Roles and emerging trends of academic libraries in Kenya

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Introduction: state of academic libraries in Kenya

The disruption of technology and remote learning have created new shifts into digital access and practice. Stirling (1983),Varlot (1983) and Rolland (1984) as cited by Diouf (2013) in earlier studies noted that reflecting on the trends of libraries have currently become a requirement for librarians and others, under the changing environment in the publications market which remains and will remain dominated by newer technologies. The advancement of information communication technology can be highly related to the explosive change and emerging trends in academic libraries.

Academic libraries have always stood out as an integral institute or organ of universities, usually referred to as the symbol of truth and success; as such, university libraries play a great role in universities. In Kenya, the establishment of academic libraries dates back to 1951 during the Royal Technical College, the present University of Nairobi. Academic libraries in Kenya are established together with the parent organization and, hence, are meant to serve the information needs of their parent organization. Most university libraries rely on their parents' organizations for funds and support in order for them to offer effective service delivery to their clients. The funds are meant to purchase information materials, subscriptions to journals and databases, staff recruitment and promotion and also the expansion of library services. Currently, Kenya has over 60 academic libraries from the same number of universities. The huge number of academic libraries has necessitated the competition of resources, increased staff brain drain and also accelerated the introduction of Library and Information

Science degree programs in most universities to cater to the high demand. However, the huge competition of academic libraries has had negative repercussions on the smaller universities or college libraries that suffer from minimal funding. With the competition among academic libraries, some services such as interlibrary lending cease to be considered or offered. It is however contrary to note that academic libraries are currently trying to establish a union catalogue of all academic libraries in Kenya.

Academic libraries are mandated to perform various tasks; most of the tasks currently being performed by academic libraries are slightly new and different from the initial tasks due to either advanced in new technology, improved staff training programs, diversification of information resources and change of user needs. One of the main roles of academic libraries is supporting teaching and learning at the institution. This is done through providing, for all academic programs, varied, authoritative and up-to-date information resources, which facilitate teaching, learning and research together with community service for all categories of users. Dewey (2009) notes that academic libraries are seen as having a crucial role in lifelong student success for critical thinking and the ability to assess the information needed in the classroom and beyond. As such, academic libraries are avenues through which they enhance lifelong learning and acquisition of pedagogic skills. How do academic libraries do this? They ensure adequate resources in various formats for all programs and to all lecturers and learners. Academic libraries have a role to maintain high-level service and ensure sustainability; it is the duty of academic libraries to ensure the functionality of their services is continuous and sustainable that the

services are offered without any disruptions to their clients. Asante and Ngulube (2020) allude that the goal of academic libraries is always to maintain a level of service quality and ensure its sustainability to satisfy readers. As academic libraries are service-driven entities, they should ensure that the services offered to library users are of great quality and meet the library users' needs and demands. It is the role of academic libraries to establish, promote and sustain quality services that will facilitate teaching, learning and research.

Just as S.R Ranganathan (1931) had indicated that a library is a growing organism, it is the duty of the academic library to ensure that innovation or adoption of new technology is done and continuous upgrades are achieved. In the current period and time where we are faced with the problem of information explosion and information overload, academic libraries should always ensure they are on par with the changes in technology, lest they find themselves overtaken by advanced technology and be redundant. Simpson (2018) notes that libraries are responsible for ensuring that their function and roles are suitable and beneficial to their patrons, and this should either be through the adoption of technology or hiring new staff. A good example of the adoption of technology that assisted academic libraries is the automation of library management systems and also the digitization of information resources, which has been a great benefit in prompt access to the library's collection and resources. Academic libraries are mandated to offer a multifunctional environment within the library space; with the increased access of information resources on the Web, academic libraries are not only confined to providing physical books. In fact,

paradigm shift alludes that the academic library is in the space and concept of a library without walls being used to describe the new form of academic libraries.

