

Innovation in Academic Libraries in Cameroon: Challenges and the Impact on Service Delivery

Roseline Bawack

Associate Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, Advance School of Mass Communication (ASMAC)

Rosemary Shafack

Professor, Chief Librarian, University of Buea, Cameroon

Abstract: Technology has developed rapidly within the academic library arena, characterized by unprecedented changes in library services. These changes necessitate novel strategies to embrace innovation, amidst a proliferation of information service providers and search engines. Innovation is no longer an option for academic libraries but a requirement to meet the demands of today's users, and to improve services. Innovation is a solution to remain competitive in times of crisis. These changes however, come with challenges. This research sought to investigate if academic libraries are innovative and which type of innovative projects are being carried out to improve service delivery; to map out library approaches towards innovation, and to find out the challenges academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon face in innovating. A survey research design was used for the study. Structured questionnaire and interview guide were the instruments for data collection, while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze data. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DoI) was used. Findings reveal that academic libraries are making minimal attempts in innovative services. However, they are not innovating as they should if they must overcome current challenges. Findings further indicate that lack of requisite skills in ICTs, inadequate funding, lack of passion for the profession, lack of motivation, lack of state-of-the-art infrastructure, the emergence of social media, and lack of trained staff were among major challenges faced by academic libraries that directly hindered required innovation. Though academic libraries are not innovative, part of the blame is on leadership and non-challance of librarians. The paper concludes that academic libraries in Cameroon are not innovative. There is an urgent need for library administration in universities to be more proactive, and step up innovative projects in order to remain valuable in the academic community. The paper proposes some recommendations to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Academic libraries, Challenges to innovation, Public Universities, Information Age, Innovation, Cameroon.

Introduction

Academic libraries have stepped into a new era where Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is being vastly applied in all facets of library services. Traditionally, academic libraries were the monopoly in providing information for scholars on campus. With the appearance of information and communication technologies (ICTS), students, and researchers are faced with a variety of online options to access information. Today, Information and Communication Technology allows information to be accessed and communicated via the Internet anytime. The information available online are mostly free

of charge (though usually not credible) and can be accessed anywhere by anyone who is able to connect to the Internet. Thus, searching information using online search engines is preferred by scholars rather than visiting academic libraries, as they find alternative sources of information mostly through Google search and Wikipedia as more veritable, convenient, and effective (Click, et al. (2017). Understandably, academic libraries in public universities of Cameroon should be worried about their roles in the ecosystems of information service delivery that is shifting away from the traditional practices.

Academic libraries are facing a lot of challenges in various forms one of which is lack of skills in using information technology. Digital information today is ubiquitous. Users do not have to come to the library for information search. Rather, they come for programmes, group study, a quiet place to read, or to use library facilities like computers and Internet. The role of university libraries as the one and only facility to provide information is diminishing. The challenges brought by information and communication technologies, are of various kinds: First is the challenges to find new and diverse roles to adapt to the changing working environment; secondly, the pressure to acquire various kinds of new skills; thirdly, the challenge of reorganizing and adapting existing physical space to the growing concerns and demand for digital collections; and fourthly, insufficient funds to support programmed library activities (Bawack, 2022). To mitigate some of these challenges, academic libraries are forced to change paradigms, change mind-set, and rethink strategies. The best way to move forward is by constantly innovating. They are required to seek new values and roles for themselves in order to remain valuable and to improve service delivery.

In developed countries, entrepreneurial librarians are flourishing today, advocating social change, responding to patron demands and designing new library services (Oyedokum, 2018). One of the innovations in academic libraries is embedded librarianship. This is a distinctive innovation that moves the librarian out of its comfort zone to create a new models of library services. The embedded librarian forms a strong working relationship between the librarian and a group of library users who need the librarian's information expertise (Shumaker, 2012).

Fortunately, a couple of academic libraries are aware of the paradigm shift and the challenges inherent, thus they are trying to list out the challenges they face in order to have a better understanding of , and think out effective innovative ways to deal with them. Innovation is viewed as part of a coping strategy of the changing context of academic libraries. According to Etebu, et al. (2020), most academic libraries fail to make recognizable impact on their services because they are handled by non-professionals or inadequately trained individuals. The challenges faced by academic libraries though inherent, are surmountable if what is needed is done for optimal service delivery. It is in this premise that this research work looked at innovativeness and challenges faced by academic libraries in public universities of Cameroon.

