EVOLVING ROLES AND COMPETENCIES OF REFERENCE AND RESEARCH LIBRARIANS FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NORTH. CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study is on the Evolving Roles and Competencies of Reference and Research Librarians for Effective Services in Academic Libraries in North- Central Nigeria. Reference service has long been recognized as an indispensable part of the functions of a library and information system. It is provided to the users in search of information deemed appropriate to meet their information needs. The new role assumed by the reference librarians, as a result of innovations, would make it imperative for them to provide such reference services as would ensure the maximum use of sources for the benefit of the users. These innovations have deep impact on the roles, competencies, skills and knowledge of library and information professionals. The paper discussed the various competencies for reference and research librarians such as Camtasia, web design and libguides. The paper further enumerated and discusses the various evolving ICT tools for virtual reference services such as; chat softwares, video conferencing software and emails. The paper highlighted the challenges for the acquisition of modern skills for reference and research librarian such as; cost of internet connectivity, poor ICT Infrastructure and lack of ICT skills. The paper also concluded that superb internet connectivity should be made available to allow the librarians make usage of the evolving computer-based applications available for the reference and research librarians. The study further recommended that Librarians should be provided with modern infrastructures to avoid poor utilization of computer-based applications and regular training and retooling should be put in place to constantly allow the librarians to embrace new technology.

Keywords: Competencies, Virtual referencing, Competencies, Reference service, ICT

Introduction

Librarians have traditionally met user education, collection development, and current awareness service obligations, as well as reference service obligations, by devoting physical resources to the provision of information services. Libraries and librarians must consider and comprehend numerous aspects of services that have emerged since the advent of information and communication technology (ICT). Many individuals nowadays utilize the internet as their main source of information, with books being their hindmost haunt owing to time and monetary restraints. (ALA,2017)

A librarian identifies materials to be digitized, clears copyright issues, digitizes, provides metadata, and acquires software to make such resources available, as well as its maintenance in form of digital library. Users can simultaneously search and use the information for teaching, learning and research.

The traditional reference system involves a face-to-face interaction between the librarian and the user. The user poses his queries to the librarian who scrutinizes them through reference interview. Through the user's body language, the librarian is able to obtain clues that could enable him limit the user's needs. On the other hand, reference service in an on-line environment operates quite differently.

Roles of Reference and Research Librarians in the Digital Age

Reference service has long been recognized as an indispensable part of the functions of a library and information system. It is provided to the users in search of information deemed appropriate to meet their information needs. It is personal assistance provided by library staff, particularly the reference librarian. The reference librarian connects the user and the document or/and information. The role of the reference librarian is very important in the process of providing reference service. He/she must not only be highly qualified but should also acquire suitable skills and competencies. The reference librarians should also be able to accept new challenges and opportunities. Reference librarian should accept new opportunities and demonstrate that his/her knowledge and skills can solve a variety of information problems.

In the last decade, libraries have become more sophisticated and more ICT- dependent. In the present times of Internet, where information is available in abundance, the reference librarian no more sits amidst the reference sources waiting for the users to approach him/her. As the world of information is undergoing a rapid change, reference librarians now work with the information by learning about its storage, retrieval, evaluation and dissemination. Development and application of information communication technology is playing a significant role in restructuring the traditional libraries into innovative digital libraries. (Houston,2016).

In addition, there has been shift from; human dependent library operations to machine dependent activities, data processing to knowledge processing; • Stand-alone systems to networked systems, document-centered information to user-centered information, print resources to electronic resources, and online information retrieval to CD-ROM databases. These are some of the shifts which are happening in the library and information profession. These are also changing

their goal is to promote learning, growth, and development in organizations as a whole, as well as in individuals. (Kathleen and Guistini, 2020)

Federal Library and Information Centre Committee Library of Congress FLICC (2008) defined competencies as the skills and abilities that contribute to success in one's specific career. Competencies were linked to performance and the monetary value of the work done. Competencies could also be used to create job descriptions, job advertisements, training and education programs, and performance evaluation programs. According to Federal Librarian Competencies (2008), academic librarians should be acquainted with the consecutive skills in an online setting: apple and Microsoft systems, management systems, serials management software, library integrated systems, a wide range of classroom software applications, e-reserves bibliographic instruction software, and instructional design products.

