NEW DIRECTIONS FOR LIBRARIES: LESSONS FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN GHANA

By

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The revolutionary changes that have occurred in library building, whereby libraries must now focus on the needs of customers (users) rather than on collection development as has traditionally been the case, are extensively discussed. Finally the article also examines the use of technologies.

Introduction

Libraries are but one of the vast range of institutions that provide today's society with service of one kind or the other. Libraries provide access to large and organized stores of knowledge. The scope of services they provide has been gradually developed over many years and is still growing. And in this age of information explosion, the services libraries offer are undeniably of crucial importance.

Traditionally, library services have revolved around the mental activity of reading and the provision of books. But the services offered by modern libraries have become extremely complex and sophisticated.

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Traditionally, library services have revolved around the mental activity of reading and the provision of books. But the services offered by modern libraries have become extremely complex and sophisticated.

These services include the provision of materials that are viewed and/or listened to as opposed to materials that are read. They also include access to machine-readable materials. The particular value of libraries is that, they contain so many items of stock and so much· information, certainly far more than most people possess individually. But the role of a library is not just to collect and store information in an organized fashion; it is also to get materials utilized.

In recent times, libraries have become responsible for developing digital and print collections. Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach, they advocate and support emerging trends and technologies and endeavour to provide leadership in scholarly communication, collaboration and research.

The Role of the Library in the University System

It is hard to imagine a University or College without a library. A library is the physical manifestation of the core values and activities of academic life. In fact, the size of the collection in a library is used as an indicator of academic quality.

University Libraries exist as an archive of accumulated knowledge, a gateway to scholarship and a catalyst for the discovery and advancement of new ideas. The University Library performs the role of selecting, acquiring, organizing, storing and disseminating information in ways that faculty and students can easily access and use.

Library materials on similar subject areas are grouped together and then shelved according to the Library of Congress Classification Scheme. Furthermore, the modern library's Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service increases research activities and publication among faculty and other staff of the university. Under the SDI service, librarians keep profiles on users' research interests so that from time to time searches can be done for the user. Most of such searches yield current information either from newly acquired books, journals, magazines or on-line databases.

The University Library provides advisory services. Users are assisted on request as to the kind of information sources or materials they need for a particular purpose, and where and how to identify and locate these sources or materials.

With the onset of Information Communication Technology (ICT), users' needs have changed to include on-line or digital information; the library provides internet and computer facilities to access this type of information. In other words, the library has become an agent of accessibility and integration linking users to a range of digital information available to a user community through licensing agreements or other means.The University Library presents an opportunity to users to acquire skills in information search in addition to its unique role of providing space and a conducive environment for learning.

Finally, the library serves as an agent of accessibility, linking users to information resources that are not available in the library, but could be obtained through partnership with other libraries.

The Roles of a Librarian

The primary responsibility of a librarian is to acquire various forms of information resource – digital and print – relevant to the needs of users, to organize and preserve such resources for easy access. A librarian assists both students and Faculty Members to find useful materials for various fields of knowledge even though he or she may not have training in those fields of knowledge. In offering service to users, the librarian helps the latter to develop interest in and knowledge of the library and its resources.

It is the desire of the Academic Board of any academic institution that students of the institution, upon completion of their courses, should develop a life-long learning habit. The librarian plays an important role in the achievement of this goal. At the onset of any new technology that can improve the work of the librarian, he or she investigates and acquires relevant skills in the new technology in order to be sure of their

application. For instance, a good librarian acquires skills in information technology in order to appreciate and accomplish library automation. The librarian functions as one of the most important educators in any field of knowledge. He spends his professional life, his energies and mind on a job which, if properly done, almost invariably brings enormous credit to the people that he serves.

This all-important role played by the librarian often goes unnoticed and for that reason not nearly enough recognition is given to the status of the librarian. The above reflections do show, however, that the librarian has responsibilities which cannot be underrated, particularly in institutions of higher education.
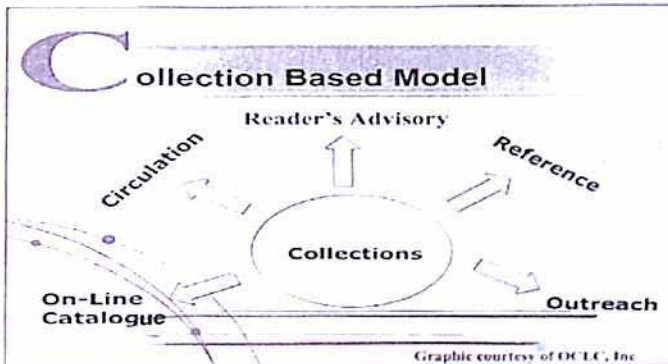
Revolutionary Changes in Libraries

The traditional role of the library over the years has been collection based. Priority was given above all to acquisition, cataloguing and preservation of knowledge. As a result, libraries and librarians were perceived as the repository and guardians of knowledge.

