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# THE ROLE OF LIBRARIANS AS EDUCATORS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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## Abstract

This paper examined the role of the librarian as an educator in the age of globalization. It explored the phenomenal change called globalization, exposing its influence on higher education and information services, especially on the teaching role of librarians. The paper identified and explained the challenges facing librarians in their capacities as educators in the age of globalization. It also highlighted the skill-set which the 21st century librarian needs to acquire. Recommendations such as co-operation and collaboration with national and international organizations; librarian-faculty partnership in imparting information literacy; and the adoption of innovative methods and variety of teaching strategies are made to enable librarian perform effectively as educators in a globalised library environment.

**Key Words:** Librarian, educator, Information Communication Technologies, globalization, information literacy.

#### Introduction

Librarianship is a dynamic, service oriented profession which responds to both gradual and drastic change taking place in the world. Thus, as the world metamorphoses from agrarian to industrial and then to information society; the profession changes from traditional to automated and then to digital form in terms of tools and methods of operation. A significant development which led to changes in librarianship is globalization, a phenomenon which is propelled by the adoption of such information technologies as the Internet, Prior to the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), librarians operated within the physical list paradigm performing their functions manually and their users had to visit their libraries physically to benefit from their services. At that time, librarians acquired, processed, circulated, stored, retrieved and disseminated information using manual methods.

With the introduction of ICTs in librarianship, librarians began to work with computers. Some of their operations began to be computerized- and automated. With the emergence of the internet came the influx of information both relevant and irrelevant. Both librarians and library users were taken aback by the quantity of information on the net. These changes affected the role of librarians in no small measure. They had to assume many roles which include information management, research, knowledge analysis and education in a global context. As a result the information needs of the users became more sophisticated. The librarians teaching role also became more complex. The librarian then became an educator in a globalized learning environment. The scope of his clientele expanded and his method of serving them also changed. He began to cope with the changing information needs of both old and new library users, and even had foreign users or distant learners to attend to. The duty of teaching users how to navigate the information superhighway became quite demanding. Martell (2003) observes that librarians were overwhelmed by the responsibility of teaching users how to navigate the internet and how to evaluate the quality of information they find. Librarians constructed extensive websites in their subject areas to guide users through a proliferation of sites. The internet prepared the ground for globalization because it enhanced users' access to information all over the world. Users became exposed to international communication and scholarship (internationalization). The number of library users increased tremendously, the number of computers in libraries multiplied, institutions and organizations began to establish hybrid libraries, that is, a situation where traditional libraries co-exist with digital libraries. Librarians had to learn to manipulate electronic resources and teach users how to do same. Describing the situation McSwiney (2005) observes that the traditional role of the librarian has moved from parochial to global. This is true because -they have to handle clients who are digitally conscious and highly exposed to collaborative activities and international scholarship, thereby demanding access to current information resources available all over the world and moreover demanding to know the various strategies to be used in identifying, locating and using information resources both in print and electronic format either off line or on-line. These therefore mean lots of challenges for the educator - librarian. This paper is an attempt to examine the role of the librarian as an educator in the age of globalization.

## Literature Review

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2003) defines globalization as the process by which the experiences of everyday life, marked by the diffusion of commodities and ideas is becoming standardized around the world. An extreme interpretation of this process, often referred to as globalism sees advanced capitalism boosted by wireless and internet communications and electronic business transactions, destroying local traditions and regional distinctions, creating in then-place a homogenized world culture. It is being promoted by the use of the various ICTs like the internet, e-mail, fax, telephone, televisions and radio et cetera.

Rawat and Kumar (2002) defines a librarian as a person who has charge of the contents of a library, making the stock and library services available to those who need them or are entitled to them. This is a traditional definition of librarian. With the advent of new information technologies, the librarians' role in the age of globalization will be redefined. Mbakwe (2010) observes that the function of librarians will no longer be keepers of collections alone but also finders, organizers, and suppliers of network services for digital information resources. There is a shift from the traditional intermediary role between publishers and. users, to the intermediary new role of matching the needs of users to availability of knowledge contained in information resources, irrespective of where and in what form these resources are available.

The new Webster's Dictionary (2004) defines an educator as a teacher, Bradley (2003) defines educator as a special type of teacher. The "teacher" here is special because the teacher is not concerned with "giving content" or "covering curriculum" as often expected and demanded of teaching staff in the regular academic system. The librarian as an educator is interested in inculcating such special skills as information literacy skills rather than delivering conventional lectures.