Competencies are behaviors that excellent performers exhibit consistently and effectively. A behavioral basis is necessary because effective assessment of competencies depends on observed behavior. In order to do their jobs successfully and effectively, librarians should possess a diversity of internet skills. Amidst the competencies were online competencies skills and technology, which was a useful tool for identifying job titles, tasks, and talents (including technology knowledge) (Liu and Briggs, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

According to the UNESCO/IFLA public library 1994 credo, the librarian "is an active mediator between users and resources." To maximize resources and reach as many librarians as possible across the country, librarians should be kept up to date on IFLA policy and standards. The policy requires librarians to acquire competencies as well as additional training through a train the trainer method. New technologies were transforming the services provided by librarians. Librarians, in turn, require new skills to keep up with these new technological developments.

Evolving Competencies of Research and Reference Librarian for effective service delivery

Reference and research librarians should be familiar with library applications and integrated library systems, as well as Camtasia, libguides, and free sources of information or other screen casting software. Important reference technological competencies that reference and research librarians require to possess includes; web design, web maintenance, chat/IM, hardware troubleshooting, and software troubleshooting and online searching. The ability to create learning materials online, extensive knowledge of apple devices, modern/developing trends in technologies and information literacy instruction, collaboration, innovation, digital literacy, critical thinking, communication, and cross-cultural awareness were among the competencies required for instruction and outreach librarians in the twenty-first century librarianship (Jasween, 2020).

According to Bakkar cited in Mole (2023), it is a service that allows librarians and library users to interact with each other through the internet by chat, e-mail or instant messaging. Many reference resources are now in electronic forms and the conventional print materials are now digitally store. Virtual reference service is defined as the provision of reference and information services involving collaboration between user and librarian in a computer-based medium (Mole,2023). Owoeye cited in Mole, (2023) describes virtual reference service as the internet-based question and answer services which connect users with experts in a variety of subject areas

the role of reference librarian. Librarians worldwide have been adjusting to the shifts mentioned above, particularly from the printed era to the digital era. The new role assumed by the reference librarians, as a result of innovations, would make it imperative for them to provide such reference services as would ensure the maximum use of sources for the benefit of the users.

These innovations have deep impact on the roles, competencies, skills and knowledge of library and information professionals. The reference librarian should be able to provide digital reference service 24x7 days regardless of location through e-mail, instant messaging, and video-conferencing, etc. However, as technology continues to develop, different generations of users will be working in different ways. (Mugyabuso, I.J., 2023).

The new role assumed by the reference librarians, as a result of innovations, would make it imperative for them to provide such reference services as would ensure the maximum use of sources for the benefit of the users. These innovations have deep impact on the roles, competencies, skills and knowledge of library and information professionals. These skills and competencies are rooted in the past of librarianship, but obviously they will take the profession far into the future because they are the basis for the continued survival and growth in this information age. Reference service is essentially personal service its quality depends on the knowledge, skills, and personal traits of the person delivering that service. (Laja, 2019).

Reference and research librarians are those who assist, advice and instruct users in accessing all forms of recorded knowledge. The assistance, advice and instruction include both direct and indirect service to patrons. A reference librarian needs to be comfortable and confident with using and learning new technologies. They need to be able to use various software and applications to manage, organize, and disseminate information. Also, they need to be able to use various devices and equipment to access, create, and share information. For example, they must need to use scanners, printers, copiers, tablets, e-readers, or cameras. They also need to be aware of the trends and innovations in information technology, and how they affect their profession and that of their users, virtually all aspects of library operation are affected by Information and Communication Technology. For example, libraries have moved from card catalogues to on-line catalogues. With so many changes in the practice of librarianship, reference service has also changed. Today, librarians not only help their users at the reference desk but also in cyber space (Achebe 2010).