Although many researchers have pointed out the challenges facing academic libraries in the digital age (Wright, 2014; Bawack, 2019), very little have been written about challenges related to innovation in a developing country like Cameroon. In this research, seven public universities have been surveyed to examine innovative projects and the challenges academic libraries face in Cameroon in innovation.

Statement of Problem

University libraries by design exist to support the university's overall objective that cuts across learning, teaching, research and outreach. This cardinal role however, is influenced by the penetrating force of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Nevertheless, despite the numerous benefits associated with the incorporation of ICTs to library service delivery, it is disheartening to note that the transition from traditional to modern academic libraries in public universities of Cameroon is becoming much more challenging in a dominated digital environment. The emerging challenges posed

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by the contemporary environment keeps increasing in number, as the application of ICTs keeps manifesting in various forms. This situation may be attributed to various factors like lack of innovation that have not been empirically unraveled. This paper through a questionnaire and interview schedule examines innovative practices taken by academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon and the challenges faced in innovating.

Objectives of the Study are:

1. To identify the challenges faced by academic libraries in innovating and the impact on service delivery.
2. To identify innovative projects and programs that academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon have carried out within the past twenty years.

Literature Review

As the center of information and knowledge for universities, academic libraries are no doubt going through a transformational path towards digital resources. This paradigm shift has a great number of disturbing challenges to academic libraries (Thomas, 2013). Scholars have noticed these new trends and changes for long and have published a great number of papers on challenges facing academic libraries in terms of innovating. Among empirical studies, the challenges related to staffing, sustainable alternative sources, acquisition of e-books and e-journals, mobile access to the library resources, and long term preservation of digital information in multiple formats are among the top issues that most scholars have discussed and written about.

Jantz (2012) conducted a study to examine innovation in academic libraries and the impact on library services. He described the challenges faced by librarians from six libraries from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) on innovation in their libraries. Results revealed that university librarians had a good grasp of innovation processes in their libraries. One library incentivized innovation by giving rewards based on new ideas and allocated part of the budget towards projects that were seen as innovative. Two librarians spoke about how budget cuts had acted as catalysts for innovation in their libraries. Regarding the pace of innovation, the study revealed that university librarians saw most innovations as incremental, not radical, with respect to existing systems. The study also revealed that innovation was highly compatible with existing processes, which caused a major challenge in service delivery.

A study carried out by Enweani, et al. (2018) on challenges faced by library and Information Science (LIS) professionals in academic libraries in Imo state, Nigeria revealed that poor funding, indifferent attitudes of library managers, absence of well-defined and uniform library policies and non-compliance with the demands of ICTs were major challenges to innovation and effective transformation of academic libraries in the twenty-first century.

Shafack (2021) investigated on challenges faced by academic librarians in managing library automation in Cameroon. Findings revealed the following challenges were inherent and include: providing services that are engaging to researchers and students, managing research data tools, digital licensing, managing and preserving digital content, subject matter expertise and library policies.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study was a survey research with a well-structured questionnaire and interview guide designed in line with the objectives of the study as the instrument used in collecting data. The population of the study comprised of 150 academic librarians from seven public universities in Cameroon. The availability and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the participants from the sampled institutions. Data analysis was done using frequency counts and percentages.

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Findings

Research Question One: Which are the Challenges faced by academic libraries in Cameroon towards Innovating and how do these challenges Impact on Service Delivery?

Findings on figure one below indicate that academic libraries face several challenges which affect the process of innovation.

