management of the available materials in the library. They won't even know what to search for because the staff may not have an index list to search for the available publications.

This is a slight on the professional ethics of librarianship. In a situation where past project owners are the only source of information or reference, they risk losing valuable institutional memory when these individuals leave and seek greener pastures and relevance elsewhere. At times authors of such publications don't even keep copies of their own work and the library remains the only gateway to access such. What happens if the library also does not have a good archival policy, the data and knowledge would then be lost forever? This will be a shame because there are many benefits in having access to previous knowledge organized in a library. Mason (2009)

understood the importance of literature reviews and affirms that the information available within the confines of a library must be accessible to all people, regardless of wealth or status.

Archiving research information and data in a manner which preserves institutional knowledge should be a top priority, since institutional knowledge is such a valuable resource, hence the stewardship of this knowledge should be seen as paramount. Surprisingly, the information professionals are not ignorant of the best practices in the information industry. Gbaje quoting Tennant (2007) states that to be effective, librarians and information professionals must constantly learn and retool, to meet up with the new challenges in the profession. Many librarians have not lagged behind in this crucial area. Reports of attendance at professional conferences, workshops, seminars have been encouraging even at their own expense. Undoubtedly, nobody can live without institutional knowledge; hence its management needs to be at the fore front of the digitization efforts. The efforts require constant capacity building for effective management.

RESEARCH CENTRES DOCUMENTS

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines institutional memory as the intellectual output of an institution, particularly a research institution. Institutional memory contains indigenous knowledge described by Sithole (2007) "as an essential resource needed for understanding of local conditions designed to help human and technological development process." The comprehensive institutional knowledge on past projects can be a great asset to any organization. The available research publications at various libraries vividly showcase research works that can benefit the growth of the scientific community for the technological advancement of Nigeria and these documents correctly fit into Wikipedia's definition of institutional repository. Very little of this knowledge has been captured and recorded for preservation, yet it represents an immensely valuable database that provides our scientists with insights on how our country have been able to adapt to changing technologies.

The documents are in the areas of specializations of the parent organizations, and come in form of preprints, reports, proceedings, memo, proposals, etc. They are produced by authors during their stay at the various centres. It is noteworthy that some significant research works, whose findings have great potential for national development has been carried out. Many of these publications and documents which are likely to contain some breakthrough in scientific discoveries are visibly abandoned in offices of coordinators and researchers. Many of them have been lost in transit. Some were published before the use of computers. Some printed many years ago on poor quality paper and are becoming increasingly difficult to read due to poor preservation culture.

Poor dissemination of research results by many libraries has led to lack of access to such findings thereby preventing the application of the knowledge so generated for development, and this militates against capacity building in research development. There are no guidelines regarding the form in which the information will be disseminated. As a result, in-house and visiting researchers rarely get the background needed. In some cases, they simply fail to examine existing documents, while in others the documentation does not exist at all or is so disorganized that it is too time-consuming to employ. Of course many do not conform to research methodology of reviewing existing literature in their research works.

Access to past findings provides users an easy way to review what's already known about previous research works. Access to these vital documents enables a researcher to determine the scope of research works which prevents researchers from repeating what others have done but to build on existing information in their studies. In many cases, where access to them is not feasible this automatically lead to a slow-down in operations.

It is a pity that much has not been done to record and preserve such important scientific documents before it is forgotten. Not so much have been documented to remind the youths and unborn generation of excellent research works carried out to improve the technological advancement and economic development by indigenous research scientists.

FUNCTIONS OF RESEARCH CENTRE LIBRARIES

The sole responsibility falls on research libraries to preserve the institutional memory and recognize the contributions of the scientists. It is, therefore, the function of the research libraries to collect, organize and disseminate information on research findings and give guidelines on its appropriate utilization to safeguard the interest of all concerned. A responsive research library should bear in mind that dissemination of research information should be of paramount importance, because of its impact on the development of the nation. Timely provision of information to the people who require them for input into policy formulation will surely enhance prudent management of funds and reduced cost.

PRESERVING THE RESEARCH DOCUMENTS

Preserving intellectual products collected at the various research libraries with the state of the art information and communication technologies, will offer users access to the bibliographical records of their organizations from inception. The existing facilities at various research libraries for preserving or disseminating information about research findings and indigenous innovations are grossly inadequate and often non-effectual.

The modern system provides access to print and online documents. It is a must for research library and information professionals to do much more to preserve its institutional memory and recognize the contributions of its scientists. Many effective techniques in preservation of bibliographic materials have been documented. An in-depth study of papers presented at automation of library and digitization of library materials workshops organized by NLA Information and Technology section and the National Library of Nigeria respectively would be a great asset to any librarian interested in documentation of institutional materials to boost resource sharing, and cross-fertilization of ideas to promote an institution's global visibility.