Aduba *et al*. (2020) denote that the increase of digital connectivity has made the academic library's role to offer various learning environments, both physical and virtual. Academic libraries have a role to participate in national development; unlike the ancient years when library staff were merely paraprofessionals, the current librarians in Kenya are classified in the academic division of the university, and their employment ranks are compared and equated with the teaching staff. The University Librarian is equated to a full professor with his/her deputy as an associate professor; as such, they too are required to participate in national development by conducting research and publications. The academic libraries can also participate in national development by ensuring that adequate information resources are available in various formats that will be easily accessible to researchers within their wider academic community. University libraries help to promote academic and national development by providing information to users who use it to conduct research (Twum *et al*., 2020). Academic libraries also offer research support, which is one of the main metrics by which universities are measured. As such, universities normally have a keen interest in improving their research output and impact (Si *et al*., 2019). The above roles of academic libraries are some of the major roles that have an impact on the academic library as an integral organ of the university; otherwise, other roles that the academic library play include budgeting and resources allocation, user education, training, information processing, staff training and recruitment and knowledge access and organization, which are basically route duties and have limited value in regards to the discussion in this paper.

Emerging trends of academic libraries

There has been dramatic changes in academic libraries in the last decade.

However, the uptake of the emerging trends has been slow in developing countries because of various reasons; nevertheless, with digitization and globalization, some emerging trends have been inevitable. The emerging trends discussed in this article cut across advanced technology uptake and also skills and competency; this is due to the fact that personnel is the drivers of technologies. Over the years, we have noticed that there has been a trend of change management adoption, especially in university libraries in Kenya; the change in management has either been based on an acquisition of prerequisite education level, which is a Ph.D. at the university librarian level, or possession of adequate skills at the lower level. Librarians in Kenya are no longer considered as mere disseminators of information but also as trainers; with the current information overload, there is a need for frequent information literacy training to library users (Williams and Zald, 1997); possession of adequate digital and information skill is mandatory. The introduction of advanced technology and a variety of information in digital formats has made the academic library a great opportunity for tech-savvy librarians. Musangi *et al*. (2019) points out the importance of new skills for new leadership; they emphasize that top-level management plays a great fundamental role in an organization because of the fact that he/she is the one who defines and drives the organization towards achieving the set goals. The Kenya Commission of University education equally gives emphasis on the education level of library staff with appropriate possession of training, which is either PhD degree, master's degree or Diploma/certificate. Currently, Kenya is experiencing a huge mushrooming of universities offering bachelor, Masters and Ph.D. degrees in library and information sciences.

Just a decade ago, only one university in Kenya was offering a PhD in Library and Information Science degree and that was Moi University. This mushrooming of universities in Kenya has made Kenya boost by having approximately 17 universities offering library and information studies at different levels. Nakitare *et al*. (2020) says that more universities and colleges

are offering library studies courses at both lower and higher levels due to high demand; this point can also be supported from our earlier discussion on the various roles of academic libraries in Kenya. Traditionally, academic libraries have always been considered as spenders, i.e. non-generators of funds in the university; however, with the currently insufficient funds in universities and common budget cuts, academic libraries have been forced to focus on ways of generating their own funds. Kavulya (2004) notes that funding of most universities has been reduced; hence, libraries need to either seek funds from other sources or come up with new initiatives that use fewer funds. Friend (2008) points out that with the dwindling funding and high budget cuts, libraries are tasked to raise funds to support some of their services; in short, the lack of funds is transforming academic libraries into fundraisers and advocators. This trend is slowly being visible in Kenyan academic libraries such as, for instance, the University of Nairobi library generates funds through short courses on bookbinding; the Bachelors' and Masters' degrees are offered by the university library. In other universities, the academic libraries manage the bookshop, operate the university press, reprographic services, etc. However, most recently, academic libraries have also started getting involved in writing for grants competitions, organization of conferences, seminars, conducting consultancy services especially on information communication technology and automation matters among other activities just to ensure that they are self-sufficient. Gremmels (2013) asserts that librarians are moving away from being custodians of information and now assuming the role of information consultants and educators.