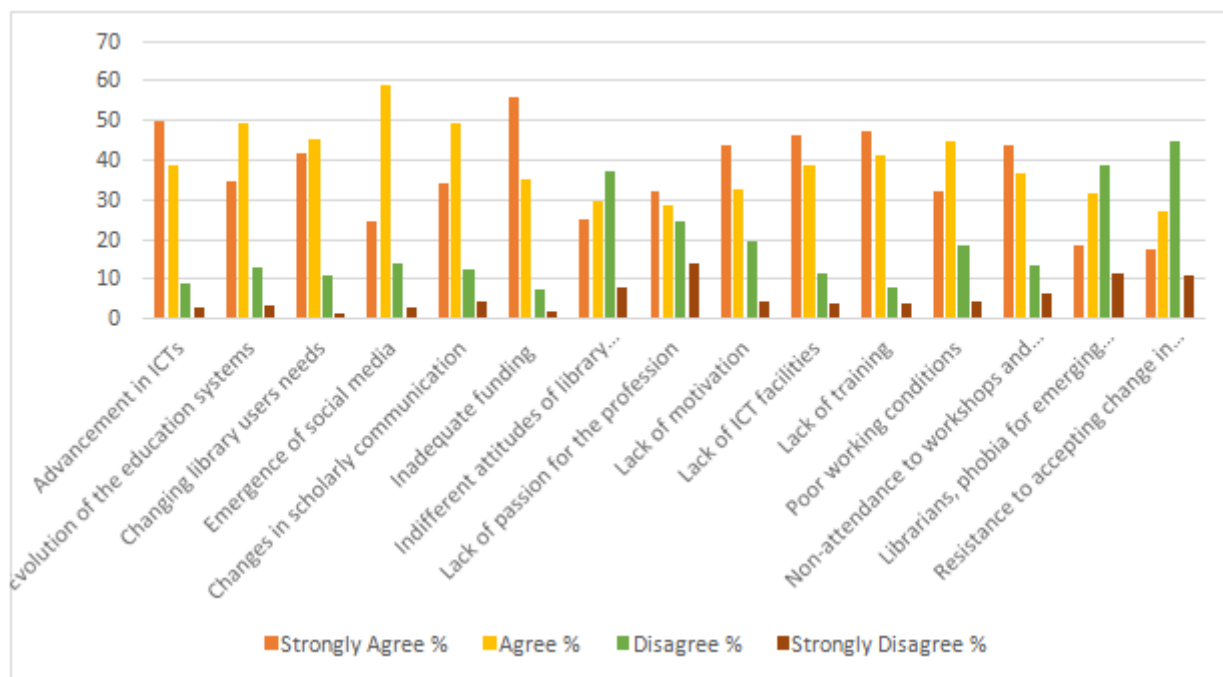


Figure 1: Challenges Faced by Academic Librarians concerning Innovating. Source : Researcher’s Field Work.

From Figure 1, the first two statements that gained the most outstanding level of agreement were “inadequate funding” and “advancement of ICTs” with percentages of 91.1% (142) and 88.5% (138), respectively. These are the most significant challenges that academic libraries are facing to effectively carry out innovative projects. Other challenges faced by academic librarians to innovate were, “lack of passion for the profession”, by 95 respondents (60.9%) who either agreed or strongly agreed. 119 respondents (76.3%) agreed that lack of motivation was a challenge, and 132 (84.7%) either strongly agreed or agreed that lack of information and communication technologies facilities were significant challenges that hindered innovative projects and practices. Lack of training 138 (88.4%) and Non-attendance to workshops and seminars 125 (80.1%) were equally agreed or strongly agreed to be challenges to innovation in the library. 131 (84.0%) agreed that the evolution of the education systems and changing library users needs by 136 (87.2%) were challenges to innovative projects. Other statements that most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to be challenges included the emergence of social media rated by 130 at (83.4%), changes in scholarly communication also rated at (83.4%), poor working conditions rated by 120 at (77.0%), and phobia for emerging technologies rated by 78 at (50%). A total of 95 respondents (54.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that different attitudes of library managers were challenges. A low majority of 87 (55.8%) were in disagreement that resistance to accepting change were challenges that had an impact on innovation in the academic library. From Figure 26, it is obvious that there are several challenges faced by academic

libraries in carrying out innovative projects.

Innovative Projects Which Academic Libraries have carried out within the Past Twenty Years to Improve Service Delivery.

On this part of the questionnaire, the researcher sought to know innovative projects that academic libraries carried out. Ten (10) innovative projects commonly performed by academic libraries within the past two decades were listed. Respondents were asked to choose within a Likert scale of 1 to 4, from strongly agree to disagree with each project listed strongly.

