STRATEGIC CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Dr. Obaro Gabrieline Onyedikachi

Library Science Unit,
Institute Of Education,
Delta State University,
Abraka.

Abstract

The study is on the basic challenges faced by Academic libraries. Basically, needs are arranged in a hierarchy and some need to be satisfied before others. This is also the case with academic libraries. There are some basic requirements that should be satisfied before others. And where this is not done they become challenges. This study therefore is aimed at the basic challenges of academic libraries. Staffing, accommodation, information resources, are discussed as the basic challenges facing most academic libraries.

Keywords: Challenges, Accommodation, Leaking, Information Resources.

Academic libraries according to Edoka, (2000) exist in institutions of higher education such as universities, colleges of education, colleges of technology and polytechnics. Similarly, Aguolu, (1989) sees academic libraries as integral parts of institutions of higher learning and not appendices or adjuncts to the institutions. Aina (2004) describes academic libraries as libraries that are attached to post secondary institutions. Academic libraries perform functions directly related to the mission of each institution. The main purpose of an academic library is to support the objectives of the university which are in the areas of learning, teaching, research. (Edoka, 2000, Obaro, 2013). The users are students, researchers, lecturers, support staff, (non teaching staff) and members of the local community in which the university is located. In fact, their primary responsibility is to satisfy the instructional and research needs of the students and the faculties. Edoka (2000) outlined the general functions of Academic libraries as follows:-

i. To provide information materials required for the academic programme of the parent institution.
ii. To provide research information resources in consonance with the needs of the faculties and research students.
iii. To provide information resources for recreation and personal self development of users.
iv. To provide study accommodation in a useful variety of locations.

v. To cooperate with other libraries at appropriate levels for improved information services.

vi. To provide specialized information service to appropriate segments of the wider community.

To serve the above functions, Academic libraries primarily must have some basic requirements like accommodation to function from, which also houses both the staff offices, information resources and equipment. Unfortunately, there are challenges in these areas and this has gone a long way to affect the functions of the academic libraries.

Statement of Problem

Some psychologists believe that the needs of individuals are arranged in a hierarchy and one need is satisfied first before proceeding to the next need. For example physiological needs like hunger thirst etc should be satisfied before safety and self esteemed needs. Similarly, for a library to function properly there should be the availability of the basic needs like good accommodation, lighting, conveniences and security measures to protect the available library resources. But, from observation, there seem to be neglect on these basic requirements of the library which have been observed because most libraries are now focusing on automation or computerization of their libraries and services. Therefore this study is focused on the discussion of the basic challenges facing academic libraries.

Challenges Facing Academic Libraries

The present day academic libraries are focusing more on library automation. This has caused a neglect on the primary areas of the libraries like accommodation, information resources, staff and services to mention but a few and as such, most libraries are on the cross road. Some of the challenges include:

a. **Accommodation**

In most academic libraries, the library building/accommodation are small. Also they do not have one big edifice, but a building with attachments. In most cases, the building/library accommodations are so small for all the library users, resources and equipment. The National Universities Commission stipulates that, the library should accommodate at least ten percent (10%) of the library users population (Obaro, 2013) but one finds out that most of the library accommodation spaces cannot even take two percent (2%) of the library users population. This is more pronounced, when examination is fast approaching and library users want to use the library. But due to insufficiency of spaces, seats and study carrels they cannot all use the library at the

same time. Supporting this view, Obaro, (2013), opined that new modern academic libraries should be built to replace the old smaller ones.

b.   **Leaking Roofs**

There are also the challenges of leaking roofs of the Academic Library buildings. Ihediwa (2014) reported in her Ph.D thesis, that the university of Calabar library had a leaking roof. Leaking roofs are so dangerous to information resources because most information resources react to damp and moisture which leads to deterioration and damages of information resources.

c.   **Conveniences**

Conveniences or rest rooms are supposed to be domiciled in the library for the library user's convenience. In most academic libraries, they are there but are either always, dirty, or locked up thereby stopping library users from using them without providing alternative arrangements. Writing on this, Obi, (2012) reported that this is so because library staff have the feelings that users who are mainly undergraduates mess up the conveniences. But even at that, cleaners are employed in the universities and some are deployed to the library.

d.   **Security Measures**

Burgle proofs, alarm systems, closed circuit television (CCTV) and others are some of the security measures adopted in libraries. Most of these security measures but burgle proofs are not available in most academic libraries. Their absence encourage theft, mutilation of materials, throwing information resources through the window. These lead to loss of information resources which is no good for a library because libraries attract users with their rich information resources.

e.   **Lighting and Ventilation**

Lighting is inevitable in libraries; cross ventilation is also essential because the library accommodates people of all sorts at the same time. Electricity is provided in academic libraries and these libraries should also have alternatives to electricity like generators and inverters etc. this is a challenge because most academic libraries do not have alternative to electricity. Edekarebor (2010) has the views that all libraries should provide generators as alternatives to electricity, for proper utilization of academic libraries.

