

INNOVATIVE LIBRARIANSHIP AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS PATHWAYS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

Plangnan P. Solomon CLN

University of Jos Library

Email: solomonp@unijos.edu.ng Phone: 07061258866

Terkimbi Simeon IORSHE CLN

Department of Library and Information Science, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State
and Gboko Polytechnic, Benue State

Email: simeoiorsheterkimbi@gmail.com Phone: 08160345785

&

Dr. Grace Iyabo Nwokedi

University of Jos Library

Email: nwokedii@unijos.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper examined innovative librarianship and community engagement as strategic pathways for ensuring the sustainability of academic libraries in Nigeria. Drawing on contemporary literature, the study argued that the transformation of the information and educational environment as a result of digital technologies and changing user expectations have necessitated a shift from traditional library practices to dynamic, user-centered and technology-driven service delivery systems. The paper conceptualizes innovative librarianship, community engagement, and sustainability of librarianship, highlighting their interconnections. It further explores the extent of innovation adoption in academic libraries in Nigeria, identified critical challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited technical work force, policy gaps and resistance to change. The paper proposes strategic pathways for strengthening sustainability such as continuous professional development in emerging technologies, strengthening institutional and community partnership among others. The study concludes that integrating technological innovation with community-oriented practices would reposition libraries as resilient knowledge hubs essential for national development.

Keywords: Innovative librarianship, Community Engagement, Sustainability, Academic libraries

Introduction

Globally, libraries have been recognized as indispensable institutions supporting education, knowledge dissemination and cultural preservation. Traditionally, libraries functioned primarily as repositories of books and information resources that support teaching, learning, and research. Scholars in the field of librarianship such as Rajinder and Gaur (2017) argued that academic libraries in particular, play a vital role in facilitating access to scholarly information and fostering intellectual development that highly align with the educational curriculum of every academic institution.

It is a known fact, that the educational environment has undergone rapid transformation due to influence of information and communication technologies (ICTs), evolving digital platforms and information seeking behaviors of library users. Collaborating

this, Solomon, Dang and Iorshe (2025) argued that users increasingly rely on digital resources such as electronic databases, resulting in declining physical library patronage and shifting expectations regarding service delivery.

Recent study by Akin-Fakorede, Ahmed & Ajani, (2026) indicates that modern libraries are evolving into innovation hubs characterized by maker spaces, collaborative learning environments and digital knowledge systems. Consequently, concerns have emerged regarding the relevance and sustainability of traditional library models. In response, librarians must adopt innovative approaches and actively engage their communities not only to remain relevant but to gain the support and patronage of its stakeholders. This transformation has been conceptualized as innovative librarianship, emphasizing the integration of technology, creativity and user-centered service delivery in libraries.

Innovation and Community Engagement as Pathways to Sustainability of Academic Libraries

Innovation and community engagement are mutually reinforcing strategies for sustaining libraries of all types, academic libraries in particular. Nigerian academic libraries have made progress in adopting ICT-based services such as:

1. **Digital repositories.** A digital repository is an online based collection of information resources such as research output of an institution (dissertation, theses) as well as other academic or grey literature of a given institution. It is also possible to describe digital repository as an electronic based centralized system that store, preserve and manages digital resources. Digital repository according to ACRL (2022) is an instrument for managing and storing digital content. The purpose of digital repository according to the author is to provide open access to institutional research, creating global visibility for the institution's scholarly output. They make information searching, processing, and retrieval easy for users. There are two types of digital repository; institution and disciplinary repository. The institution repositories are online collection of institution specific resources such as projects, dissertation and thesis produced by the institution including grey literatures. A repository owned by a college, polytechnics and university or any organization may be called digital repository. Digital repositories enhance open access to educational resources. According to Sharma (2023) argued that open access, eliminate duplication of reading materials (research) providing 24/7 access for the material. Despite the benefits of digital repositories, it is common fact that some academic libraries are yet to integrate digital repositories even those that have, there seem to be low utilization. Collaborating this, studies by Temim, Abdulwahab and Eiriemiokhale (2025) reported low implementation of digital repositories and corresponding utilization of digital repositories usage in academic libraries in Nigeria. It is important to emphasize that academic libraries should implement digital repository initiative as it aligns with the current user behaviour in regards to the high preference of digital resources. Similarly, academic libraries should market their available resources including digital resources to attract high patronage from users. To achieve this, community engagement must be considered.