Furthermore, virtual reference, digital reference, e-reference are newer internet reference Information services. This technology mediated reference service and has emerged as a result of various factors among which are the advent and wide use of the internet and asynchronous services. (Ezema and Ugwuanyi, 2014).

Many professions use competency outlines to improve individual and organizational achievement as well as to offer a foundation for future workforce planning. Competencies are frequently made up of lists or clusters of information, abilities, and mindsets that define and contribute to professional success. Libraries, for example, attempt to go beyond adaptation in their surroundings to foster types of generative ("active") learning that increase the capacity to create and develop competency mindsets that enable generative learning which are regarded as vital since

Camtasia

Camtasia is a video editing and recording software that allows users to capture their computer screen, webcam, and audio. It can be used to create a variety of videos, including tutorials, demonstrations, and lectures. Camtasia offers a range of features, including: Screen recording: Capture your screen, camera, mic, and system audio as separate tracks, editing tools: Add transition effects, text callouts, and other media components, interactive videos: Add quizzes to assess understanding and provide feedback, templates, use templates to create videos, PowerPoint integration, record directly from Microsoft PowerPoint Asset library: Access icons, intro templates, motion backgrounds, music tracks, and more

Captioning: Automatically create caption files from your video's transcription Camtasia is available for Windows and Mac computers, and is available in multiple languages.

Camtasia redefines screen recording with industry-leading clarity, capturing screen, camera, mic, and system audio as independent. (Nancy, 2017)

1. **Screen recording:** Capture your screen, camera, mic, and system audio as separate tracks
2. **Editing tools:** Add transition effects, text callouts, and other media components
3. **Interactive videos:** Add quizzes to assess understanding and provide feedback
4. **Templates:** Use templates to create videos
5. **PowerPoint integration:** Record directly from Microsoft PowerPoint
6. **Asset library:** Access icons, intro templates, motion backgrounds, music tracks, and more
7. **Captioning:** Automatically create caption files from your video's transcription

Camtasia is available for Windows and Mac computers, and is available in multiple languages. Camtasia is a recording software that allows you to record and clip whatever is happening on your screen: perfect for filming webinars or video tutorials.

Web design

Web design encompasses many different skills and disciplines in the production and maintenance of websites. The different areas of web design include web graphic design; user interface design (UI design); authoring, including standardized code and proprietary software; user experience design (UX design); and search engine optimization. Often many individuals will work in teams covering different aspects of the design process, although some designers will cover them all.[1] The term "web design" is normally used to describe the design process relating to the front-end (client side) design of a website including writing markup. Web design partially overlaps web engineering in the broader scope of web development. Web designers are expected to have an awareness of usability and be up to date with web accessibility guidelines.(Mole,2023)

Components of Reference and Research Librarians

Here are some components of research and instruction librarians' work:

1. **Assignment design and consultation**

Librarians can help students design assignments that encourage information, data, and digital literacy. They can also create customized research sessions to meet the needs of students.

2. **Information literacy**

Information literacy is a major component of research literacy in education. It helps students develop the ability to acquire knowledge and participate in projects.

3. **Research guides**

Library staff can create research guides that provide overviews of topics, organize resources, and provide procedural information for conducting research.

4. **Evaluating sources**

Evaluating sources is an important aspect of research. It helps students critically analyze the accuracy, reliability, validity, authority, point of view, or bias of sources.

5. **Literature Reviews**

Literature reviews are an essential component of research. They help identify gaps in knowledge, provide direction for future research, and support or challenge research questions or hypotheses.

6. **References**

Referencing is an essential part of writing research or scientific papers. All sources of information should be referred to from the text and cited in the reference section.

Related Researches

According to Bolton (2014), libraries in Africa should integrate mobile phone services to their resources. It is particularly critical when it comes to the information literacy through an outreach campaign or text reference. Several academic and research libraries is still striving to find librarians who have understood technologies used for electronic information. Academic libraries now offer online reference services, individual consultations, chat services, email, and numerous social network services to suit this evolving demand. Emiri (2015),

Role of ICT in Virtual Reference Services

Information and Communication Technology has enabled libraries to offer virtual reference services, such as chat, email and video call referencing, providing patron with in remote access to library staff for assistant and support. Through information communication technology, there are several tools used for virtual reference services, including;

1. **Chat Software:** Libraries can use chat software to provide real-time assistance to users.