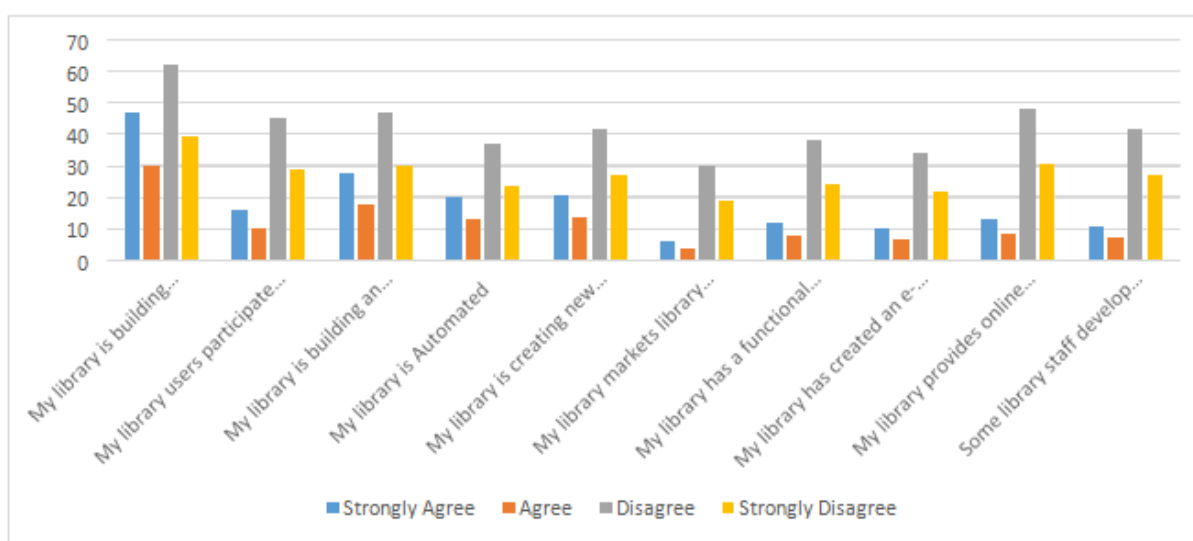


Figure 2: Innovative Projects Being Carried Out by Academic Libraries within the Past Twenty Years.

Source: Researcher’s Field Work.

Findings in this section are presented as disagreed to represent both disagree and strongly disagree. From Figure 2, there is clear evidence that academic libraries do not carry out innovative projects. Most respondents disagreed with all nine (9) statements that listed the types of innovative projects expected from the academic libraries. Figure 2 shows that 109 respondents (69.8%) did not agree with the statement that ‘My library is building partnerships with other libraries’. 95 (60.9%) respondents disagreed that ‘their library users participate in activities related to service innovation’. About half of respondents, 81 (51.9%), disagreed that their library is building an Institutional Repository, 99 respondents (63.4%) disagreed that their library is automated, 93 respondents (59.6%) did not agree with the statement that their library is creating new services.

One hundred and twenty respondents (76.9%) disagreed that their library markets library products, 106 respondents (68.0%) disagreed that their library has a functional website, 112 respondents (71.8%) disagreed that their library has created an e-learning platform, 95 respondents (60.9%) disagreed that their library provides online library services. Finally, 103 respondents (66.1%) disagreed that some library staff develop Information literacy courses.

Discussions

Several challenges were identified as barriers to innovative projects by academic libraries.

Advancement of ICTs

From the analysis that scrutinized challenges that academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon are facing, challenges which have disrupted innovation and impacted service delivery, it was seen that the most critical challenge encountered by academic libraries in Cameroon in adapting to the changing paradigm in innovation was the advancement of ICTs. Lack of knowledge in ICT use and failure to catch up with ICT trends will delay the transition from print to digital content and manual to electronic format, negatively impacting library service delivery. Academic librarians in Cameroon would overcome this challenge by keeping up with developments in the evolution of ICTs via learning, monitoring, and improving operational skills. It should be noted that though the advancement in ICTs is providing excellent opportunities for academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon to facilitate and improve library services, particularly in the use and management of digital resources, it has shattered the monopoly and effectiveness of traditional methods of service delivery.

Inadequate Funding

Findings from this study reveal that funding academic libraries in Cameroon is inadequate, and libraries were having difficulties managing their budgets. Indeed, all respondents in this study indicated that inadequate funding of academic libraries was a major barrier to innovative practices, and this negatively affected library service delivery. It should be noted that funding is essential in achieving the academic library's goals and projects, including serving library users to provide information resources, especially digital resources. Adequate funding is a prerequisite for the effective management of academic libraries in the digital age. With inadequate funding, the library is unable to subscribe to new publications, unable to acquire infrastructure needed to digitize their collection, unable to build databases and Institutional Repositories, and unable to purchase e-books and e-journals which are currently indispensable and in high demand for research and learning.

