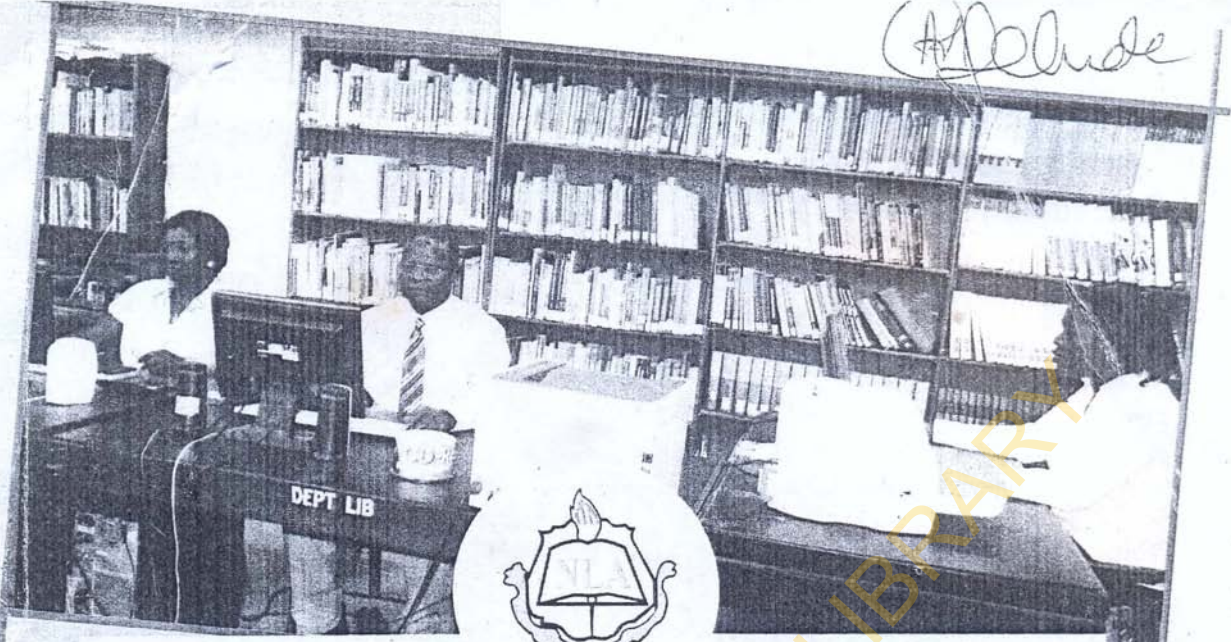# NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Creativity and Innovations in Nigerian Academic Libraries: Implications for Library Development

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the dominant driver in library and information services is rapid technological advancement involving several technologies including mobile applications and social media. Committed to assisting teaching, learning, research and community services and enhancing the best possible use of these libraries, many academic libraries in Nigeria have creatively and innovatively improved upon service delivery using a variety of ways and approaches. The aim of this paper is to discuss the phases of development which two of these libraries – the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos Library have undergone. The paper also highlights the products and services as well as the approaches that the librarians have adopted in meeting the ever changing needs of their clients. This paper is informed by the personal experience of the authors who had actively participated in projects that brought about the changes.

Keywords: Academic libraries, innovation, creativity.

Introduction

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." —Charles Darwin

While some individuals are pessimistic about the future of libraries, many in the academic community envision future library services that incorporate new philosophies and new technologies, to meet the needs of all users more effectively than ever before. These changes go beyond merely incorporating technological advances to include rethinking the very core of what defines an academic library—the sense of place, of service, and of community that has characterized the modern library for the last century. Slowly but surely in Nigeria, librarians, especially those in academic libraries are realizing that the complex situations they face cannot be approached in a routine manner. Indeed, the quest for creative solutions to library and information matters has become pervasive. If academic libraries are to remain central to education processes, their literacy services and programs must evolve to meet the needs of their users. These services must be designed to be relevant to the user and eliminate anxiety in the users' information search (Oyelude, 2011).