Some commonly used chat software includes library answer, spring share, question point.

2. **Email:** Libraries can offer email reference services where users can send their questions and receive answers via email.

3. **Video Conferencing Software:** Libraries can use video conferencing software like Zoom or Skpe to provide face-to-face assistance to users remotely.

4. **Text Messaging:** Libraries can use text messaging services to provide quick and easy assistance to users via mobile devices.

Challenges of Evolving roles and Competencies of Reference and Research Librarians

1. **Cost of internet connectivity:** In a developing country like Nigeria where students are used to a system where library use is free for the virtual library may be problematic.

2. **Poor infrastructure:** The cost of internet may be compounded by the enormity of funds needed to establish and maintain a virtual library in a country where ICT infrastructure is poorly developed.

3. **Low ICT skills:** Many students do not have information literacy skills to assist them to understand and use various information sources.

4. **Poor information literacy skills:** Many students do not have information literacy skills to assist them to understand and use various information sources. (Adayi, 2019)

Conclusion

The subject of ICT in libraries and other field appear to have been over-flogged, but even if it is so, it is worth it. The phenomenon has become a way of life and any attempt to boycott is at one's peril. Greater attention must be paid to the universities, particularly the libraries which are the life line of the universities. With a sustained financial investment for: networking of university libraries, provision of virtual libraries, training of skilled manpower, provision of necessary infrastructures and proper management, the Nigerian universities and indeed the society will be lifted out of the doldrums. Any society that fails to invest in information will sooner than latter pay dearly for it. The effectiveness of digital reference services in academic libraries can be enhanced through deliberate actions by all stakeholders in the academic system, which include following measures; Adequate funding of academic libraries by government in order to facilitate the acquisition of relevant Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools for enhanced digital reference services provision. This is because the academic libraries require ICT tools to function in a digital environment where digital reference services are parameter for users' satisfaction.

such as law. This service are designed to provide quick and convenient access to information resources and support to users who may not be able to visit physical library or who prefer to seek help remotely.

Libguides

Libguides is the most popular, most flexible content management & curation platform for libraries. It is a flexible platform for creating and sharing guides, maintaining A-Z lists, and publishing blogs. LibGuides offers additional powerful features for customizing, managing, and organizing content.

Key LibGuides Features includes; building an unlimited number of guides, helps to share library-specific reusable assets to easily share catalog items, A-Z databases, and other media, built-in modern blogging tool, fully customizable, multi-lingual look & feel options and profile boxes that highlight librarians' subject expertise, subject, topic and course guides such as; Create curated guides to help patrons start library research. Promote library content and resources and embed guides at the point of need. Embedding targeted library content into your courseware platform at scale is easy with the LibGuides CMS LTI tool.

Additionally, the LibGuides A-Z tool increases database visibility and usage with robust browsing and search options for the database content. Promote and embed subject-specific databases on other pages, manage database trials, highlight new database additions, and more. (Okoli,U.G. 2021)

Information Literacy and Library Instruction

1. Build targeted guides for library instruction programs. Enhance information literacy programs with relevant guides to help connect users with library content. Embed media-rich content to supplement library teaching. Combine with LibWizard for even more library instruction features.

2. Create and maintain websites and blogs. Create library websites that fully match your institution's branding and domain. Our SEO techniques ensure your LibGuides web pages are indexed and highly ranked by all major search engines. APIs allow ingesting of LibGuides content into your discovery layer.

3. Build Cloud-based, secure staff intranet: Integrate with our LibAuth layer which plugs into your ID/authentication platform for fine-tuned access to LibGuides content. Staff can collaborate building and organizing institutional knowledge in one, secure content platform.

4. LTI Connector for LMS Integration: With our LTI integration, you can map your LibGuides content to courses at your institution, so students automatically see the targeted course content you create in LibGuides right alongside their other LMS content, automatically.

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