Lack of Passion for the Profession.

Findings from this study, show that most academic librarians in public universities in Cameroon lack passion for their profession. It could be considered a direct obstacle to innovation.

Paradoxically, a trained academic librarian will lack passion for the profession. This negativity could be justified by the fact that most of those who claim to be academic librarians are not trained library and information science professionals. This finding is highlighted by an interviewee who vehemently insisted that academic librarians in public universities of Cameroon do not like their profession. To justify her statement, she brought out three reasons: when she was head of the consortium (COCUREL), trained librarians with duty posts refused to assist in writing innovative projects; librarians equally did not find it necessary to participate in the Open Access Week (OAW), which she organised; all library staff in her library were assigned to a computer each, connected to the Internet, and her library had state of the art infrastructure like printers, Internet and WIFI, yet librarians refused to carry out assigned library services like online searches and populating the library's database. Lack of passion for the profession however, could be because librarians are not skilled in library services or are demotivated.

Lack of Motivation

Findings indicate that lack of motivation to effectively carry out innovative projects was a major challenge. It should be noted that motivation, be it internal or external, plays a vital role in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of academic library services. Hence, motivated staff would be an asset

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to the library, and they would be willing to step up performance when motivated. This certainly explains why most interviewees emphasised the need for motivation in academic libraries. Most of the forms of motivation requested by academic librarians included recognition of service, appreciations, responsibility, staff training, financial awards, respect for library staff and harmonisation of the status of all academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon. Library managers should consider the impact of demotivated librarians on innovative practices and the quality of library services to address the factors contributing to the situation.

Lack of ICT Infrastructure

Findings revealed that most public university libraries lacked ICT infrastructure. ICT infrastructure is an important factor supporting various services in academic libraries. ICT will connect librarians with other librarians, connect librarians with information and connect librarians with their users. In other words, ICT infrastructure will make it possible for academic libraries to provide more accessible, faster and more comprehensive access to knowledge and information to users and many others. Therefore, ICT infrastructure such as software, hardware, internet facilities are required for the library to give digital access to information resources. This deficiency in ICT infrastructure has a negative impact on service delivery. Generally, from interviews with almost all heads of libraries, ICT infrastructure was said to be poorly developed and very deplorable in some instances.

Lack of Training

Most academic librarians in public Universities in Cameroon lacked training. It should be noted that training enhances productivity, therefore, training and education are generally the most important direct means of upgrading librarians' knowledge, intelligence and skills. Training library staff is indispensable and would play a pivotal role in capacity building and professional development, especially in the digital environment. Lack of training could also result in delayed library projects, poor use of the Internet and its features to support online learning and digital resources remotely. An interviewee reported the absence of training facilities and the non-attendance of workshops by librarians as major hindrance to innovation.

Evolution of the Education System

Findings revealed that the evolution of the educational system was a major challenge for academic libraries to meet their objectives. The evolution of the educational system requires an uninterrupted provision of quick access to digital information to users when needed, in the right format, from wherever users are. It implies that academic libraries in Cameroon are now required to provide contemporary library services that meet the changing needs of students and researchers. Some of these needs include the creation of e-learning platforms, online databases and institutional repositories by the academic library. Academic librarians will have to change their mind-sets to quickly adopt strategies to acquire modern skills, particularly skills related to using and managing online platforms and electronic resources to meet the changing education system.

Changing Library User Needs

Findings indicate that changing user needs is among the major challenge academic libraries in Cameroon face. The majority of respondents indicated that services requested from library users are new and changing constantly. Users are requesting for digital content, which implies that academic libraries should progressively transform their resources into digital formats. Academic libraries need to provide services and resources compatible with users' expectations and digital lifestyles to satisfy and attract users. The major challenge is how to satisfy users when academic librarians do not have the skills to manipulate digital resources. With changing user needs academic librarians should seek alternative methods for continuous learning to update their skills.