The common approach to preservation in the modern time is digitization into electronic formats which is a process towards building digital library for the centres; digitizing the documents and then storing them in an indexed database will facilitate access for planning and development purposes in Nigeria. Users will be able to find and access the documents they need by accessing the database. Ubogu (2006) and Gbaje (2007) suggest the use of "portal software" that enables single login/access to all institution's resources and specific digital resources that could support teaching and learning. The use of portal software ensures effective dissemination of information. Preserving the documents through the process of digitization is only a step towards ensuring that it is fit for contemporary purpose and available for discovery and re-use through changes in technology, while maintaining its security and authenticity. The goal is to preserve the factual data without changing the meaning.

The libraries also need to address the factor of power supply by providing alternative sources of power through the use of solar energy, generators etc. The libraries cannot totally rely on electronic information system. There must be improvement on the preservation of print materials in order to forestall unpleasant circumstances such as power outage and problems relating to maintenance and sustainability of internet technologies.

Importantly, the singular aim of digitization transcends preservation purposes. The research libraries should aim at attaining the full life cycle of the repositories through the selection, acquisition, access, maintenance and sharing of the resources. The effective use of information/knowledge requires it to be shared and distributed; and its transmission through learning is equally essential. Information sharing among professionals improves research productivity and also conserves the resources that are available.

Gbaje (2007) supports Kaufman in his assertion that "the modern librarians have to move their services to the online environment if they are going to be

relevant in the digital age." Researchers all over the world prefer access to electronic information delivery system and internet resources whether they are skilful enough to use the technologies or not because electronic documents are more versatile than the printed documents: they can be displayed on computer screen, edited and printed out. The unique advantage is that it will never be out on loan. Therefore research librarians must be ready to become teachers of new resources to their numerous information illiterate users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Research materials are vital for national development; it is recommended that a quarterly symposium on research findings and their usefulness be organized. The seminar should be structured to include all geopolitical zones where all the research libraries centres will be invited to present papers on best practices for the profession.
- Our professionals should be able to articulate a proper budgeting method that will enhance the approval of their proposals, and present the need for digitization to the management of the organization. Of course, librarians must be very thorough because they are selling information product to policy makers, who might not understand the need for huge investment into a project that is non-profitable to them. Education of the decision makers in information technology about the benefits of the services should be continual.
- The existing and meagre budgetary allocation should be properly utilized for the digitization project, for research libraries to be able to preserve the available collections of the institution to ensure continuity, while keeping pace with technology as they are rolled out in the market. The electronic conversion of research works, if properly and fully implemented, will greatly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of research and development, and the access to research and development results by users through out the country in a fast convenient and cheaper way. To achieve this vital aspect of digitization should be prioritized and classified into urgent and immediate needs. The sustainability and continuity means little charges will be made on the users to enable the libraries to generate funds.
- Proactive research librarians should study papers presented at Jos during the National Interactive Seminar on Digitization of Library Materials: Processes and Tools, and Library and Library Automation: what works and what doesn't work? (2007) and Case studies of the digital experiences of Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Jos. The papers look at the issue of capacity building for take off of digital projects, in libraries.

- Some of the materials that are meant for conversion are already in the collection of the research libraries. Librarians should start by gathering the institutional publications, create a temporary database on access or excel platform to document them. Frantic efforts must be made to retrieve missing ones by getting in touch with the course organizers, programme coordinators, and participants, who are likely to have individual copies. This is not going to be efforts in futility because others have done so and succeeded. It is worthy of mention that some of the equipment and access needed for the conversion processes are on ground in many of the research libraries. A research establishment without access to the internet cannot fulfill its roles in the modern times. "A national survey on these materials is necessary, and a national directory should be created, to ensure that such materials are recorded and documented. A systematic approach to conversion of the materials should be employed to ensure that all documents are captured for posterity.
- There is internet access which has not been fully utilized to promote the global visibility of the organizations. Internet access is not only for sending mails but a useful tool for that person that is well equipped and literate enough to use it. The capabilities are there on the internet to complement the existing services the librarians offer to their numerous users. A word of caution came from Ochai (2007),
- That the challenge before us is not just of access to digital resources; but that of adding African content and making same available on the wide area network. This is exactly what research librarians should set out to do.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made to discuss the need for information networking and the need for effective management of institutional repositories through conversion into electronic format. The vision of a truly global knowledge partnership will only be realized when we participate as both contributors and users of knowledge. Today many of the government establishments are connected to the internet. Visits to some of them show that the internet access has been greatly under-utilized. The internet is largely being used for downloading of international resources and sending mails; the capacity for sharing the local knowledge generated in the country has been downplay. The capabilities of the internet must be used to address the development of electronic information management system. It is high time we gave adequate attention to indigenous content management which is the professional domain of librarians and other information professionals.

Thank you.

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