With the huge availability of information resources on the internet, the academic libraries are mandated to justify their existence and role in the university; as such, this has led to the concept of advocacy and marketing; academic libraries are no longer comfort zones; they are required to market their services to their users so as to ensure maximum utilization of all the acquired and subscribed resources. Advocacy on the other hand is done to justify the existence and need for

continuous support. Friend (2008) notes that advocacy and marketing is done for awareness and also for justifying library role and for seeking funds. Academic libraries being a user-centred organ of the university have to ensure that the needs of their users are met; with the advancement in technology, most library users are on various social media platform, for instance, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and LinkedIn. This trend has necessitated academics to equally adopt the streaming media and use of Web 2.0 systems in the library so as to reach a wider audience of users. However, in most academic libraries, the system is not fully integrated with the library system to enable it to offer immediate feedback, but it is rather used for updates and communication, which in essence also serves the users' curiosity. Ondieki Makori (2012) and Baro et al. (2014) also support the use and adoption of Web 2.0 systems in the provision of library services.

With the advancement of technology and also with the provision of electronic books and electronic journals, the library is slowly moving into a wall-less library. According to Andrews et al. (2016), they term this a transformation of library from place to library as a platform, i.e. the adoption of the concept of libraries without walls. With the introduction of mobile phones and smart devices, academic libraries have also been able to adopt some of their services to be used using the smart devices, for example, the introduction of QR codes in the library searches and access of information; the smart devices are also used to access library resources just as can be used by computers. This concept has equally relieved the academic libraries from spending extract funds on purchasing of computers for internet access or for online public access catalogues (OPAC) access. Hamad et al. (2018) support the concept and say that

libraries have started using phone applications to either access books or for OPAC services.

Academic libraries have also started transforming into open access initiatives; this transition is where universities through their digital repositories allow free global access of the published resources by either themselves or by their staff. However, the open access initiative has more benefits to the universities as it allows visibility of the institution and in return raises the particular university global visibility rankings. Nakitare et al. (2020). More institutions are adopting open access initiatives through the use of open access policies and also adopting institutional repositories. The open access initiatives have been made possible through the adoption of a digitization system that most universities have adopted. With the increase of digitization of information resources, most academic libraries are

