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**LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:  
A NEW PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

*The 21<sup>st</sup> century has indeed witnessed a new dimension in the area of library practice. This paper discusses libraries and librarians in this century. It portrays vividly the traditional libraries which were devoid of any form of ICT, as well as the librarians who lacked skills necessary for enhancing library services. The paper also presents the 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries as those characterized by the use of ICT in the acquisition, processing, preservation and accessibility of materials. It highlights the new roles of the present day librarians who have eventually become image makers, facilitators, intrusion server managers, online cataloguers, system analysts, web designers etc. The paper recommends the need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians to train and retrain themselves while parent institutions should ensure that librarians are sponsored to both local and international conferences. Professional Associations are also urged to organize seminars/workshops for librarians at subsidized rates. The paper finally concludes that as libraries continue to change; librarians should strive to acquire necessary skills which will position them to fit in and perform maximally in the present day libraries and those of the future.*

**Key words:** 21<sup>st</sup> century Libraries, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian's, Librarians new roles

**Introduction:**

The acquisition of written knowledge in form of repository can be traced back to civilization.

Many thousand years ago, clay tablets were discovered in ancient Mesopotamia. Worthy of note was the great discovery of the personal collections of Assurbanipal, a grandson to Sennacherib. These collections played a great role in the history of what is the library of today. A library can traditionally be defined as a collection of books and non-book materials made accessible for study and research. It also includes the physical accommodation where such materials are housed for the purpose of study and research. Reitz (2004) defined it as a collection or group of collections of books and other materials organized and maintained for use. The place of libraries in the lives of individuals and the development of the nation cannot be overemphasized. Bandy (2010) posits that the library plays various roles which include:

- a lifetime to a bright future of hope to the patron who is out of work. It provides programmes for training, retraining and even opportunities through the librarians effort to rebuild a career gone astray
- libraries are a place for education and self help. Because they bring access to all, they bring opportunity to all
- libraries offer lifelong learning , providing opportunity from pre-school age to retirement age
- libraries offer the hardware as well as expertise of librarians to teach people how to use the internet in finding relevant information without delay

Libraries are places where people get educated as well as obtain self-help. They bring opportunity to all, to access materials and acquire knowledge. Traditional libraries depict settings where every operation, ranging from acquisition to processing, preservation and retrieval of materials were all done manually. Ilo (2008) observes the need to use the manual setting as a standpoint for the activities of the modern day library.

Ogunsola (2011) observes that traditional libraries housed books, journals, manuscripts and other sources of recorded information. The 21<sup>st</sup> century however brought a complete turn around in library practice. Apart from the provision of variety of resources in digital formats, there is opportunity for the use of ICT facilities in carrying out library operations. Opportunities also abound for users to acquire skills necessary to navigate the web for information relevant to them. Lee (2005) observes that while the business world is changing the new knowledge economy and digital age libraries of all types are undergoing drastic changes too. Fagbola et al(2011) maintains that libraries have changed most patterns of traditional services and information processing and handling as well as information dissemination to suit changes in the global village.

### **The traditional library and librarian**

The traditional library acquired and hosted materials in different formats and they were only housed within the physical walls of the library. Lacy (2012) posits that a traditional library confines users to the materials available in the four walls of the library building while Jones (2003) described a traditional library as an organized store house for information dissemination.

Traditional libraries are dominated by books, journals, reference collections etc all in printed forms. The librarians did not have the skills to render services outside the four walls of the library. The users were compelled to visit the library at any given time when they required library resources and services. Patrons wasted lots of hours searching the traditional catalogue in a bid to get the required information resources. The in-house processing are rigorous and time wasting, for instance describing the bibliographic details of library materials on cards take a lot of time to file and inter file. Ilo (2008) quoting Formsom (1999) noted that before the advent of technology in the University of Botswana about six months passed between the time books passed through the hand of the cataloguing coordinator and when they finally got to the shelves. The catalogues were the major link to the holdings of the libraries and patrons wasted much time trying to locate relevant materials from the catalogue where cards were filed by author/title and subject.

The International Technology Research Institute (1999) observed that the traditional library is characterized by the following:

- emphasis on storage and preservation of physical items, particularly books and periodicals,
- cataloging at a high level rather than one of detail, e.g., author and subject indexes as opposed to full text,
- browsing based on physical proximity of related materials, e.g., books on sociology are near one another on the shelves,
- passivity; information is physically assembled in one place; users must travel to the library to learn what is there and make use of it.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Library**

The present day libraries have metamorphosed from manual system to technology driven operations. Ogunshola (2011) posits that the changes in libraries and the role of librarians originated in the US and other English-speaking countries. Bandy (2010) describes the 21<sup>st</sup> century library as a place to stay connected with a large amount of digital and analogue data and maintains that they are not just the building but the librarians and other staff who offer different levels of services and are always available listening to and helping patrons to find information. The use of technology has not only improved the resources and services of the library, but has brought a tremendous change in the pattern by which services are rendered. Akintunde (2004) observes that even the vocabulary of librarianship is changing: dissemination is being replaced by communication, repository by data, literature by knowledge, search by navigation, etc. The advent in technology brought a new turn in information acquisition, processing and retrieval. The 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian is thus faced with the provision of information to clientele in an information society. This therefore places a lot of assignments on the present day librarian. Ogunsola (2011) noticed that the technology driven environment has enveloped the library and is taking it to unprecedented heights in knowledge acquisition, management and communication. Electronic resources constitute part of the holdings unlike the traditional

library which consisted of materials in print. The 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries are manned by skilled staff that use their expertise to render services to the library users. These modern day libraries provide an increasing range of services using media technology to reach more diverse users than ever before. Fabunmi,(2009) posits, that the 21<sup>st</sup> century library is a well selected collection of units of document entry resources spread everywhere, accessible always, where individuals and groups such as authors, publishers, vendors and readers are linked through hyperlink technology across the global electronic network to relate in different ways. They have user friendly organizational pattern.