There have been important developments in library and information services for a long time although creativity seems to be neglected in the library and information science profession. There have been few creative acts recorded in the profession. For instance, Jill E. Luedke and Sarah K. Laleman Ward, reference and instruction librarians respectively at the Sophie Gimbel Design Library at the Parsons New School of Design in New York City reported how librarians in this library created a new trend among their students while creating opportunities to promote the library with a relatively inexpensive button maker. The buttons capture images from library resources and are used as rewards in library instruction programs and as giveaways at institutional events (Bell, 2008).

There are some library promotional videos that librarians have created for and posted to YouTube for library users to view and enjoy. Some of these are not only creative, but sometimes provide raw data or information useful for research purposes. An example is the uploading of proceedings of a workshop

held in September 2011in Nairobi Kenya titled "Do policymakers understand the role of libraries in mobilizing the Internet as a catalyst for development, innovation and freedom?" which was organized by Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) in connection with their recent research into perceptions of public libraries in Africa (http://www.eifl.net/perception-study) which can be viewed live on Internet Governance (IGF) YouTube channel at http://www. youtube.com/user/igf#p/u/4/YvqKLc5LP1g and a transcript of the same made available at http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/component/content/article/108-transcripts/837-28-september-2011-ig4d-185-do-policymakers-understand-the-role-of-libraries-in-mobilizing-the-internet-as-a-catalyst-for-development-innovation-and-freedom-. These are innovative and creative ways of making information available in libraries.

The introduction of Knowledge Classification scheme by Melvin Dewey, the Library of Congress Law scheme expanded by Elizabeth Moys and lately the online catalogs do all demonstrate innovations in library development. Furthermore, development of reference services-online databases, technological advances in library instructions and so on are services which should be acknowledged as creative changes in the profession (Riggs, 1989).

In Nigeria, episodes of creativity became noticeable in the 1990s1 with the integration of ICTs in the library functions under the National Universities Commission and the World Bank credit facility agreement of 1991 (Zaid, 2004). During this period, the federal universities were supplied with books, journals, micro computer and a 4-user Local Area Network version 270 of The Information Navigator Library (TINLIB) software for use in Federal university libraries. This innovation saw the workload of the librarians greatly reduced. Presently at these two libraries, nearly all the library functional areas and services have a touch of creativity. Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan was established in 1948. The library has branch libraries apart from the main library which has different sections handling different aspects of library work. There are five faculty and thirteen departmental libraries. The faculty libraries are headed by professional librarians with library officers assisting, while the departmental libraries are headed by library officers.

The University of Lagos Library was established in 1962 with seven working sections within the library and eight branch libraries. All the sections

and branch libraries are headed by professional librarians with the capacity to introduce technological or non technological innovations within their libraries. It is through the creative efforts of these professionals that these two university libraries derive the glory of being amongst the best academic libraries in Nigeria. This paper highlights the creative and innovative services the two university libraries have successfully introduced to better meet the needs of their users. The creative process are technological and non technological in nature.

Literature Review

Thinking about libraries that creatively develop better services can start with a simple idea - "where you work is where you live". That idea comes from Tony Tallent who writes about the importance of creating a fun workplace that supports creative thinking. Tallent (2008) observes that we spend a third of our day at our libraries, and that library workers who find themselves in dull, lifeless cubicles will also find their creativity sapped. The key to understanding this was two concepts: innovation and creativity.

Creativity

Creativity is bringing into existence something new. It is a new idea that can be used to solve a problem (Burke, 1994). All the new ideas that are introduced in the library may be referred to as creativity because it is through these ideas that a problem is solved. Creativity involves applying new methods to more familiar ways of reaching users and need not involve fiercely original ideas but simply new ways to approach a well-known service with some fearlessness as just having access to technology is not enough. This is the working definitioof creativity adopted for this paper. Using creativity and innovation is exemplified in the mind mapping software developed by Buzan (2010) who found pictorial ways of depicting ideas in the mind. This creative use of maps has brought about the Mind Map which can be applied to every aspect of life where improved learning and clearer thinking will enhance human performance. The Mind Map has four essential characteristics: the subject of attention is crystallized in a central image; the main themes of the subject radiate from the central image

on branches; the branches hold a key image/word printed on the associated line from which details radiate out, and; the branches form a connected nodal structure. (See Fig. 1).

