

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: MEETING THE LEARNING CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The paper examines innovative strategies academic libraries can adopt to address the 21st century learning challenges in Africa. The objective of the study is to identify some innovative strategies academic library can adopt to personalize library services and make library a more motivating learning environment for all category of patrons (students, teachers and researchers). The research questions include: What are the trends in technological innovations in academic libraries? What is the role of leadership in promoting academic library innovative strategies? What strategies can academic library adopt to make the library a more motivating and interesting learning environment for students? How can academic libraries strategize library services to support and encourage effective teaching and research? The paper reveals that library management or leadership is the driver of any meaningful change in an academic library. The changes include technological innovations, that is introduction of new ICT technologies in library will involve organizing training for the library personnel. That academic libraries in Africa can be better repackaged aesthetically using furniture arrangement and colours to demarcate the different section/unit with the sole aim of making the library more interesting and motivating for learning. The paper recommendations include organizing ICT and communication, interpersonal relationship skills for all library among others.

Keywords: Innovations, Leadership, Innovative Strategies, Academic Libraries, Learning challenges, 21st Century, Africa.

1 INTRODUCTION

Libraries' activities are being influenced by different technological innovations of the information explosion century. [1] reported that even the public libraries are influenced by several trends, "evident in the range of innovative services and projects developed by libraries". Nicholson's study portrays innovation as not just technological but in different social models. The 21st century library exists in a technological world of constant update. Like their profit oriented or profit inclined counterparts, that have established that danger of obsolescence lies in holding onto traditional models of achieving organisational set goals, libraries strive to move along modern trends to provide access to their information sources to meet the needs of her users. [2] wrote that academic libraries ready to thrive need to adapt to its external ever evolving environment. In 2012, Jantz summarised scholars' suggestions of the need for libraries and libraries to change. Martel (2000) in [3] entreated Librarians to generate changes that would have been impossible in the last century but compulsory in the 21st century that will create that value added services to its users. Users have a range of seemingly impossible in previous times activities they can carry out in academic libraries, brought about by innovation.

The learning challenges in Africa are numerous and overwhelming. Amongst the several challenges affecting Africa education system is the lack of quality learning and teaching materials [4]. This challenge has contributed in no small measure to the low standard of education in Africa. The falling standard of education in Nigeria for example has been attributed to poor funding among other factors from UNESCO's report [5], reflecting the decayed state of education among African countries. Funding is another critically disturbing affecting effective delivery of quality information services in African academic libraries. The responsibility solely rest on every academic library to provide access to quality information services and resources in diverse formats in support of learning, teaching and research. That is, the 21st century future bound academic library is well positioned to confront every challenge of lack of quality teaching and learning information resources among others in Africa. The expectations of patrons on academic libraries among others is timely and hitch free provision of access to information resources [6]. Thus, this paper focuses on the learning challenges of the 21st century and how academic libraries can contribute to mitigating these challenges.