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Poor Working Conditions

Most academic librarians decried poor working conditions in Cameroon's public universities as a major challenge and a deterrent to innovation. Findings reveal that poor working conditions cut across academic libraries in all seven geographical zones of this study. It should be recalled that poor working conditions in academic libraries disrupt the zeal for librarians to provide effective services and the enthusiasm to innovate. For example, an interviewee stated that poor working conditions have caused librarians to develop a negative attitude towards library services like, lack of interest in library activities, slow use of technologies, lack of collaboration with users, and reluctance to acquire new knowledge and skills. The interviewee further added that this situation makes it difficult for academic libraries to exploit even existing information resources, leading to poor library service delivery. It should be noted that working conditions in an academic library is an essential determinant for efficient and sustainable performance. It allows for library resources to be optimally exploited and disseminated to users.

Phobia for Emerging Technologies

Another challenge from findings was phobia for emerging technologies. Though this challenge was declared by half of academic librarians in public universities in Cameroon, it implies that most academic librarians are obsessed with the use of technology. Developing phobia for emerging technology is detrimental to productivity in library services, and this negatively impacts service delivery. If academic libraries must transform, they should create avenues for successful change that will culminate in effective library services, and such avenues must accept modern technology. However, only half of the academic librarians have a phobia for ICTs. This means that part of the academic library staff could mitigate the challenge and engage in quick transformation by creating new services and initiating innovative practices that could positively impact service delivery.

Resistance to accepting change was a challenge related to phobia for emerging technologies. Most academic librarians resist transformation to a new era. Some librarians are far less comfortable accepting to change the way things are done. Indeed, with the increasing shift in paradigm in academic library services, the growing tension between those willing to embrace change and those who resist change, especially changes related to transformation of academic libraries to digital is a major setback to innovation. It should be noted that change is a phenomenon that is inevitable for progress in the digital environment. Resistance to change in academic libraries will limit how the academic librarian can manage resources, talk less on innovation to migrate to digital and virtual libraries.

Shortage of Human Resources

Shortage of human resources was mentioned as a challenge by all interviewees from the sampled public universities. Indeed, all interviewees lamented a shortage of professional staffing, which they attributed to the major difficulty in adapting to the changing paradigm in library service delivery. A sufficient workforce in quantity (number of workers in relation to workload and student population) and quality in a variety of areas like the level of education, training, knowledge in managing and disseminating electronic and digital information, and providing library services as a whole, is important for the library to effectively serve its community.

Language Barrier

An interviewee revealed that despite the shortage of human resources, most librarians presently providing library services are not bilingual enough to manage English and French users. She reported that she was the only bilingual librarian, thus could not satisfy all English speaking users all the time. It should be noted that in a country like Cameroon which officially has both English and French languages, the ability for a professional to switch to either language is advantageous to users.

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Collaboration with Faculties

Lack of collaboration with faculties was a challenge highlighted by most librarians who were interviewed. Findings revealed that faculties were not enthusiastic, supportive or cooperative, and they seldom visited the library. While interviewees from Anglo-Saxon universities emphasised good collaboration with some lecturers, most interviewees from French-speaking universities reported a lack of collaboration with faculties. Most interviewees perceived faculty lecturers as portraying poor attitude towards the library and librarians. Some interviewees said that these negative behaviours from academics rubbed off on students, some of whom treated academic librarians as uneducated and unimportant. It should be noted that collaboration with academics and faculties will have the advantage to improve a range of innovative practices like building digital collections, facilitating access to digital resources and discovery, developing learning skills for students, embedding information literacy skills and research skills into the tertiary curriculum, teaching, tutoring and working on research projects. The absence of collaboration has a direct negative impact on research output of scholars and library services. Collaboration will make faculty understand and appreciate the value and potentials of librarians in contributing to knowledge in an academic milieu, especially in terms of information literacy courses, rather than imagining that academic librarians are less educated as was reported in findings.

Innovative Projects Carried out by Academic Libraries in Public Universities in Cameroon within the Past Ten Years to Improve Service Delivery.

Building Partnerships with Other Libraries.

Findings reveal that more than three quarters of academic libraries have not considered partnerships as an innovative project. This means that academic libraries are working independently and in isolation. Academic libraries cannot afford to work in isolation in the twenty-first century. It is generally believed that two heads are better than one. When academic libraries work individualistically, the scope of innovative ideas is limited. They should take up innovative projects like building partnerships with other libraries. Partnerships as an innovation in the twenty-first century is a reality as it provides academic libraries with new opportunities, skills and technology to face current information trends. This finding is in conformity with Giesecke (2012) who posits that building partnerships paves the way to success. Partnership presents academic libraries with new knowledge and tools to provide users with the most effective services. Academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon should build creative partnerships with other libraries as one of its innovative projects to widen their scope of knowledge sharing and build better and sustainable networks. These would positively impact service delivery.