2. **Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC).** The online public access catalogue is an information retrieval system that consist of descriptive bibliographic records of library resources such as books, journals among others owned by a given library. OPAC is an innovation that replaces the traditional catalogue. Present day library users would like to get information from the library without visiting the physical library (Hudron, 2019). OPAC provides patrons the opportunity to access the availability and location of library collection on a given subject without visiting the physical library.
3. **Electronic databases.** The term database is used to in this work to refer to organized online collection of digital information resources such as journals, e-books, reports, videos and multimedia which provides 24/7 access to users. Library electronic information resources maybe licensed (that is subscription based) and non-subscription based which can be accessed remotely. Electronic databases are essential information resources in modern academic libraries that support effective academic achievements of users (Udoh and Akwang, 2023). They are easier, faster and convenient to access. Examples include Health Internet Network Access to Research Initiative, HINARI, Journal Storage, JOSTOR and Directory of Open Access Journals, DOAJ among others. Studies conducted by researchers indicates that academic libraries are adopting the use of electronic databases. However, studies indicate low level of utilization of electronic databases by library users such as undergraduate students (Udoh and Chukwuemeka, 2022). The utilization of electronic databases depends on awareness and digital literacy skills of users. Academic libraries have to ensure creation of awareness of availability of digital electronic databases and train their patrons for usage. To achieve, libraries must implement robust community engagement initiatives.
4. **Social media tools.** One of the exciting products of information and communication technology to man is the advent of social media. In definitive terms, social media refers to online based interactive technologies or software that facilitate the creation, managing and sharing of information, ideas, events and other forms of communication through virtual communities. Libraries and librarians keep connected to their clients through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram among others for promoting or publicizing library resources, events and services (Iorshe&Echnono, 2023). However, the use of social media by academic libraries in Nigeria is still low. For instance, a study by Akporhonor and Fasae (2020) indicated that librarians rarely use social media to promote library resources. The study revealed only two academic libraries studied out of six in Ekiti and Ondo State had social media presence and utilizes it. Some academic libraries are yet to have their libraries presence on social media and it does not go well in the current digital era. Social media is an innovation that should be embraced by libraries to foster community engagement and yield corresponding support and patronage by the library publics.

However, available literature and observation indicate that, adoption of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics and blockchain technology remains limited (Ojobor, Okafor and Ugwuanyi 2025). In many circumstances, the technologies are not practically implemented in libraries.

Community engagement strengthens user relationships and ensures that services are tailored to societal needs. Together, these approaches enhance relevance, increase usage and justify continued institutional support for libraries. In the current era, librarians should be at the helm of affairs to champion innovative trends such as digital literacy training. It is to be understood that the dimensions of digital literacy cover artificial intelligence, AI literacy, Internet of Things, information and media literacy, cyber security and digital content creation among others. It is important for libraries particularly academic libraries to engage in the initiative for the purpose of equipping their users with relevant digital skills. Libraries according to Abimbola (2025) are hubs for social interaction as they provide instruction in digital literacy and community-based activities meant to improve communication engagement. In doing so, academic libraries will not only sustain engagement and relevance in their communities but also secure goodwill, long-term patronage and institutional relevance in the digital age. Despite the glaring benefits and sustainable future, libraries encounter challenges in adopting innovations.

Challenges Facing Innovative Librarianship in Nigeria

It is imperative to acknowledge that innovation in librarianship is a pathway for librarians to embrace for the sustainability of librarianship in Nigeria. It is also essential to state the obvious fact that so many challenges face innovations in librarianship in Nigeria. These include but not limited to the following:

1. **Inadequate Funding.** Limited financial resources restrict acquisition of modern technologies and infrastructure (Ogunmodede & Popoola, 2021). Libraries are underfunded and even government ministries such as education and information that are supposed to support libraries do not live to their mandate.
2. **Inadequate Technical Manpower.** Although basic ICT skills are common, advanced technological competencies remain insufficient (Emmanuel et al., 2023).
3. **Poor Infrastructure (Power and Internet).** Unstable electricity supply and limited internet connectivity significantly hinder digital service delivery. Frequent power outages disrupt access to electronic resources, while slow or unreliable internet reduces the efficiency of online services. This infrastructural deficit remains a major barrier to innovation in academic libraries in Nigeria.
4. **Absence of Policy Framework.** There is a lack of comprehensive national and institutional policies guiding adoption of digital transformation and innovation in libraries. Without clear blueprint, implementation of new technologies becomes inconsistent and may become unsustainable.
5. **Resistance to Change.** Some librarians' exhibit reluctance to adopt new technologies due to fear of complexity or lack of confidence or technical skills required to use such technologies. Organizational culture and inadequate training further reinforce resistance to innovation.
6. **Fear of Job Loss.** The application of computers and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence have created concerns about job displacement among library staff. Most librarians fear that, they will lose their job. This fear can slow down the adoption of innovative practices despite their long-term benefits to both the library and users.

Strategic Pathways towards Sustainability of Academic Libraries in Nigeria

To enhance sustainability, the following strategies were recommended:

1. Continuous professional development in emerging technologies. There are many ways through which librarians can be exposed to innovations in librarianship. It could be through organizing conferences and workshops.
2. Integration of digital systems and automation
3. Strengthening institutional and community partnerships
4. Advocacy for policy recognition and funding support
5. Promotion of entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets among librarians

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that innovative librarianship and community engagement are essential pathways for sustaining academic libraries in Nigeria. Academic libraries must transition from traditional repositories to dynamic knowledge hubs driven by technology and community needs. By so doing, academic libraries will sustain their relevance, maintain continuous adoption of innovation, professional competence and build strong community connections. Community engagement builds good reputation, engender trust and sustained patronage of the library by the library publics.

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