

Information Literacy Skills of Librarians and Service Delivery in the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

The 21st century has witnessed a transformative shift in the role of librarians, driven by rapid advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs). This research explores the critical importance of information literacy skills among librarians and their impact on service delivery in the modern library environment. Information literacy, encompassing the ability to locate, evaluate, and utilize information effectively, is an essential competency for librarians in facilitating access to the vast array of resources available to users. This study investigates into the various dimensions of information literacy, including digital literacy and ethical information use, highlighting their relevance in enhancing user engagement, resource accessibility, and lifelong learning. The analysis underscores the challenges faced by librarians in acquiring and maintaining these skills, such as lack of competency, poor internet connectivity, limited professional development opportunities as a result of inadequate funding, and institutional barriers. Despite these challenges, the research identifies opportunities for librarians to enhance their competencies through continuous professional development, collaboration, and integration of information literacy into library education curricula. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the role of information literacy in promoting digital citizenship, combating misinformation, and fostering an informed society. By examining the interplay between information literacy skills and library service delivery, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how these skills contribute to the quality and effectiveness of library services. It also offers practical recommendations for library management, policymakers, and educators to support the ongoing development of information literacy competencies among librarians. Ultimately, this study highlights the indispensable role of information literacy in empowering librarians to navigate the complexities of the information age, thereby ensuring that libraries remain vital centers of knowledge, learning, and community engagement in the 21st century.

Keywords: Information Literacy Skills, Librarians, Service Delivery, Information Needs.

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving 21st century, the role of librarians has transformed significantly, requiring a deep understanding and mastery of information literacy skills. Librarians, as gatekeepers of knowledge and facilitators of information access, play a crucial role in connecting users with the vast amount of information available in today's digital world. This

transformation highlights the critical importance of information literacy skills in librarianship and their significant impact on service delivery.

Traditionally seen as custodians of books and repositories of information, librarians have now become dynamic information professionals equipped with a diverse set of competencies to navigate the complexities of the digital age. The advent of technology has reshaped libraries, rendering traditional models obsolete and necessitating a shift in the roles and responsibilities of librarians. In this context, information literacy skills have become essential tools for librarians to effectively fulfill their evolving mandates.

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the information literacy skills essential for 21st-century librarians and their significant implications for service delivery. By exploring the importance of information literacy skills in librarianship, the impact of these skills on service delivery, the challenges librarians face in developing these skills, and their overall effect on service delivery, this paper elucidates the intricate relationship between information literacy and librarianship in the digital age. Through a synthesis of relevant literature and empirical evidence, this paper illustrates the evolving nature of librarianship, the necessity for librarians to possess robust information literacy skills, and the transformative potential of these skills in enhancing service delivery. Additionally, it explores strategies for fostering information literacy among librarians and highlights exemplary practices that demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between information literacy and effective service provision.

As libraries continue to evolve into dynamic hubs of information and knowledge dissemination, the role of librarians as information literacy champions becomes increasingly vital (Withorn et al., 2021). By equipping librarians with the necessary information literacy skills, this paper argues that libraries can fulfill their mission of empowering patrons, fostering lifelong learning, and serving as catalysts for social and intellectual enrichment in the digital age. Thus, this comprehensive analysis seeks to illuminate the pivotal role of information literacy skills in librarianship and their transformative potential in shaping the future of library service delivery.

Information literacy encompasses a set of competencies that enable individuals to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to meet their needs. In the context of libraries, information literacy skills are indispensable for users to navigate the vast array of resources available, critically evaluate information sources, and ethically use information for academic, professional, and personal endeavors (Panda & Kaur, 2024). Librarians facilitate the development of these skills among patrons through various initiatives and programs.

