

Libraries and the new media age: Strategies for creating learning commons among University libraries in south-south Nigeria

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Abstract

The new media has significantly changed the way many things are done in the society. The library is no different. Therefore, this study determined the strategies for creating learning commons for university libraries from South-South Nigeria. The researcher also examined the problems associated with the creation and utilisation of learning commons. Survey research design was used for the study while the sample size was 1640, made up of the 100 librarians and 1540 library users. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection while mean and standard deviation were used in the analysis of data for the study. The result showed that strategies for creating learning commons for university libraries from South-South Nigeria range from the effective use of people, technologies, and services, which are the three components of e-learning theory. Even the problems militating against the creation of library learning commons revolve around these components. Based on the result of this study, the research concludes that the creation of effective library learning commons must be done within the lances of e-learning theory to achieve the desired results.

Keywords: *library, new media, creating, learning commons, and strategies*

Introduction

Advancements in technologies have led to the emergence of the new media. The main power of the new media is the Internet. McQuail (2005,p.39-40), states that in respect of the emergence of any new medium, “we can at least recognise the claim of the Internet(and World Wide Web) to be considered as a medium in its own right on the ground of its now extensive diffusion.” The expression ‘new media’ has been in use since the 1960s and has had to encompass an expanding and diversifying set of applied communication technologies. Lievrouw and Livingstone cited in McQuail (2005:38) aver that it is difficult to explain what the ‘new media’ comprises. They choose to define them in a composite way, linking information communication technologies (ICT) with their associated social contexts, bringing together the three elements: technology artefacts and devices, activities, practices and uses, and social arrangements and organizations that form around devices and practices. They define new media based on the essential features which are concerned with; the main ones who seem to be: their

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interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as the sender and receivers, their interactivity, their multiplicity of use and open-ended character, and their ubiquity and delicateness.' The features of the new media as explained above define the 21st-century library.

Although the mission of the library had largely remained the same, the means of fulfilling this mission have dramatically changed. As libraries modernise, they face an increasingly harsh budget environment. The political, social and technological environments are one of transformation and uncertainty. To address this paradigm shift, libraries have been forced to implement extensive physical creations. These creations are additions to the libraries designed to address the decline of user statistics brought about by the repaid expansion and explosion of information and the Internet. These creations are the library commons. The Library of the future (that is future libraries) have been described as "Portal through which students and faculty will access the vast amount of information resources in the world and less a place where information is kept" as focus shifts from ownership of information to access to and management of information (Wood & Walther 2010, p. 7). Libraries are now developing electronic models to meet the new demands of users while also maintaining their role as centres of information. One of the features of 21st-century libraries is learning commons.

The increased use of the term learning commons had become apparent by 1994 when the University of Southern California hosted a national conference titled "Information Commons: Learning Space Beyond the Classroom". Beagle's white paper for this conference proposed a developmental pathway "From Information Commons to Learning Commons, based on a typology of change adapted from research by the American Council on Education. This white paper defined an information commons as a library-centric cluster of network access points and associated IT tools situated in the context of physical digital, human, and social resources organised in support of learning". Learning Commons, by contrast, was no longer library-centric, as when the resources of the information commons are organised in collaboration with learning initiatives sponsored by other academic units, or aligned with learning outcomes defined through a cooperative process (Beagle, 2004). Since the late 1990s, hundreds of Learning Commons have developed and morphed in response to Web 2.0 technologies and the continuous evolution of libraries and librarians' functions. Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, social networking sites, video sharing sites and web applications, have radically impacted the way that information is exchanged and engaged in. Learning Commons takes these technologies into consideration and then adapts to provide the best possible services to the new 2.0 users and students. Each Learning Common contains a variety of learning spaces to support different learning styles ranging from informal collaborative, technology-intensive, formal (training areas) and reflective. One of the critical issues concerning learning commons is how they are created. To effectively create learning commons, there must be strategies to be adopted. Therefore, a study of Strategies for creating learning commons among University libraries in South-South is essential because it will yield empirical data that could serve as a guide regarding the creation of learning commons, hence, the need for the current study.