Figure 1. *Emerging trends*
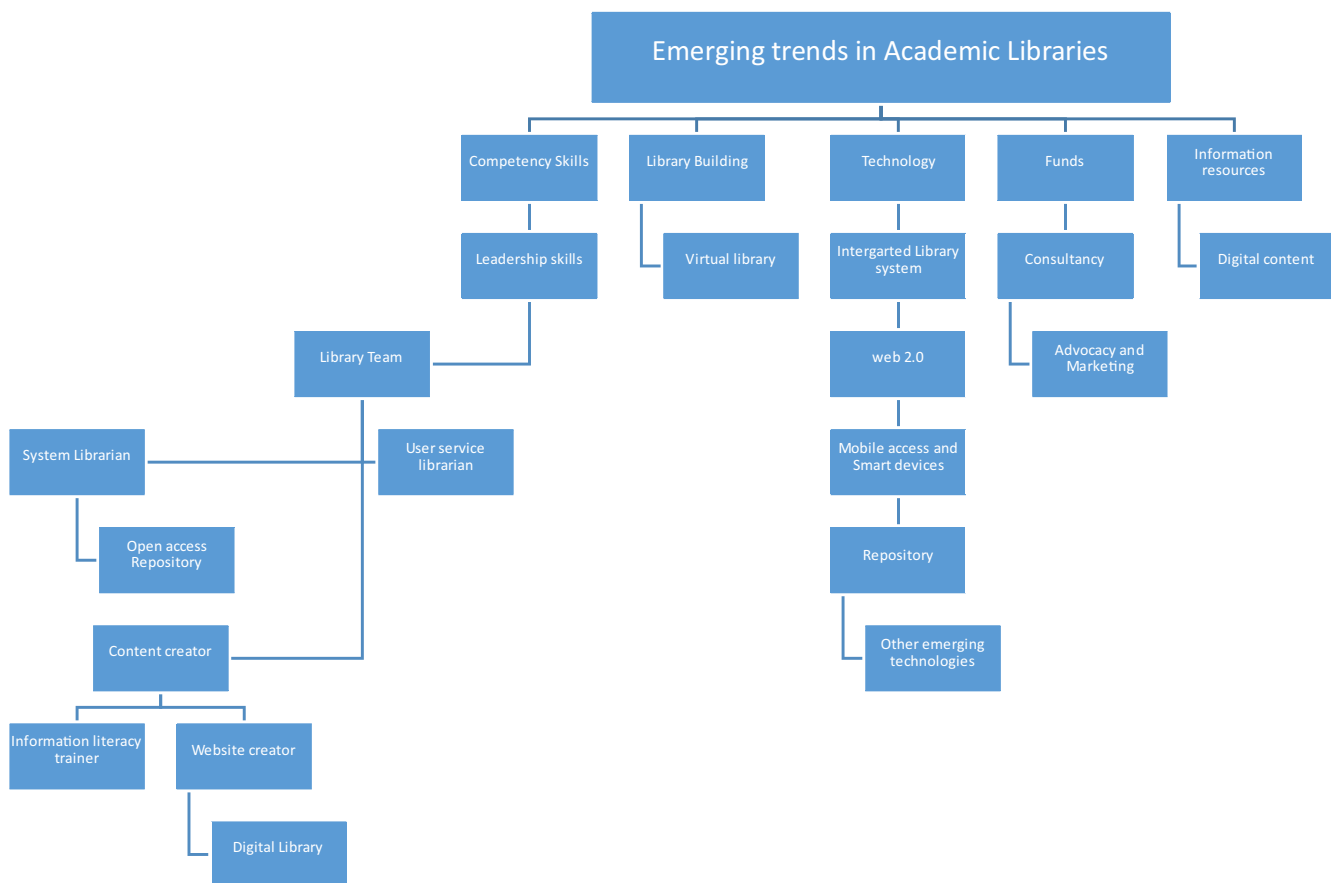
currently developing digital libraries that are meant to assist library users to access digital content. In Kenya, the Commission of University education has set guidelines that encourage the creation of digital libraries within the library. Owusu-Ansah (2020) supports the concept of establishing digital libraries within the libraries for accessing electronic resources. However, with the adoption of mobile phones and smart devices for access to library resources, the digital library lifespan will be short-lived soon.

The academic library is also adopting various technology to assist in the smooth management and access of library resources. Makori (2016) and Mutula (2001) both allude that with the evolving automation and integrated library systems available in the market, most institutions are adopting integrated automation systems that are user-friendly and have multiple search strategies. Moruf and Dangani (2020) also note that there are various emerging library technologies such as Bibliographic Citation Management Software, Instructional System Design Software, Electronic Copyright Management System, Classroom Management Software, Library Automation Software and electronic Resource Management Software.

The above figure (Figure 1) summarizes the emerging trends in academic libraries in Kenya; from the table, the four main emerging trends are training and competency skills, library access, advanced technology, funds and information resources, which affect the other specifics as had been explained earlier.

Conclusion

Academic libraries are not static just as mentioned by S.R Ranganathan (1931) described in his five laws of library science; they are a growing organism. Though the emerging trends in academic libraries in Kenya has been slow, which can be construed to various factors such as lack of funds, lack of support by various university management, lack of a policy that guides the adoption of emerging trends and also unskilled staff, we are still seeing tremendous advances and improvement in Kenya as compared to other academic libraries within Africa. For proper utilization of the various advanced technology, it is imperative for academic libraries to consider integrating technological systems into conventional information resources and services.

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