However, with the advent of information technology and new models for teaching and learning in higher education, there have been radical changes in the expectations that faculty and students have for their libraries. Accordingly, libraries have now shifted from collection based services to customer oriented services in order to demonstrate their ongoing contributions to teaching, learning, and research, in a world fundamentally re-shaped by information technology and new expectations for higher education.

COLLECTION BASED MODEL

Collection based model

ollection Based Model

Reader's Advisory

Circulation

Reference

Collections

On-Line Catalogue
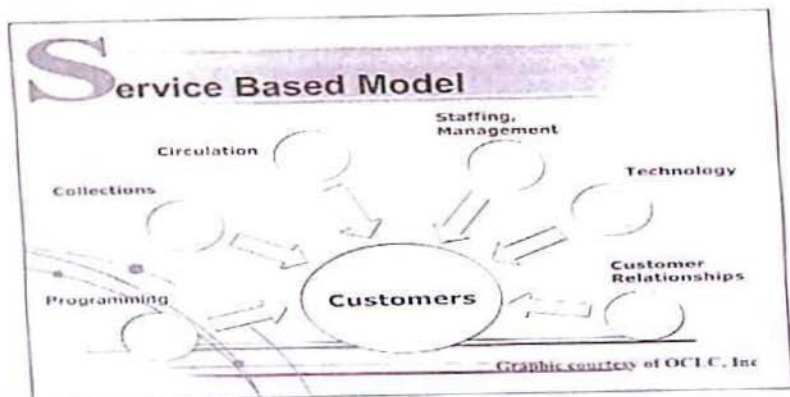
Outreach

Graphic courtesy of OCLC, Inc

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The model above illustrates the collection-focused library where services are provided based on the collection the library possesses rather than users' needs.

The services mentioned above, namely, circulation, reader's advisory, reference, outreach and online catalogue are all rendered based on the collection of the library. In other words, the collection determines the level of service provided; so that if the collection is underdeveloped, the services provided are affected and vice versa.

SERVICE BASED MODEL

Service based model

S ervice Based Model

Staffing, Management

Circulation

Technology

Collections

Customer Relationships

Programming

Customers

Graphic courtesy of OCLC, Inc

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The Service Based model, on the other hand, focuses on user needs. This model is designed on the following pillars:

1. Libraries must be market and customer driven institutions.
2. The library's products must be determined by the customer.
3. Libraries must provide direct customer service.
4. Quality versus quantity services.

1. Libraries must be market and customer driven institutions

The market or customers of an academic library are students, faculty members, and other university staff, some of whom are extremely busy and can only use the library from a remote distance because of their

multiple tasks. Such customers want to save time, and hence must be served in time. Again, some users may be computer literate while others may not. Also, some users may have acquired skills in information search and therefore will not need much attention while others may be novices. Others come to the library with a vague idea of what they need and therefore require advisory services. Librarians should not forget that some users are lazy and would like to be totally dependent on the staff. Identifying users helps the library to forecast the needs of users, to know their strengths and weaknesses as library users so that the library will be able to serve them to their satisfaction.

2. The Library's products must be determined by the customer

Unlike the collection based model, the service based model focuses on the needs of users. In other words, services offered are determined by users' needs. A service based model library, therefore, tries to answer the question: why and how do our users use our services? For instance, the faculty and staff of a university mostly use the library for research purposes.

For that reason, the library's collection must be enriched with periodicals as well as electronic facilities for online searches. Again, for both staff and students who may be too busy to come to the library and spend time to read, the reference section can take record of requests, do the searches and then print or photocopy needed materials for delivery. The circulation desk also assists users to borrow materials for use outside the library. In short, users of an academic library have various degrees of needs that must be satisfied.

3. Libraries must provide direct customer service

Like financial institutions and other business organizations, libraries now see themselves as business enterprises with customer service as their priority. The circulation desk can be compared to the enquiry desk in an organization. It serves as the user's first place of call where affable staff guide users to find their way in the library.