Statement of the Problem

The new media has become very pervasive, thus affecting almost every facet of human society including the library. The interactivity, interconnectedness and flexibility of the new media all make it useful for libraries of the 21st century. Users have also come to realize the essential roles of new media features in libraries. Consequently, there are higher expectations from library

professionals as they are expected to incorporate new media features into their range of services. Also, the emergence of learning commons among the range of services libraries offer could be considered as a response to the challenge posed by the new media, the issue of strategies for creating these learning commons remains problematic. This issue may even be more problematic in less developed countries like Nigeria where advancement in technologies is still at their lower ebb. Therefore, the problem this study sought to resolve is to provide empirical data on the strategies for creating learning commons among university libraries from South-South Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to achieve the following:

1. To determine strategies university libraries in south-south Nigeria should adopt to enhance the creation of users learning commons.
2. To identify the problems associated with the creation of learning commons for users' satisfaction in university libraries of south-south Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What strategies university libraries in south-south Nigeria should adopt to enhance the creation of users learning commons?
2. What are the problems associated with the creation of learning commons for users' satisfaction in university libraries of south-south Nigeria?

Literature Review

A university library is a library established by any university system to assist it to achieve her mandate. Adeleke (2015) and Apotiade (2002) have emphasised on the crucial role of university libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Many times, university libraries have been referred to as the heart or nerve centres of institutions of higher learning where all academic activities revolved. The mission and vision of university libraries in the university setting (university libraries) go in line with the objectives of the parent institution, the university. Akporhonor (2015) posited that University libraries invest a huge amount of money every year on the purchase, process and storage of information resources to serve its user.

Singh and Kaur (2009) stressed that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of university libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is teaching and research. University libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprise of students, lecturers, and researchers to support their teaching, learning and research needs (Iwundu, 2012). With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the way libraries play their roles have changed. Today, the contemporary practice in university library services in the 21st century is being propelled with an information explosion and the inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in all aspects of library services. Kumar (2009) notes that university libraries are changing dramatically by adopting new means of technology in all activities of print to e-environment where a variety of manual method, is replaced by computerised system which provides an opportunity for online accessibility.

Libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiatives (Okiy, 2015). The present-day university library services in the 21st century are focusing more on the area of digital, virtual or libraries without borders all of which have transformed university libraries and led to transition and transformation in the university library environment. The transition and the transformation are accompanied with sophistication in the changing pattern in the information needs of users which is growing rapidly. Singh and Kaur (2009) observed that there is a paradigm shift from stand-alone libraries to library and information networks; from printed publications to digital documents; and from ownership to access. The transition according to them is as a result of the impact of ICTs, the Internet and the web which is affecting all types of libraries. Learning Commons is a product of advancements in technologies.

There are a variety of definitions of learning commons, but basically, it is both an environment and a philosophy. The environment is both physical and virtual, and both are intended to support students learning. It is flexible so that it can accommodate large group efforts, presentations, smaller collaborative clusters and also individual students needing a quiet space. It has a variety of areas to serve the different learning needs of its users. It is accessible to individuals and to whole classes to pursue learning goals as the need arises, not a weekly schedule. It employs technology to facilitate students in their efforts to discover, create and share knowledge. The virtual site is safe, reliable, accessible and flexible to serve the needs of all learners. Philosophically, it is students centred, a comfortable and inviting place for students to be actively engaged in their personalized learning. The teaching pedagogy is varied and includes inquiry and experiential learning. The learning commons is a place where students are supported in their inquiry by other learners and by adults. Books and literacy are still highly valued and supported, but the focus shifts from managing the collection to supporting the learner

Creation of learning commons is a critical thing that requires proper planning. According to Williams and Macmullen (2008), said that learning commons librarians must ask the right questions. Instead of focusing on floor plans and furniture, it is better to ask questions about the types of activities that users will be engaged in and what services will be needed to support those activities. With this understanding, one can engage and plan for campus partners, the location of service areas and the types of support staff needed to achieve one's goals. For learning commons to be effective, certain steps must be taken. Sinclair (2014) avers that strategies for creating learning commons should be centred on people services and technology. Scholars (e.g., Omekwu, 2002; Saikia, Gohain, 2013; Ozioko 2008) agree that libraries of the 21st century need to come up with strategies that could make them render quality services to their users. For learning commons, knowledge and use of ICTs and proper application must be at the heart of such strategies.

