



## Innovative Solutions in Academic Libraries: Reports from Two Libraries in Osun State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study focused on identifying innovative solutions that are in place to solve problems and improve quality of service delivery in Tekena Tamuno Library, Redeemer's University Ede and Training Library, Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic Ede.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a descriptive survey method. Two libraries were selected for the study through snowballing sampling technique. Interview was the major instrument for data collection.

**Findings:** The study discovered that the two libraries face challenges on provision of quick and unrestricted access to information resources, which was impossible due to the limitation of paper based collections. To solve this challenge, digitization and provision of access to electronic resources are major innovative solutions common to the two libraries. This has greatly reduced users' frustration because users can now have access to information resources they need, available for download free of charge, while eliminating physical queues at the circulation desks and users' frustrations.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends, among others, that libraries should embrace digitization and provision of access to electronic information resources, as well as deployment of modern technology for creating relevant solutions to the problems facing the libraries.

**Originality/Contributions to Knowledge:** The study, through primary data collected directly from the field, has revealed the potency of using modern technology, especially digitization, to solve the problem of users' frustration, time wastage and decline and has repositioned the image of the libraries across the spheres of the academic communities where the study were conducted.

**Keywords:** Academic libraries, Innovation, Creativity, Library solutions, Digitization

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of 21st Century information users is changing. They need information in a ready-made electronic version. This was consequential on the increasingly use of mobile smart devices that gives unrestricted opportunities to access information on the go. Similarly, libraries are adopting many of these new technologies to enhance their services



delivery, although with varying degree of adoption. Librarians and libraries face challenges on daily basis on meeting the information needs of their customers in a satisfactory way. These challenges are as peculiar and unique as each library and their users. However, as much as libraries need to retain their leadership seat in the *business* of information provision, especially as they are faced with myriads of competitors/ alternative sources that challenge their traditional roles, there is the need to identify common challenges that can lead to users' frustration and decline in the number of library users. Providing creative solutions to these problems will not only bring new users to the library, but also good for the growth and sustenance of the profession, which many are seeing as one of the endangered professions.

According to the Mauritius Library and Information Association (2009), creativity deals with problem identification and generation of ideas to solve that problem, while innovations deal with selection of best ideas and developing such in a way that can be used by others to solve similar challenges. This translates that innovations are bred from creativity which were aimed at solving a particular problem. Creativity and innovation are important for organizations such as libraries to maintain their leadership position as well as outpaced competitors. Walton and Webb (2016) corroborates this view by pointing out that such areas where innovations in libraries are required may include: implementing new technologies to improve and spread library services to meet the needs of the users. This is with the aim of focusing on quality service delivery by the library which should be the utmost goal of any library (Jantz, 2017).

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Academic libraries in this 21st Century are expected to meet the diverse information needs of the entire academic community, and making optimum use of technologies to enhance their information service delivery. Similarly, the nature of information users in the 21st Century are changing. Information users need information, usually in a ready-made, mobile or compact version that can best gratify their needs. However, it has been observed that many academic libraries are yet make optimum use of technologies and creativities in producing lasting solutions to some of the challenges they face, especially in service delivery. This usually leads to users' frustration, non-satisfactory and decline in the number of library users, as many of them are turning to alternative information sources. It is against this backdrop that this study was set out to investigate the innovative solutions available in Tekena Tamuno Library, Redeemer's University, Ede, and Training Library, Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic Ede, Osun State.

### 1.1 Objectives

The study focused on the following objectives:

1. To find out the innovative solutions currently available in the two libraries.
2. To identify the rationale behind the innovative solutions in the two libraries.
3. To ascertain the level of acceptability from the library users.
4. To identify the challenges experienced by the two libraries on engendering the innovative library solutions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey method, and snowball sampling technique was adopted to select the two libraries which the study focused upon. A staff of the Department of Library Science, Federal Polytechnic Ede, was contacted who also indicated the innovative developments in Tekena Tamuno Library (TTL) Redeemers University, Ede, which led to the inclusion of the TTL as part of the study. Interview was used as the instrument for collecting the data. Appointments were booked with a staff each in the two libraries – Dr. Adeleke Akinniyi of the TTL, Redeemer's University, Ede, who is the Head of the Virtual Library and Mr. Blessing Amusan of the Training Library, Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS), Federal Polytechnic Ede. Interviews were conducted and notes were taken accordingly.



### 3. FINDINGS

#### **Innovative solutions currently available in the two libraries.**

According to the information provided by the Librarian at the TTL, various innovative solutions are available at the Tekena Tamuno Library. However, two prominent ones were mentioned and discussed. These are: (a) Digitization of past questions and (b) Quality control of students' research reports. Paper based examination past questions were converted to digital formats and uploaded on the library portal where students can access and download them remotely, without needing to physically visit the library. Also, students were mandated to visit the library liaison officer in charge of their Faculty to get quality assurance clearance for the physical format and binding of the project copies before they can be submitted to their respective department.

From the Training Library, DLIS, two prominent innovative solutions that were discussed include: (a) digitization of past questions and (b) offline access to e-books: e books were download online and a database was created and managed by *Calibre Library*, an open source e-library management software. Staff and students were trained on the use of the software for managing their personal e-collections on their laptops. Also, *Aldiko* (an android app) that performn similar functions to *Calibre Library* was introduced to the users and were equally trained on using it to manage their personal electronic collections on their mobile devices. Similarly, a social media platform was developed to take requests from the users.

#### **Rationale behind the innovative solutions in the two libraries**

##### **Tekena Tamuno Library**

It was observed that many students were not satisfied with service delivery in the aspect of provision of past question papers. The problems associated with this was that there are restrictions on the use and access to paper- based past questions. The copies were not much. Many users had to wait endlessly for others to finish using it before they can have access. Also, the circulation desk used to get overcrowded for users requesting for past questions. It was the need to bring sanity to this chaotic situation that led to blending technology with creativity to provide innovative solution to solve the problem.