### **Role of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarians:**

The role of librarians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been upgraded as a result of technology. The present day librarians are ICT driven because the libraries are equipped with ICT facilities. Librarians are expected to combine the traditional roles with the present day roles since they have come a long way as navigators who are well versatile in the use of technologies. Bridges, (2003) observes that librarianship has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. As a result, librarians are expected to be versatile, not only in subject area knowledge and inter personal ability, but also to possess considerable technical skills, required to keep abreast of the trends in modern librarianship. Romas, (2007) posits that a 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian is:

- an information broker for both prints and electronic media, who selects, acquires, organizes, repackages and provides access to both digital and print information sources.
- a change agent, that is a technology application leader who liaises with the computer science unit to design and manage the library ICT.
- a facilitator, making access to information easier by providing access to network, purchases appropriate library software, databases, e-books and e-journals.
- an educator, who trains users on how to access both prints and electronics. He also educates them on the use of search engines to surf materials from the internet.
- a business manager, who possesses the ability to negotiate with publishers. He also discusses license agreements for e-books, e-journals and databases.
- an image maker who is capable of adding value to the library in order to gain management support and project a positive image to the outside world.

Gassman ( 2003) posited that the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians provide services to faceless patrons. These ones are able to access the present day virtual libraries without necessarily coming in contact with the librarians. The use of technology in these modern libraries has various impacts on the librarian's role as well. Libraries are moving from use of card catalogues to the use of online catalogues. Librarians have also shifted from manual to online cataloguing. Their present roles and expectations include indexing services, web designing as well as management of library computer systems. They are faced with the issue of developing software and the MARC standards needed for cataloguing records electronically as well as management of intrusion servers. They equally teach their clients how to use the new technologies in

accessing their materials. Most modern day librarians provide virtual reference services and battle with the challenges of moving from manual to more virtual work environments.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians are highly trained, self motivated professionals who not only safe guard information in different formats but also train other staff to use information and serve library users better. Kanczak and Szoltysik,( 2006) notice that modern day libraries heap new tasks upon the librarian. Therefore, the modern librarian must know how to use the new sources of information skillfully. He/she must acquire psychological, social and professional capabilities.

### **Need for building new knowledge and skills**

The modern day librarian can only operate maximally in this dispensation if he has enough skills to match with the present responsibilities. He must therefore, implore all available means to acquire skills. Tikekar, (2009) opined that the onus of transforming traditional libraries into the 21<sup>st</sup> century ones mainly falls on the librarians. They must shift from information locators to information evaluators and instructors in the use and evaluation of information sources.

Libraries of the present day need librarians who are educated, experienced, intelligent and resourceful. Somvir, (2010) opined that librarians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must train and retrain themselves and should stop believing that the onus of training falls entirely on their employers. Librarians must constantly update their skills and become multi-skilled to meet up with imminent challenges. The librarians must also be equipped with a wide range of personal and transferable skills in order to manage the changing environment in which they work. These librarians are technology application leaders who work with other members of the information management team to make information accessible to users. Hashim and Mokhtar, (2012) defined them as knowledge based practitioners who use research as a foundation for their own professional practice.

The advancement of ICT has brought a lot of changes not only on library and information services but also on the roles and expectations of librarians. There is a new change in paradigm and librarians must also change. CARL(2010) insisted that the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians should have the following competences:

- expert knowledge of the content of information resources.
- excellent instruction and support for library and information service users.
- appropriate information technology to acquire, organize and disseminate information.
- skills to evaluate the outcome of information use and conduct research related to the solution of information management problems.
- effective communication skills

These librarians are also expected to be engaged in the exploration and implementation of new technologies needed to match with the present patrons most of whom have become technologically savvy in the use of ICT. They must possess high level of information literacy skills, as well as knowledge of the principles and techniques of effective reference services. It is expected that the present day librarian participates in research which plays a big role in both

knowledge acquisition and service delivery. Hashim and Mokhtar,( 2012) posits that the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians must be committed to research and contribution to the profession. He must contribute through writing, editing, referencing and reviewing of books. They must attend conferences and present papers and be involved in teaching. These librarians must be knowledgeable in integrated library system (ILS) web technologies such as web 2.0, twitter, face book, my space, OPAC 2.0 etc. They must also have knowledge of data management..

## Recommendations

The paper recommends that, the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarians should strive to acquire new knowledge and skills to function effectively in the modern day libraries. This they can do by studying relevant materials and participating in conferences and workshops.

Parent institutions have the responsibility of sponsoring librarians to local and international conferences as well as study visits to high-tech libraries.

Libraries and Information Centres should organize in-house trainings and seminars geared towards skill acquisition for librarians

It also behooves the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria and the Nigerian Library Association at all levels to organize workshops and seminars for librarians at subsidized rates.

## Conclusion

The advent in technology has brought on board new roles for the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian. Therefore, librarians need to add value to themselves through the acquisition of skills required to fit into the changing world of modern day libraries. These libraries will continue to change. It therefore behooves the librarians to follow the trends in order to remain relevant in this present day information age and in the ages to come.

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