Theoretical Framework

This study found expression on the e-learning theory. The theory was proposed by Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016). The e-learning theoretical framework of the trio contains the three main components of information systems. These components, according to Aparicio et al., are people, technologies, and services. The trio argued that people have interaction with e-learning systems while E-learning technologies aid the direct or indirect interaction of the different groups of users. On the other hand, technologies give support to incorporate content,

ensure communication, and provide collaboration tools. A holistic examination of the e-learning theoretical framework showed that the e-learning stakeholders (people) are made up of customers (e.g. students, employee), suppliers (e.g. teachers, content providers and accreditation bodies) professional associations (e.g. students commissions and board of shareholders (e.g. education ministry, industry). The second dimension which e-learning technologies is made up of contents (eg document, digital audio and video, authoring tools, visualization tools, knowledge repositories, journal/newsletter, learner web, post area, web link manager, audio and video capturing, edutainment content, search engine, learner online, glossary and assessment) , communication (eg discussion area, chat, forum, social network, email, synchronous communication) and collaboration (e.g. multi user dialogue, sharing tool, ask an expert area, problem/solution area and one-on-one monitoring). The last dimension which is e-learning activities has a pedagogical model (e.g. open learning, distribution learning, learning communities, communities of practice and knowledge building communities). Finally, the theory has what the trio called instructional strategies which include contextualizing instruction, presenting and cuing content, activating learning processes, activation and assessing learner outcome, synthesizing and sequencing process into instructional lessons, promoting or supporting authentic learning activities, facilitating problem solving, promoting collaboration, supporting role playing, supporting multiple perspective, modeling and explaining scaffolding. This theory is relevant to the current study because it explains understanding creation and utilisation of learning commons for user satisfaction. The theory covers all aspect of the study such as the technology, the user and the contents. This theory is useful to the current study because it shows that in adopting strategies for the creation of learning commons, people, technologies, and services must be the guiding principles. In other words, care must be taken to ensure that such strategies do not compromise the essence of learning commons.

Methodology

The researcher adopted descriptive survey design to achieve the objectives of this study. The study was conducted in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria made up of six states viz: Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross Rivers State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State. There are university libraries belonging to the federal, state and private organisations within the study area. The study also covers the users and librarians working in the university libraries of the following universities: Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State; Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effuru, Delta State; University of Benin, Edo State; University of Calabar, Cross River State; University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

The population of the study was made up of all the one hundred (100) professional librarians and the thirty thousand, eight hundred and five (30805) library users of all the six federal university libraries in the South-south geo-political zone in Nigeria. The University Records (2015) and a preliminary visit to the universities under study showed that Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State established in 2011 had 11 professional librarians and 1252 library users. Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effuru, Delta State also established in 2011 had a total of 11 professional librarians and 1621 library users; the University of Benin, Edo state established in 1970 had 14 professional librarians and 6320 library users. Furthermore, the University of Calabar, Cross River State is a second generation university had 15

professional librarians and 7211 library users, the University of Port Harcourt on the other hand established in 1976 had 22 professional librarians and 7180 library users. Lastly, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State established in 1988 had 27 professional librarians and 7221 library users. The rationale for choosing the federal university libraries is because they are better funded and have purpose built libraries. They have better opportunities of creating library commons for students than state university libraries that are usually poorly funded.

The sample size of the study was 1640, made up of the 100 librarians and 1540 library users. The entire population of the 100 librarians were used because they are manageable. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was however used to select the library users. For this study, the strata were the individual university libraries from South-South. Therefore, The technique was used to select 1540 of library users using 5% as prescribed by Atoyebi (2010) who stated that the sample size of 5% from a population is enough to ensure representation of the population that ranges from 1000 (one thousand above). Consequently in Federal University Otuoke, the population of library users is 1252 and 63 proportion was sampled; in Federal University of Petroleum Efur, Delta State, the population is 1621 but 81 proportion was use sampled the University of Benin has 6320 but 361 proportion was sampled, in University of Calabar, the population is 7211 but 360 proportion sampled, also in the University of Port Harcourt, the population of library users is 7180, but 359 proportion was sampled. Lastly, University of Uyo had 7221 library users, but 361 proportion was sampled for the study. Every registered student and university staff in the universities and the library staff were given equal opportunity to be selected.

Data for this study were collected using questionnaire. The instruments were face validated by three experts. Two from Department of Library and Information Science and one from Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education all from University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The research instrument was trial tested on 10 professional librarians and 20 library users at the Covenant University, Ogun state, which is outside the study area. This was done because respondents from Covenant University, Ogun state have similar characteristics with the study area regarding knowledge on the subject of interest. Data collected from the respondents were used to establish internal consistency reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha. Therefore, the Cronbach alpha for library users yielded: 0.91 for Cluster A and 0.82 for Cluster B the data that were collected for this research was analysed in tables, using mean and standard deviation.

Result

Out of the 100 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents, 92 copies were filled and returned. This represents a returned rate of 92%. Also, out of 1540 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to users, 1322 copies were returned. This represents 986%. The mean returned rate for both questionnaires was 89%.