Also, there have been series of complaints from some Faculties on the quality of the binding of the students' projects. This was also identified by the Library. To address this issue, the library made a case to the University Management to be in charge of the quality control (physical format) of the project and ensure consistency in the quality of outputs that were produced. Permission was granted and this solution is still at the test-running stage. Liaison officer was appointed in the library for each faculty, who is in charge of checking the projects for quality in physical format and approved for binding and also access the binding if they are properly carried out. This process has boost the image of the library in the academic community from the passive book keepers to active knowledge managers who are partners in complementing the efforts of other stake-holders to achieve the Institutional goals.

##### **Training Library, DLIS**

Initially, the Departmental Library kept past question papers in files. Apart from challenges on physical space management, the files and the past questions were deteriorating fast due to heavy usage by the students. Also, many students have to wait for other users before they can also have access. This equally waste the time of the users and usually leads to frustration and disappointment on the part of the users. To solve this problem, two staff of the library converted the past questions to a digital format, and share it on the students WhatsApp groups. This has permanently solved the problem as students can now have access to digitized version of past questions at their convenience, without necessarily visiting the library.



Also, due to paucity of funds and high exchange rates, there was decline in the rate at which paper books were procured. However, because of the need to keep meeting the information needs of the lecturers and students of the Department, the staff of the library also blend their creativities with available technologies to create a lasting solution. This culminated in the development of a database, where the users can access electronic information resources, without necessarily using the Internet. The database is managed by *Calibre Library* software.

#### **Users' level of acceptability of the services**

The users level of acceptability of the library solutions were high from the two libraries. According to the Librarian at the TTL, users were very receptive about the innovations in the service delivery. Also, at the DLIS Library, users' level of acceptability of the services were very high.

#### **Challenges experienced by the two libraries on engendering the innovative library solutions.**

However, as high as the level of services acceptability were, they were not without challenges. One major challenge common to the two libraries was sourcing for the past questions from various lecturers and departments. Just as the library can only upload the past questions available, some users do complain of non-availability of the ones they need.

Also, the cost of scanning, manpower, time and energy expending on putting these solutions to place were becoming too much. To reduce this, efforts are already in place to liaise with each department in the RUN and lecturers at the DLIS, respectively, to supply the libraries with soft copies of the past questions, other as PDF or *doc*. format. This will save time, energy and cost incurred on converting the paper based to digital resources. This allows the librarians to have ample time to attend to other necessary routines that can be more beneficiary to the library. DLIS Library faces problems of internet connectivity. However, the Library has a social media platform where users can request for resources and services they need. Although, there is power stability in TTL, however, the cost of generating the power supply is too expensive and as e-resources and services require constant electricity supply to function, this has remained a major challenge that has no immediate solution for now. Another challenge facing the two libraries are resistant to change and technophobia from some users. Some users agitated that they do not possess smartphones to access the e-resources or agitated that they were more comfortable with the old system of paper-based services.

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study revealed that the two libraries took active steps in creating innovative solutions to challenges they face on effective service delivery. The libraries harnessed the benefits of new technology to create lasting solutions worthy of emulation by other libraries. This is similar to Nkiko, Idiegbeyan-Ose, Ilogho and Esse (2014) reported the use of ICT skills for effective service delivery in Covenant University Library. Digitizing of library collections has been perceived as improving greater access to collections by improving multiple and remote accessibility (Otubelu and Ume, 2015).

Also, it was revealed that users level of acceptability of the solutions were high. This may not be unconnected with *European Scientific Journal*. 14 that modern library users prefer the use of modern technology and electronic resources to print resources, because of myriads of opportunities they present. Challenges facing the two libraries include: resistance to change, low internet bandwidth, cost of generating electricity and resistant to change and technophobia. These are in line with Nkiko, Idiegbeyan-Ose, Ilogho and Esse (2014) observations on a similar study conducted on Covenant University Library.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that there are various innovative solutions available at the two libraries to solve their immediate challenges. Both libraries have been able to synchronize their creativities with available technologies to engender necessary solutions to challenges that has been frustrating their users, that can also lead to decline in the population of the users. These acts of ingenuity have also carved a niche for the libraries at the two institutions and equally change users' orientation and perceptions about the libraries and librarianship.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. Libraries in Nigeria should embrace the use of technologies for creating solutions to problems facing their libraries. There is the need to create a synergy between creativity of librarians and available technologies to engender the desired changes and solutions necessary to improve information services delivery in all libraries. To achieve this, library management need to develop a robust platform for identifying and managing employees' talents and creativities and assign tasks based on employees' talents and creativities.
2. Librarians should be more committed to taking the front seat in the global village by acquiring relevant technical skills that will make them digital fluent and function effectively in this dynamic information environment. There is need for training and retraining of staff in line with current realities in information management.
3. Digitization and use of electronic information resources will continue to be the major deciding factor that will bring users into the library. Therefore, library managements need to invest robustly in this area. There is need for digitization of very useful collections, as well as acquisition of related electronic databases to meet the information needs of the users through a comfortable and satisfactory approach.
4. Also, there is need to train library staff and users in the use of various library technologies that can enhance their job productivity and information accessibility respectively. Equipping the users with basic information literacy skills will not only improve their level of information accessibility and use, but will also benefit the library staff by giving them ample opportunities to expend on other profitable routines.
5. Libraries need to conduct frequent user studies to identify challenging areas that can frustrate users' satisfaction or lead to decline in the number of library users. This will enable them to brainstorm of creating innovative solutions that can improve their service delivery and customers' satisfaction.



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