Joint Participation in Innovative Projects

For academic libraries to succeed in innovative projects, library users should be actively involved. Findings from this study reveal that library users do not participate in activities related to innovation in academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon. Indeed, most academic librarians attest that library users are not involved in any of the innovative initiatives and projects. It should be noted that innovation is considered a collective process of developing and implementing ideas and practices that reflect the emergence of a new paradigm of librarianship. Academic libraries should note that when users are involved in innovative discussions and projects, they co-create value and draw on each others input for better options. It implies that innovation in academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon should involve both academic librarians and academia. This could valorise library staff, it could improve staff performance and stimulate growth in terms of service delivery. Therefore, joint innovation projects (with users) would help academic libraries in public universities of Cameroon better engage with patrons, integrate their input and collectively find solutions to some challenges. This could justify the badly needed funding for building and expanding electronic and

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digital resources. This finding is in conformity with (Ellis & Phillips, 2013) who stated that academic library services need to be redefined in a manner to incorporate students' view points and opinions.

Building Institutional Repositories.

Another innovative project, which is currently being discussed in many library and information science (LIS) articles, sometimes connected with the transformation from manual to digital, is institutional repository (IR). An IR is part of the electronic collection development of an institution. An IR aims to collect, preserve, manage, and make accessible, the intellectual output of a university. Finding reveals that most respondents indicated either that their libraries did not have IRs or where in the process of building one. This presents a dissatisfactory state of affairs that needs an urgent response. Academic Libraries have the responsibility to make visible and accessible research outputs like thesis, dissertations and research publications. Indeed an institutional repository will not only make visible the institution's research products, it will also create visibility for the library and the university, especially in terms of ranking for the latter. This finding is supported by Anenene (2017) who said that one of the expected innovations in academic libraries in the twenty-first century is Institutional Repositories.

Library Automation

Another innovative project that academic libraries carry out to transition from traditional to modern libraries is automation. This study revealed that no academic library in the seven public universities in Cameroon was completely automated. About half of respondents stated that their libraries had begun the automation process. Findings from interviews with chief librarians and one ICT librarian reaffirmed that only four out of seven university main libraries (Buea, Bamenda, UYI, Dschang) were in the process of automation. No departmental library was involved in automation. It is important to note that automation of an academic library in the twenty-first century permits decentralized access to a bibliographic record by multiple users. Findings further revealed that most of academic libraries used the free open software called 'Pour ma Bibliotheque' (PMB) and the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) for automation to make accessible their library collections. These free open software will allow users to access the library's collections better and save time. However, copyright issues, plagiarism, and privacy policies were challenges mentioned by interviewees that go along with automation and institutional repositories.

Creating New Library Services.

Creating new library services is essential in transitioning from traditional to modern library services. Findings from this study indicate that more than half of academic libraries have not created new library services. This implies that academic libraries are slow in the adoption of innovative services. Indeed, creating new services in the academic library is an innovation to mitigate the challenges brought by technology and the changing needs of library users. Thus, the absence of new services will have a negative impact on library service delivery. It should be noted that the success of an academic library in the information era depends on the demands of users, the level of satisfaction, and the creation of new and innovative services. However, an interviewee attributed the absence of new library services to lack of motivation, lack of awareness of modern trends, resistance and indifferent attitude of librarians.

Marketing Library Services and Products.

Findings show that most academic libraries were not marketing their library services and resources. Marketing an academic library in the information age is a way of making sure that the library and librarians meet the needs of their users. It should be noted that marketing the academic library, its resources, services and facilities are vital in the information age because of competition from other

information providers. With search engines like google increasing their capacity to provide information from various parts of the world and in different packages, the academic library is being threatened, and its relevance is questioned. Academic libraries have to reach out to clients, users, and stakeholders to face such competition. One of the best ways for this to be done is through marketing. Absence of marketing library resources could be considered one of the common problems responsible for limiting the current use of most academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon and their resources. Though less than half of respondents agreed that their libraries marketed their resources, this small but positive response could be attributed to academic libraries with a reasonable number of qualified librarians who had learned marketing in LIS schools as a strategy for resilience to remain sustainable.