Table 1: Mean Response of Librarians on Strategies Adopted to Enhance the Creation of Learning Common

Sn	Strategies	Status of the respondents	Overall	R	D
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		Librarian		Users		Mean	SD		
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
8	Employing qualified staff	3.27	.88	3.19	.90	3.19	.90	8th	A
5	Politeness to Increase friendliness	3.15	.92	3.17	.88	3.17	.88	5th	A
1	Provision of Adequate Materials by the Library	3.11	1.13	3.14	.93	3.14	.94	1st	A
7	Free communication with users to enhance interest to use of the library services	3.07	.98	3.14	.88	3.14	.88	7th	A
11	Introduction of Campus partner centre	3.04	.89	3.10	.87	3.10	.87	11th	A
4	Library Education/orientation to make learning interesting	2.84	.96	3.05	.87	3.03	.88	4th	A
6	Encourage users to maximally use the information service	3.21	.94	3.01	.96	3.02	.96	6th	A
3	Increasing opening hours	3.06	1.01	3.01	.95	3.01	.95	3rd	A
9	Introduction of e-information resource to increase accessibility	2.99	.94	3.01	.98	3.01	.98	9th	A
12	Introduction of Technology Question centre	3.09	.95	2.95	1.04	2.96	1.04	12th	A
2	Training of Library Staff on Proper Resource Management	2.86	1.00	2.85	1.03	2.85	1.02	2nd	A
10	Introduction of customer service centre	2.89	.99	2.60	1.04	2.62	1.04	10th	A
Cluster Mean						2.62			A

Table 1 above shows the mean ratings of the respondents on strategies adopted to the creation of Learning Common. Using the principle of the real limit of numbers, the results of the data analysis revealed that the twelve items mentioned in the table were appropriate strategies that can enhance the creation of Learning Common. Also, the overall mean showed that employing qualified staff (mean = 3.19) and introduction of customer service centre (Mean 2.62) highest and least strategies for enhancing the creation and utilization of Learning Common.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Problems Associated with Creation of Learning Commons

Sn	Problems	Status of the respondents	Overall	R	D
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		Librarian		Users		Mean	SD		
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
1	The incompetence of library staff	3.27	.97	3.18	.91	3.23	1.01	1st	A
2	Lack of computers and accessories	3.21	.97	2.80	1.11	3.01	.97	2nd	A
3	Poor library education	3.01	1.03	2.99	.99	3.00	.86	3rd	A
4	Materials are not current	2.97	.99	2.97	.94	2.97	.82	4th	A
5	The Stringent Library Rules	2.94	1.02	2.93	.98	2.93	.89	5th	A
6	Insufficient time (opening and closing hours)	2.84	.96	2.99	.94	2.92	.83	6th	A
7	Poor Architectural Design of the Library	2.73	.96	3.08	.89	2.90	.97	7th	A
8	Poor Cooling/Heating system in the Library	2.80	.94	2.95	.98	2.88	.81	8th	A
9	Limited Study Space for all Users	2.63	.91	3.02	.90	2.83	.84	9th	A
10	Library materials are wrongly shelved	2.49	.99	3.01	1.01	2.75	.82	10th	A
11	Poor Furniture Arrangement	2.67	.96	2.82	1.07	2.75	.83	11th	A
12	Library staff are inexperienced	2.86	1.14	2.57	1.14	2.72	.82	12th	A
13	Non-existence of internet connectivity in the library	2.73	1.11	2.70	1.10	2.71	.97	13th	A
	Cluster Mean					2.92	.44		A

The data presented in table 2 revealed the mean ratings of the responses of the respondents on the problems associated with the creation of Learning Commons. Using the criterion mean of 2.50, the table indicates that items 1-13 were above the cut-off point of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale, this shows that the respondents agreed with these items. The standard deviation values for the seven evaluation activities ranged from 0.97 to 1.01 which implied that the respondents were not far from one another in their responses and that their responses were not far from the mean.

Looking at the two categories of respondents in the study, the results indicated that librarians and users identified incompetence of library staff (mean= 3.27) as a critical problem associated with the use of learning common in university libraries in south-south. Furthermore, an indication of the grand mean (mean=2.92) showed that all the items are problems associated with the use of learning common in university libraries in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the strategies for creating learning commons in university libraries in South-South Nigeria. The result showed that the strategies for enhancing creation of learning common includes :employing qualified staff, politeness to increase friendliness, provision of adequate materials by the library, free communication with users to enhance interest to use of the library services, introduction of Campus partner centre, library education/orientation to make learning interesting, encourage users to maximally use the information service, increasing opening hours, introduction of e-information resource to increase accessibility, introduction of technology question centre, training of library staff on proper resource management and introduction of customer service centre. The finding of this study agrees with the report of Sweeney (2015) who reported that the number one factor in converting a library into a learning commons is the strength and vision of the professional doing the transition. The research supports the principle that strong librarian leadership is vital for meeting the challenges of implementation. These strategies are in line with the three components of e-learning theory as postulated by Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016). The three components are people, technology and service. Therefore, the result of this study has confirmed the postulations of the e-learning theory. For example, the training of library staff belongs to people component, the introduction of e-information service belongs to technology component while maximally use the information service belongs to the service component. Consequently, to create learning commons, the postulations of e-learning theory are very relevant.