Despite the clear importance of information literacy skills, many librarians face significant challenges in acquiring and maintaining these competencies. Rapid technological advancements can render skills obsolete quickly, and many librarians lack access to ongoing professional development opportunities. Furthermore, institutional barriers and limited resources can hinder efforts to improve information literacy skills among library staff. These challenges pose a threat to the effectiveness of library services in the digital age, where the ability to manage and deliver information is paramount. It is as the result of the identify

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Nature of Information Delivery Service in the 21st Century

The 21st century has revolutionized information delivery services, marked by the integration of digital technologies and a shift towards more user-centric and accessible offerings (Ike & Umah, 2023). This transformation has been propelled by technological advancements, evolving user expectations, and a broader recognition of the library's societal role. Key aspects defining 21st-century information delivery services include:

Digital Transformation: Libraries have adopted digital technologies to broaden their services beyond physical books and materials. This includes e-books, audiobooks, online journals, databases, and multimedia content. They also offer digital literacy training and technology resources like computers, tablets, and internet access (Mylapilli, 2023). Digital transformation in information delivery involves integrating digital technologies into library operations to enhance user experience and accessibility. This shift has redefined how libraries provide resources and engage with their communities (Nyoka, 2022). Key components of this transformation include digital collections, online catalogs, virtual reference services, digital preservation, and remote access to databases.

Online and Remote Access: Libraries now offer services accessible remotely, such as online catalogs, virtual reference services, and digital archives, enabling users to access resources from anywhere at any time. The expansion of online and remote access has significantly extended libraries' reach and impact, allowing them to serve users more effectively and keep up with technological advancements and changing user expectations (Kraus et al., 2021). This flexibility is a fundamental aspect of modern information service delivery, providing benefits like online catalogs, e-resources, online workshops and events, and digital archives.

Community Engagement and Collaboration: Libraries are increasingly engaging with their communities through programs, events, and partnerships. They often collaborate with local organizations, schools, and businesses to address community needs and support literacy, education, and lifelong learning. Community engagement and collaboration in information delivery involve libraries partnering with local entities to meet community needs and expand access to resources (Omona, 2020). By actively engaging with the community and collaborating with stakeholders, libraries create meaningful connections and deliver more relevant and impactful services. Key aspects of this approach include partnerships with local organizations, community-centric programming, and outreach and promotion.

Information Literacy and Digital Literacy: Libraries play a crucial role in promoting information literacy and digital literacy, helping users navigate and critically evaluate the vast amount of information available online. They offer workshops, resources, and guidance on these essential skills. Information literacy and digital literacy are vital components of modern library services, teaching users how to find, evaluate, use, and

create information effectively and responsibly in the digital age (Withorn et al., 2021). These skills empower users to engage confidently with information, making them more discerning consumers and producers of content. Libraries foster these competencies through workshops, resources, and personalized support.

Innovative Programs and Services: Libraries are embracing new programs and services to remain relevant in a fast-evolving world. These include maker spaces, which offer technology and tools for creative projects, as well as coding, robotics, and other emerging technology programs. Abutayeh (2021) highlighted that innovative programs and services in information delivery have revolutionized how libraries engage with their communities and provide access to information. These initiatives leverage technology, creativity, and collaboration to address the changing needs of library users. Examples of innovative programs and services include mobile libraries, seed libraries, tool lending, and virtual and augmented reality experiences. By adopting new technologies and approaches, libraries continue to be dynamic centers of learning, culture, and community engagement.

Accessibility and Inclusivity: Libraries are dedicated to ensuring their services and spaces are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities. This commitment involves providing assistive technologies, materials in various formats, and accommodating diverse cultural and language needs. According to Mamabolo & Durodolu (2023), accessibility and inclusivity are fundamental aspects of modern library practices, ensuring everyone can benefit from library resources and services regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances. By prioritizing these values, libraries create welcoming and equitable spaces where all users can access information, engage with resources, and participate in community programs. This commitment supports the library's mission of promoting learning and knowledge sharing while fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion. Key components include assistive technologies, accessible formats, physical accessibility, and inclusive programming.

Sustainability Initiatives: Many libraries are adopting sustainability initiatives, such as reducing paper usage, promoting recycling, and using energy-efficient practices. They are also advocating for and educating users about environmental issues. According to Tanner et al. (2021), sustainability initiatives in information delivery services reflect libraries' commitment to environmental responsibility while serving their communities effectively. By adopting sustainable practices, libraries can reduce their ecological footprint and promote a culture of sustainability. These efforts enhance the library's role as a community hub and inspire patrons to adopt sustainable practices. Key initiatives include digital services, resource sharing, interlibrary loans, and community education and programming.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Libraries continue to play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, including digitizing historical documents and media and offering access to rare and unique collections. Nwofor *et al.* (2023) emphasized that preserving cultural heritage in information delivery services is a critical responsibility for libraries, ensuring historical, cultural, and artistic works are safeguarded and accessible for future generations. By prioritizing cultural heritage preservation, libraries ensure that valuable historical and

cultural resources remain accessible for research, education, and personal enrichment. This work fosters a deeper connection to the past and contributes to the cultural vitality of communities. Key aspects include archival storage, conservation practices, public access and exhibitions, and oral history projects.