f.   **Staffing**

All libraries should have staff. Library staff have been described as the engine that control the running of all the activities performed in the library. Hence they are the pivot around whom the users, information materials, equipments, tools and all other

faculties revolve (Wawire and Messah, 2010). Nevertheless it becomes a challenge when the library staff neglect their duties. Oghenero (2012) reported in his study that most shelves, reading chairs, tables and fans are always dusty and some staff eat in the library which is contrary to library rules. Edekarabor (2010) also wrote that some staff of some academic library has turned the library into market by bringing in and selling of their wares in the library. This in turn makes the library noisy. He went further to outline other negative behaviour of the academic library staff that has posed as challenges to the library as: chatting, gossiping, discussions and answering of phone calls on top of their voices. Obi (2012) supporting the above assertion opined that most library staff comes late to work.

g.   **Information Communication Technology (ICT)**
        ICT has become so popularized in libraries. This has led to a shift from the traditional manual system to the computerized system, which also has led to the neglect of the basic requirements of academic libraries, hence, a strategic challenge facing most academic libraries. It was reported by Ihediwa (2014) that most academic libraries are partially automated and some are still in the process of automating their libraries. Abubakar (2011) stressed that IT literacy among libraries is still at the peripheral level. Nok (2006) also observed that many staff of university libraries are not computer literate as such, they find it difficult to cope with the requirements of the electronic age.

h.   **Library information resources**
        Information resources in most academic libraries are outdated. In the serial sections, there are no current journals. The best and current serial seen are the Nigerian dailies (Newspapers).
i.   There are no photocopying machines/centres either run by the library or contracted out that is domiciled in the library. As a result users cannot photocopy needed materials like the ones from the reference section.
j.   Also there are always delays in the processing of students library identity cards which permits the students to use the library.
k.   Materials are not loaned out, and the available staff are insufficient in handling the work.
l.   Some offices are small and unconducive for the staff.

        All these pose as challenges. Supporting the above views, Abubakar (2011) wrote that academic libraries in Nigeria are at a cross road and this is because they are operating in an era of dwindling finances where resources (financial and materials) are not forthcoming. Finance is needed in all facets of the library both to improve the accommodation, repair the leaking roofs, run the library, buy current journals and other things.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the basic requirements of the library should be handled and taken care of. This is because; accommodation, staffing, information resources and security are the basics for the library. If these things are not there, there will be no library. Therefore, they should be taken care of first.

Recommendations

Having considered the aforementioned challenges, the following recommendations are made:

1. A befitting accommodation for a university library that can conveniently house information resources, equipment, staff, and convenience should be erected for the universities.
2. The various heads of units should report the library situation to the university librarian who will in turn report to the vice chancellor in their Council and Senate meetings. This is because, it is possible they are not aware of all these challenges especially the leaking roof so that something can be done urgently before the next rainy season.
3. Funds should be allocated and when allocated should be judiciously used.
4. Security measures like burgle proofs, CCTV's, should be provided.
5. Staff should be told not to eat in the library. A refectory should be provided for them as an alternative.
6. Buying and selling of wares should be prohibited in academic libraries.

References

Abubakar, B. M. (2011). Academic Libraries in Nigeria in the 21st century. *Library Philosophy and Practice.* Retrieved from http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/-mbolin/abubakar.htm.

Aguolu C. C. (1989). *Libraries, knowledge and National development:* Inaugural lecture series. Maiduguri, University of Maiduguri press.

Aina L. O. (2004). *Library and Information science text for Africa.* Ibadan. Third World Information Services.

Edoka, B.E. (2000). *Introduction to Library Science.* Onitsha, Palma publishing and links company.

Edekarabor, S. O. (2010). *Libraries, challenges and prospects.* Onitsha, Wind of love publishers.

Ihediwa, G. O. (2014). *Availability and utilization of library information services by researchers in the South Federal Universities in Nigeria.* A thesis submitted to the University of Nigeria Nsukka in the partial fulfillment of the award of a doctor in philosophy in Library and Information Science Department. (Unpublished).

Nok G. (2006). The challenges of computerizing a university library in Nigeria: the case of Kashim Ibrahim library A.B.U. Zaria. *Library Philosophy and Practice* 8 (2)

Obaro, G.O. (2013). Library security challenges and control measures: A case study of two Academic libraries in South-South Nigeria. *Research in Education 19*(1) 161-164.

Obi H.N. (2012). Information Services Utilization. *The news*, 8(2) 10-18.

Oghenero, J.O. (2012). Academic library development in the Niger-Delta. *The pilot* 10(2) 20-28.

Wawire of & Messah .O. (2010). Challenges faced in establishing university libraries in Kenya, *International Journal of Library and Information Science.* 2(8) 148-154.