Reitz (2005) defines information literacy (IL) as skills in finding the information one needs, including an understanding of how libraries are organized, familiarities with the resources they provide (including information formats and automated search tools) and knowledge of commonly used research techniques. The concept also includes the skills required to critically evaluate information content and employ it effectively, as well as an understanding of the technological infrastructure on which information transmissions is based, including its social, political and cultural context and impact.

Writing on the influence of globalization on higher Education, Echezona, Ezema and Asogwa-Eze (2009) observed that globalization is a process that affects almost all facets of life. It affects the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of life in many nations of the world. Its influence on higher education is enormous. It should be noted that the major characteristics of globalization are integration, liberalization and privatization. They identified some of the changes which globalization brought to higher education.

- Increase in the number of students all over the world. This includes both indigenous and foreign students. This implies more library users for the librarian to handle.
- Globalization offered new perspectives to solving educational problems.
- Education is now more concerned with critical thinking and self directed learning opportunities which will serve the individual over a life time.
- Globalization provides the platform for international competitive educational systems.
- Globalization enhances global education for both academics and students.

When globalization is discussed in relation to information services, it means a way of transmitting information and learning and a way of disseminating and acquiring knowledge globally. Writing on the impact of globalization on information services, Makori (2009) observes that information work has not only increased tremendously in terms of products and services but also in terms of global players and distribution channels, information products are now available in masses from multiple sources. Echezona, Ezema and Asogwa-Eze (2009) also posit that for researchers, globalization has opened up a wider horizon for them not only in Nigeria but also in other developing countries. Internationalization of resources has permitted researchers and scholars with different culture and locations to showcase what is obtainable in their environment. Scholars in Nigeria can as a result of globalization today access simultaneously resources in other universities without travelling to the physical locations.

Makori (2009) observes that all these development have increased competition among, the global information players that only the best will survive by being effective in operating marketing and creation of products and services. Globalization provides expanded opportunities in information services. For information professionals, the biggest challenge is on how to exploit the potentials of ICT systems to manage global

information services effectively. Mbakwe (2010) observes that the role of librarians as both user educator and intermediary is prevalent in this changing environment. The present day librarian should possess personal and transferable skills in order to manage the changing environment in which he/she works. Librarian will manage network resources and services most effectively if they have management and interpersonal skills.

## The Librarian as an Educator in Global Context

The Librarian has always been an educator to library clients even in the traditional library settings where he acts as guide to users and gives them user education training. Globalization has however, expanded his role and made it more complex and gave him clients all over the world. His teaching role is no longer limited by distance and time. He now deals with people with diverse cultural backgrounds. Globalization made library users become more exposed to international scholarship and global scholarly communication. Apart from demanding enhanced access, great speed, accuracy, and state of the art facilities; they request to be taught how to do the search themselves. Those who already have an idea want to perfect their skills. And most of them expect the librarian to provide such direction and assistance. Librarians now have to serve changing populations of students both in their institutions and other institutions around the world. The question is how would librarians perform the function of educators' in a global context effectively?

Librarians would need to internationalize their perspectives, adapt to new colleagues, new settings and new clients, new institutions as globalization tends to bring all tertiary institutions in the world into one. He therefore needs to adopt new methods of delivering information, or example, Networked learner Support (NLS). A library educator in service delivery in a global context teaches clients how to find information both in the physical library and over electronic networks. The librarian does this by keeping clients informed about library stock through a wide information network such as reference files, catalogues, bibliographies and bulletins Cassel: (1999). A librarian working as an educator in the information industry can also play other roles:

He can work as an information scientist if he acquires the skills of organizing knowledge into systems and structures that facilitate the productive use of knowledge resources. He can help to streamline the knowledge policies structures, processes and systems that will promote learning in an organization. The Librarian can work as a

researcher. Ukachi (2010) describes the librarian-researcher as one who has the skill of has the skill of identifying, locating and obtaining publication not owned or leased by the library. It is a library's duty to know that each additional source can be queried to make a search. The librarian uses own experience and technological skills to locate information.

The librarian can also work as a website builder and publishers. The traditional skill of a librarian in locating, evaluating and organizing information is of immense use in the creation development and content filling of a website for the organization and the library. The role of a librarian while creating a web page is to deliver information about the library and it's services such as, hours of services, location of services, details of library staff and library policies. He should also act as an interface to the library Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). The Librarian can also serve as an Interface designer. He can help in the design of technology-based information services and share their intimate knowledge of what users want and need as they have years of experience in helping patrons utilize electronic media and subsequently using internet and World Wide Web. He can also work as a facilitator. A librarian addresses the communication and information needs of the users in one way or the other and makes an identification of resources for fulfilling the needs of users.