Mind Maps to show how Mind Mapping can be used to implement and enhance creativity and innovation Mind Maps created in Buzan's iMindMap software (more at www.mind-mapping.co.uk/software)

Source: http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/_images/_Pdf/EXAMPLES/ BUSINESS/Creativity-and-Innovation/Implementing-Innovation-and-Ideas/ Creativity_and_Mind_Maps.pdf

Innovation

Innovation is the implementation of new ideas to produce a new service or product (Martins and Terblanche, 2003). Creativity and innovations are different from each other, but they are interrelated in one way or the other. Basically, creativity is about thinking of methods to improve our old products and services and putting the ideas into practice is an innovation. Innovation is also modifying or improving the existing services or products (Avlontis et al, 2001). In our rapidly changing library environment, we can expect to see more creativity and innovation. Looking out at our current challenging and uncertain information landscape, it appears that libraries are increasingly confined to tight

boxes. Whether the solution requires invention or innovation, escaping the box requires creativity.

In one instance, it was realized that from the minds of creative librarians come the innovative programs that will enable libraries to avoid future marginalization or obsolescence. Libraries have traditionally worked with restrained resource pools. To have come so far with so many successes is owing to the high levels of creative thinking in our libraries. Secondly, in times of rapid change our most valuable asset is our ability to master the art of adaptation. If one program fails, if library users seem to be going elsewhere for their information, if library user expectations shift unexpectedly, then library workers must use their creativity to quickly adapt. By understanding user communities, one can create new programs that leverage our skill sets to deliver new services and new ideas that will continue to make the library a community destination, both physical and virtual.

Methodology

This paper offers case studies of interesting programmes that serve as examples of how, with little more than a creative idea, libraries can bring a whole new level of service to the end user or improve internal processes to make for a more effective library organization. The methodology adopted was a combination of approaches and methods. First was the reliance on observations about developments in the services provided by the libraries, and second was actual participation in projects that brought about the changes. The paper is informed by experience and review of literature available on the topic. The purpose was to get a deeper understanding and do a comparison of developments taking place in the two libraries.

Creativity and innovations introduced in the two Libraries

This section explains some of the creativity and innovations the University of Lagos Library and the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan successfully introduced.

Electronic Reservation Service

This service is different from the traditional book reservation, called reserved book room service in some academic libraries. Many students, faculty, and staff time is now spent in digital space. To better meet the changing needs of our users, the management of the University of Lagos Library implemented changes in the provision of library services to facilitate teaching, learning and research. The Library has expanded the reserved collection to include: books from the library collections; books from personal or departmental collections; recommended texts from lecturers; online journal articles from the library's electronic journals collection; lecture notes including any material for which the lecturer has copyright, whether electronic or paper; media including videos; DVDs, CD-ROMs and past examination papers.

For effectiveness, faculty members now submit electronically, their recommended texts, course title, course code, number of students per course and other course materials to the Reserved Book Librarian one or two months before the commencement of every session. These materials have short loan periods to allow greater and equal access for all students in the course. This request form for e-reservation is available on the library website.

Incorporating Web 2.0 Tools in the Library

Web 2.0 has brought a better concept of sharing and two way interaction over the internet. In this, users' perspective is prominently being taken care of. Blogs, wikis, social networking and other such are the points of its highlight. The idea of using Web 2.0 tools in libraries is an innovation that the University of Lagos and the Kenneth Dike libraries have introduced. Users could join the University of Lagos library page from the institution's Facebook account (www.facebook/unilag.com) and the Kenneth Dike library from www.facebook/kennethdikelibrary and the E. Olatunde Odeku Medical Library, a branch of the Kenneth Dike Library, from www.comui.edu.ng/odeku where access to full texts of some medical literature on the databases provided are available.

Some librarians in these institutions have adventured and created blogs where librarians can interact with their users and also get feedback from them.