Overall, information delivery services in the 21st century are branded by innovation, adaptability, and a commitment to meeting users' evolving needs. Libraries leverage technology to enhance their services and expand their reach while staying true to their core mission of providing access to information and promoting lifelong learning.

The Significance of Information Literacy Skills in Librarianship

In the 21st century, while information is more accessible and abundant than ever, many individuals still struggle to navigate, evaluate, and effectively utilize it. This highlights the critical role of librarians and their information literacy skills. These competencies are crucial for librarians to succeed as facilitators of information access, educators, and guides in an increasingly complex information landscape (Tait *et al.*, 2016). The importance of information literacy skills in librarianship can be examined from several key perspectives:

Facilitating Information Access: Librarians are responsible for connecting users with the information they seek. Information literacy skills enable them to expertly navigate various information sources, including digital databases, online repositories, and traditional print materials. With the ability to locate, retrieve, and disseminate information effectively, librarians ensure equitable access to information for all patrons, regardless of their background or technological proficiency (Nzomo *et al.*, 2021).

Empowering Users: Librarians do more than provide access to information; they empower users to become information-literate individuals. Withorn *et al.* (2021) emphasized that information literacy skills enable librarians to teach patrons how to critically evaluate information, differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources, and synthesize information to build knowledge. By imparting these skills, librarians promote a culture of lifelong learning, enabling users to navigate information independently and make informed decisions in various aspects of their lives.

Supporting Lifelong Learning: Libraries are centers of lifelong learning, catering to the diverse educational and informational needs of individuals at different life stages. Information literacy skills enable librarians to design and deliver educational programs, workshops, and instructional sessions that enhance patrons' digital literacy, research skills, and information management abilities (Lawal, 2023). By fostering a conducive learning environment and providing tailored support, librarians facilitate continuous learning and skill development among patrons, enriching their lives and contributing to their personal and professional growth.

Promoting Digital Citizenship: In an era marked by the proliferation of misinformation and digital manipulation, information literacy skills are essential for fostering digital citizenship and combating false information. Librarians with strong information literacy skills act as advocates for media literacy, helping patrons critically evaluate online content, identify

biases, and navigate ethical issues related to information use (Adair et al., 2023). By promoting responsible information consumption and digital citizenship, librarians play a crucial role in cultivating an informed and democratic society.

Enhancing Service Quality: Information literacy skills are vital for providing high-quality library services that cater to patrons' evolving needs. Librarians proficient in these skills can tailor their services to match patrons' information-seeking behaviors, preferences, and technological competencies (Hamad et al., 2023). Leveraging information literacy skills, librarians can offer personalized assistance, develop innovative programs, and curate relevant resources that address the diverse informational needs of their communities, thereby improving the overall quality and effectiveness of library services.

The importance of information literacy skills in librarianship cannot be overstated. These skills are foundational to librarians' roles as information intermediaries, educators, and advocates for intellectual freedom and democracy. By equipping librarians with robust information literacy skills, libraries can continue to fulfill their vital societal functions of providing access to information, promoting lifelong learning, and empowering individuals to navigate the complexities of the information age with confidence and competence.

The Influence of Information Literacy Skills on Service Delivery

The influence of information literacy on service delivery in libraries is significant and varied. Information literacy equips library users with the skills needed to navigate a wide range of resources, enhancing their ability to access, evaluate, and use information effectively. This, in turn, impacts several key aspects of library service delivery:

1. **Improved User Engagement:** Information-literate users are more engaged with library resources and services. They can independently find relevant information, leading to a more satisfying user experience.
2. **Enhanced Access to Resources:** Information literacy helps users effectively navigate library catalogs, databases, and other resources, ensuring they can access information regardless of format or location.
3. **Empowerment through Lifelong Learning:** By promoting information literacy, libraries empower users to become lifelong learners. These users develop critical thinking skills, allowing them to evaluate information critically and make informed decisions in various aspects of their lives.
4. **Community Building and Social Inclusion:** Libraries serve as community hubs where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together. Information literacy initiatives foster community engagement and social inclusion by providing opportunities for shared learning experiences and knowledge exchange (Tanner et al., 2021).
5. **Effective Use of Library Services:** Information-literate users are better equipped to utilize the full range of services offered by libraries, including reference assistance, research support, and educational programs (Adigun & Tella, 2021).