The reference section is another customer service point in the library where advisory services are offered to users who are not sure of the kind of information materials that are relevant for them and where and how to identify and locate such materials.

4. Quality versus quantity services

Even though library users do not pay fees directly for the use of academic libraries, they are well informed of the required standards of academic libraries and therefore have high expectations and values for academic libraries. They expect quality service. For instance, users expect services in time, and they also require that library collections should satisfy their full needs. A service based model library is aware of the challenges and the advantages that information communication technology has brought to bear on library services.

The library therefore does its best to meet the expectations of users so far as ICT is concerned. For example, the library operations are automated so that the online Open Access Catalogue (OPAC) replaces the card catalogue, thus making accessing and retrieval of information easier and faster. Also, internet facilities are provided to link users to a range of digital information available through licensing agreements or other means. Internet facilities also make it possible for library users to benefit from online services such as video conferencing and distance learning, DVD and computer Screen Theater, question point/ instant reference service, among others.

The service based model library like other business organizations puts up quality services that always exceed the expectations of its users. It is obvious from the discussion above that most academic libraries are moving from the traditional roles of acquisition, cataloguing and preservation of knowledge to new roles as market and customer driven institutions whose aims are to know the needs of its users and to offer services that satisfy those needs.

Use of Technologies in Libraries

Computing and networking technologies, in all their various forms are

becoming an integral part of almost all library services. To ensure that these technologies are used in an efficient and cost effective manner, libraries should ideally devise a technology development plan as part of a broader long range plan encompassing all library services.

Key Factors in Technology Development Plan in Libraries

There are six factors critical to effective library technology development plan and implementation.

- **Support of library staff including its management**
  - No planning effort will succeed without the full support and commitment of all library staff and management.
  - This commitment should be made before starting a technology planning process.

- **Direct involvement by other parties**
  - The development of a technology plan should be undertaken not by library staff alone, but with active participation by the Library Committee, IT department and other stakeholders.

- **Service-based technology goals and initiatives**
  A key factor in the use of any library technology is a realization that technology is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Technology must be viewed as a - vehicle to offer more efficient and effective delivery of current services and to add new services to help carry out the mission of the library.

- **Staff Development**
  - Too often, emphasis is placed on the hardware and software aspects of technology at the expense of staff training and in-servicing needed to help ensure proper and effective use of technology. Without a firm commitment to initial and continued staff development, the benefits of technology will not be fully realized.

- **Identification of funding and development of a budget**
  - Any technology plan must address the need for funds to

implement the plan. Funds must be budgeted annually to maintain existing technology, to update or replace obsolete technology on a regular scheduled basis, and to provide necessary staff support.

- **Evaluating the technology development plan**
  - Some type of evaluation process is necessary to ensure that goals and objectives and other facilities of the technology plan are actually implemented.

The technology development plan must describe the following;
- Hardware/Software
- LANs/WANs
- Automated systems
- Internet
- Databases

The library technology plan should also address the following;

- In what specific library areas/functions is technology being used (eg administrative, technical service) and to what extent?

- How is integrated technology used in the daily function of the library?

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the library's current technology environment?

- What problems or issues does technology help to solve and what problems or issues does it cause?

- What is the level of staff expertise and staff use of technologies?

- What information resources do the patrons use via technology?

- How much of the library's budget is allocated to technology?

Some Latest technologies that are used in Libraries

- Internet access
- Web access to library resources
- Self check out machines
- Debit card credit technology
- Patron self – inform units
- Drives up services
- Questions point line chat
- Video-conferencing and distant learning facilities
- DVD and computer screen theater
- Question point web casting instant reference
- 24/7 Information specialist assistance
- Radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology (clips vs. barcodes)

Conclusion

In recent times, libraries are being managed like any kind of business; a library is no longer a warehouse for books but rather a supermarket of ideas. In fact, libraries have made a shift away from collection based services where services are provided based on the collection of the library rather than on the needs and expectations of users.

Information Technology and new models for teaching and learning in higher education have brought radical changes in library services. It has, therefore, become necessary for librarians to be abreast with the technology era. They need to investigate and acquire knowledge and skills in ICT in order to meet client needs.

The strategic use of automated systems will enable libraries provide quick and easy services to their ever growing users. Libraries must begin to re-think the traditional concepts and rather provide state-of-the-art library services with focus on customer service. Rather than concentrating on building library collections, librarians must always work hard to exceed the expectations of customers.

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