## **Information Literacy in Libraries**

Evans (1999) classifies information literacy into informal instruction and formal instruction.

- **Informal Instruction**: This is sometimes called one-on-one instruction. It is the kind of informative help usually provided by the reference staff. It is sometimes quite detailed and often referred to as the most effective instruction, but it usually occurs "on demand" at the point at which a client wants or needs to use a library source.
- **Formal instruction:** This includes library tours and orientations for groups, formal classroom instruction within a school or academic institution, and workshops or tutorials for groups or individuals. Formal instruction includes library orientations and torus, classroom presentations, collaborative learning, tutorials, computer assisted instruction and electronic classrooms.

## Challenges Facing librarians as Educator in a Global Context

The pressure of globalization has led to an expansion of the activities of librarians especially in their role as educator and they are facing several challenges. The major ones are as follows:

- a. Lack of Computer Literacy and Information Literacy: some librarians suffer from either computer illiteracy or information illiteracy or both. Some have refused to take the bull by the horn by making effort to obtain training in both computer literacy and information literacy. Librarians cannot give what they do not have.
- b. Challenge of Acquiring New skills and Teaching Strategies: Librarians need new perspectives and skills training to operate effectively within a dynamic international context. Nimon (2001) as cited in Linda Becker (2006) states that as the use of new internationally based technology became widespread, the skills and ability to access, evaluate and use meaningful content became ever more important. Librarians would have to take responsibility along with teaching academics for providing those skills. Librarians have needs to acquire expertise knowledge of e- learning in teaching pedagogies before they can teach information literacy successfully.
- c. Constantly changing Technology and Lack of Standardization of Hardware and Software: The environment in which librarians work are changing in terms of greater complexity in locating, analyzing and linking information, constantly changing technology and adaptation, lack of standardization of both hardware and software, continuous learning for users and staff, and management of financial investment for technology.
- d. Poor Infrastructural Facilities: Librarians in developing countries experience some levels of frustration in the course of discharging their duties due to poor infrastructural facilities. For instance, in Nigeria, the telecommunication facilities are still not well developed. Lack of sufficient funding also make institutions not to procure the desired facilities for the libraries.

## Basic Skill-Set for Librarians as Educators in a Global Context

To function effectively in the age of new technologies, a librarian is expected to possess the following skills:

• Computer Literacy Skill: this involves understanding and operating the computer. Reitz (2005:b) defines it as the skill required to retrieve information

efficiently and communicate effectively using computer hardware and software, based on conceptual understanding of computer technology and how it can be used to accomplish specific task, including an awareness of its inherent limitations as well as its advantages.

- Information Skill: This is the ability to locate, evaluate and use needed information effectively. It forms the basis for lifelong learning.
- Network Literacy Skills: This, according to Ezeani (2010) is higher than technical and computer literacy skills. It includes networking skill, general internet skill, internet skill, desktop publishing skill, content development and digitization skill, web-based services and virtual learning skills.

#### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to enable librarians operate as educators in a global context.

- a. Acquire training in information and communication technologies
- b. Adopt innovative teaching methods e.g. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI).
- c. Acquire teaching knowledge and study the theories of learning to be able to handle various types of learners.
- d. Attend conferences, seminars and workshops on teaching methods
- e. Take active part in distance education
- f. Train students to train their fellow students.
- g. Encourage personal contacts with learners.
- h. Vie for grants for library support and facilities.
- i. Attach importance to librarian faculty partnership III imparting information literacy skills.
- j. Adopt marketing, advertising and public relation strategies to attract users.

## Conclusion

Globalization has influenced both higher education and information service dictating more demanding and complex roles for librarians who had to take up more teaching responsibilities. Librarians therefore need to be proactive in this age of digitization of information. They do not need to fear loss of job or resist change because even in the era of immediate self instruction especially with online tools, there is still need for someone to show people how to use technology effectively. Librarians should acquire the necessary skill-set and learn the various information literary strategies such as stimulation, variety, use of concrete specific information and use of personal contact.

They (users) are impressed by people and organization which they feel care about them. Librarians therefore need to learn the new tools, methods and strategies which have evolved in this information age. They should face the challenges of playing the expanded role of educator in a globalized information environment and serve users in a way that show they care for them. Librarians are the pathfinders in this global village. They must master the paths and show users how to move through preferably in an atmosphere characterized by conviviality.

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