Information literacy skills are intrinsically linked to the quality of service delivery in libraries. Librarians with strong information literacy competencies can:

- Assist users in navigating complex databases and online resources.
- Provide tailored guidance and instruction on information-seeking strategies.
- Collaborate with educators to integrate information literacy into educational curricula.
- Empower users to become critical thinkers and lifelong learners.

Challenges to Effective Information Service Delivery in the 21st Century

Despite the critical role of librarians' information literacy skills in delivering effective information services, several challenges hinder their development and maintenance. Rapid technological advancements and skill obsolescence create significant barriers to professional growth. Librarians must balance traditional roles with emerging responsibilities in the digital landscape. Limited resources and professional development opportunities further restrict their ability to enhance these skills, while resistance to change and institutional obstacles impede progress. The following are some of these challenges:

1. **Lack of Competency:** Some librarians in Nigeria lack the necessary skills for 21st-century information service delivery. They are often resistant to technology, viewing the use of computers in library work as unnecessary. Consequently, they hesitate to adopt new technologies. Tanawade (2022) notes that many librarians lack confidence in using advanced information technology, which slows service delivery and reduces productivity. Hayati and Jowkar (2018) highlight that unfamiliarity with computers and database searching is a major barrier to adopting new information technologies.
2. **Poor Internet Connectivity:** Reliable internet access is crucial for digital libraries, but many Nigerian academic libraries still struggle with slow internet connections. Olabude (2021) identifies high initial costs as a significant barrier to developing internet infrastructure in Africa.
3. **Inadequate Power Supply:** The unreliable power supply in Nigeria severely hampers the provision of effective information services. Frequent power outages force libraries to rely on alternative sources like generators, which are costly and difficult to maintain. Adepetun (2018) points out that the high expenditure on alternative power sources significantly impacts organizations, including libraries.
4. **Poor Funding:** Adequate funding is essential for acquiring information and communication technology equipment, internet subscriptions, staff training, and other library services. However, government funding for the education sector is often insufficient. Haber (2022) states that apathy and inadequate funding are major obstacles to IT applications in African libraries.
5. **Lack of Technology Literacy:** Some professional librarians lack the technological literacy necessary for modern library services. Technological literacy involves the ability to use technology responsibly to communicate, solve problems, and manage

information. Edem (2018) argues that poor performance among librarians and information professionals in developing countries is due to inadequate ICT skills rather than underfunding. Anyira (2022) adds that librarians without well-developed ICT skills cannot provide effective library services, making this a major obstacle to service delivery in the 21st century.

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for librarians to enhance their information literacy skills and meet the demands of the digital age. Professional development and lifelong learning initiatives offer pathways for librarians to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills. Collaboration and knowledge sharing among librarians foster a culture of innovation and the dissemination of best practices. Integrating information literacy into library education ensures that future librarians are equipped with essential skills from the beginning of their careers. Additionally, advocacy at institutional and policy levels can raise awareness about the importance of information literacy and secure support for professional development initiatives for librarians.

Conclusion

The advent of information and communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the role of librarians. ICT has improved access, research, and communication, making it an invaluable tool for libraries that support teaching, learning, and research. Consequently, professional librarians in the 21st century are expected to leverage these opportunities to ensure that libraries are aligned with contemporary standards and continue to be centers of information provision, generation, and dissemination.

Recommendations

1. **Prioritize Librarian Training:** The success or failure of library services hinges on the quality of the library staff. Therefore, training for 21st-century librarians should be a top priority.
2. **Ensure Prompt Release of Training Funds:** Funds allocated for staff training and development in higher institutions should be safeguarded and released promptly. There have been instances where staff scheduled for training could not attend due to insufficient funds.
3. **Encourage Personal Skill Development:** Given budget constraints, librarians should take personal initiative to improve their skills to uphold their profession. As custodians of information, they need to be skilled, competent, and knowledgeable.

Additionally, acquiring computer literacy skills, metadata skills, and information literacy skills is crucial. These competencies are essential for effectively serving users and delivering high-quality library services.

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