In the blogs, general information about the library is posted. The libraries and librarians also have Twitter accounts. When librarians interact with users, library management gets to know exactly what the users are saying about the library and this creates room for improvement.

E-Resources Management Services

After procuring and subscribing to e-books and e-journals, libraries need to evaluate the usage of the resources. The automation librarian at these libraries sends alerts or notices to members of the University community via short message service (SMS), E-mails and social network tools to create awareness of the availability of such e-resources. This has helped the libraries to analyze the use and workflows of electronic contents in the library. This has also helped the library management to plan properly about the subscription and optimum use of the e-resources.

Virtual Learning Environment

Owing to the increased number of researchers and postgraduate students, space that is convenient for knowledge creation, intensive study and facilitates research is needed. With support from the University management, the University of Lagos library allocated space for specific groups of students and researchers. The specialized space offers specialized support to graduate students and academic staff to have quiet reading. The virtual learning environment is equipped with computer work stations that are fully connected to the internet. A resource or chat room where users can make private use of library resources and group discussion rooms were also created.

The situation is somewhat different in Kenneth Dike Library. An e-classroom which can seat fifty users is provided but this facility is mostly given out for teaching courses, or presenting seminars that require getting access to online content. A multi-media space equipped with one hundred computer work stations is provided for all categories of students, researchers and lecturers to gain virtual connection on the first floor east wing of the library.

Laptop Loan Service

This service was introduced at the University of Lagos Library in October, 2011. At the circulation desk, library users can loan laptops for use within the library. This service which has afforded users the opportunity to do work requiring word processing attracts a token fee. In Kenneth Dike Library, users are allowed to bring in their own laptops and the spaces created for them are made available especially in the postgraduate section, the multimedia laboratory and the stairwell landing space on each floor of the library.

Provision of Research Tools

The acquisition and provision of writing and research tools by the University of Lagos is another creative action which has helped researchers to easily gather, manage, store and share all types of information as well as generates citations and bibliographies. These tools which are: RefWorks, Textract and EndNotes have further helped users to customize and refine writing and searching to suit their unique needs. Researchers from other universities now come to use these tools in the library.

Instant Messaging

This is an innovative idea introduced on the University of Lagos Website for user-orientated services. This service which has been a very useful feedback tool has presented some interesting opportunities for University of Lagos Library to reach out to users, especially in relation to reference services. A parallel innovation also occurs in the Kenneth Dike Library where linking some modules on the library website to some librarians' phone numbers is carried out. Questions towing the "Ask a Librarian" line are answered immediately and in real time via short message system (SMS) or Instant Messaging (IM). This service is a new trend aimed at replacing the notice boards and making reference services more effective in the library.

The 24-hours Library Service

This service was launched at the University of Lagos Library in 2009 and at the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan in 2011. This service has since provided library services to users twenty four hours a day, seven days a week (24/7), except during public holidays. This service allows library users to make use of library space for reading and research. Some of the normal functions offered during normal work hours for example reference and circulation services are not offered during the night shift duty. The process of change to this system has not been an easy one, but with the determination to be creative and innovative, a lot is being achieved and library users are grateful for the innovation.

Conclusion

Creativity and innovation have been shown to be powerful forces for positive and productive change benefiting library staff and users. The implications for library development are enormous. The library as a growing organism needs the creativity of librarians and information professionals to bring about innovations that will result in improvements to the system as a whole. From a little idea formulated in the mind of someone, great changes in work patterns, workflow, and work systems evolve. Creativity and innovations need to be highly recognized and even rewarded where possible.

The University of Lagos and the Kenneth Dike University of Ibadan libraries have set a pace for other academic libraries in Nigeria to follow. Being creative and innovative in libraries will be a way to make users feel at home while using the library. With the advancements in technology, libraries will creatively and effectively implement Web 2.0 tools which our users are commonly using. When librarians continue thinking creatively then the library will become more productive and their creativity will work to ensure that the age-old cliché of the place with "dusty and old books on the shelves" becomes a productive place where the traditional and hi-tech meet in a "hybrid library environment" no library user wants to miss out on this development.

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