The result also revealed that the problems of creation of learning commons for users' satisfaction in university libraries in South-South Nigeria include: poor/non-existence of Internet connectivity in the library, lack of computers and accessories, poor library education, materials are not current, the stringent library rules, insufficient time, poor architectural design of the library, poor cooling/heating system in the library, limited study space for all users, library materials are wrongly shelved, poor furniture arrangement, library staff are inexperienced and incompetence of library staff.

The findings of this study are consistent with that of Ranganathan (1999) who observed passionately that "there is some staff that cannot get out of the habit of looking upon users as a nuisance. This is a problem because rather than the users being encouraged to utilise the services they are discouraged.

Lack of competence by learning commons librarians to promote users to exploit the library is a clog in the wheel of library usage. It is imperative that those who serve the users should have a reasonable level of knowledge and skills to be effective in reading services in these days that services are electronic. This is a problem that needs to be tackled to help the users to utilize the available resources and services effectively.

There is a growing perception that the physical library is no longer essential to the educational experience since students increasingly rely on technology for learning and communication (Gardner & Eng, 2005). The study of Gardner and Eng (2005) study found that "73 percent of the respondents were more likely to research by using the Internet than by going to the library". The furniture arrangement and seating capacity contribute enormously to the utilisation of the resources and the services the university libraries provide. In fact, designing, building, and maintaining a commons may be too big a project for a single organization or department and might require a collaborative effort among several campus entities. Another often-encountered problem is that of choosing the right services to offer in a new commons.

Since there is no single model of the ideal learning commons, it can be anything designers conceive to suit each institution's unique needs and culture. This flexibility is an opportunity, but it also means institutions might have to "roll the dice" on some features based on their best guesses as to what will work well. Even then, when a commons is well designed and executed, space can become a victim of its success, with areas that are overcrowded, especially during peak periods. As a result, some have had to adopt scheduling procedures, making their gathering areas less available for just-in-time projects.

Librarians considering the change to a learning commons face several challenges. Awareness of the challenges and ways to overcome them can expedite the implementation of a learning commons and contribute to its long-term success.

Learning commons accommodate several forms of activities that are not traditionally held in a library. Learning commons incorporate collaboration, social activities, classrooms, games, and makes spaces as well as traditional quiet spaces for individual work. Coordinating all of these activities in one area creates a design challenge. The challenge of technology is an expensive one. The digital natives now served in schools expect the newest equipment and software. Easy access and mobility are major concerns for students to be able to move throughout the zones according to use for the moment. Laptops and tablets maximise movement and require little space. Even the problems associated with the creation of learning commons in the university are related to the three components of e-learning theory. This implies that when these critical issues –people, technology and service—are taken care of, learning commons can be better created with a corresponding possibility of satisfying users.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This study determined the strategies for creating learning commons for university libraries from South-South Nigeria. Based on the result of this study, the researcher concludes that strategies for creating learning commons for university libraries from South-South Nigeria range from people, technologies, and services, which are the three components of e-learning theory. Even the problems militating against the creation of library learning commons revolve around these components. Based on the result of this study, the research concludes that the creation of effective library learning commons must be done within the lances of e-learning theory. Therefore, this study has a theoretical contribution as it has offered empirical evidence on the relevance of people, service and technology in the creation of learning commons. Based on the result of this study, the researcher recommends, that government should make adequate provision of information resources and services in the institutions under study including outside and within the libraries venues. This will assist in patrons to utilize the benefits of learning commons. Also, advanced computer training programme is introduced for library personnel since this projects involved utilisation of modern information resources like an electronic classroom and other modern facilities. This will enable the librarian work efficiently. Since learning commons involve provision of resources like WiFi connection, it is expected that, there will be influx of students more than the traditional library environs, Spaces that focus on human-centered design and encourage learner participation will become increasingly important in transitioning to learning commons model that emphasizes the academic community of learners and the range of services they require.

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