Building a Functional Website for the Library

A crucial element to the success of an academic library is its online web presence which serves as a gateway for users to locate information. Findings from this study reveal that most academic libraries do not have a functional website. Those that have the library's collection are not visible. The websites are hosted on the main website of the parent institution (university website), and access to it is usually via a link on the home page of the university website. Building a website for the academic library is an innovative project to expand and make the library's services visible. Today, public universities in Cameroon are providing distance education. In this circumstance, students and learners expect to remotely access multiple online information resources and digital services from their academic library anywhere and anytime. A library's website is supposed to provide these services. Unfortunately, this finding indicates an acute under-visibility of research products from Cameroon public universities via their website. It means that students and other stakeholders would not have remote access to library resources if they do not visit the library. This seems unacceptable in the twenty-first century, as it might cause a situation of under-utilization of the library's digital resources. This could explain why academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon are not visited and not used by many scholars. This prevailing situation is contrary to the principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which stresses the need for academic libraries to use ICTs for the production and dissemination of a variety of information and knowledge (new and existing knowledge) and make them available both locally and internationally to make a meaningful contribution to support SDGs.

Teaching Information Literacy (IL) Courses

Another innovative project that academic libraries should carry out is information literacy. Findings reveal that information literacy interventions have not been seriously considered or implemented in most academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon. Indeed, teaching information literacy in the university is an innovation in the twenty-first-century library that aims to augment students' academic performance and perfect their ability to use the library and other information sources. Therefore, to optimize the usage of library resources, students and academics must be taught the skills to learn, to be able to recognise when information is needed, can locate it, evaluate it and use it effectively and ethically. However, findings indicate that slightly above half of the respondents agreed that IL projects were developed in their libraries. It is consolatory that IL is practised in some academic libraries. An interviewee said that though IL was practised at the level of lessons offered to students, they were inadequate and did not go far enough to equip students with the requisite computer skills or data searching skills. Some interviewees said that basic orientation on what was available in the library and how to assess the library's database were aspects of IL taught. Other interviewees declared that IL was not in their library programme, so they did not see it as their business, and added that librarians did not have the skills to teach IL courses.

Conclusions

Librarians agreed that innovation was a critical process for survival in the information age. The study identified some innovative services in academic libraries. It was discovered that academic libraries in Cameroon were confronted with a catalogue of challenges to overcome in transitioning from traditional to modern library services. Academic libraries must collaborate with management, join library associations, and partner with other libraries to overcome some of these challenges. It should be recalled that one activity of the academic library that users' greatly appreciated was service delivery. Holistically, the study concluded that several barriers significantly hindered innovative practices and user satisfaction. To exploit the library's resources, users must learn information literacy from librarians, which, unfortunately, is often not offered by librarians.

In a nutshell, the study concludes that despite the incessant and precipitated demand for digital online resources from academic libraries; despite the abundance of online information from various Internet sources, academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon are not innovative enough, and have not effectively adapted to the changing paradigm in delivering novel library services to users, thereby creating a somewhat paradigmatic paralysis. Equally, academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon are faced with a catalogue of challenges ranging from lack of technical and contemporary skills, funding and other socio-cultural issues, hindering effective, innovative practices and adaptation to the changing paradigm of transiting from the traditional to modern academic libraries and the consequent impact on service delivery.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in line with the findings of the study:

Advancement of ICTs: Academic libraries should promote the use of ICT tools to innovate. University management should provide academic libraries with relevant and functional ICT facilities to facilitate the transition process. It will require suitable ICT facilities to innovate in projects like digitization, online databases, and institutional repositories.

Lack of ICT Facilities: University management should provide relevant and functional ICT facilities for academic libraries to facilitate innovative projects and programmes. Public universities in Cameroon must enter into partnership with organizations such as AAU and AU that assist African universities in the provision of ICT facilities such as computers, servers, Internet, in line with the emerging digital trend. It will enable academic librarians in Cameroon to acquire relevant facilities that will enable them to automate, build institutional repositories, create e-learning platforms and create online databases to meet the increasing demand for digital content.

Evolution of the Education System: University administration of surveyed institutions should organise joint workshops involving all librarians, students' representatives and lecturers to evaluate changes in the education system and develop proposals to mitigate the challenges. Academic libraries will focus on agreed priority areas for innovation.

Changing Library User Needs and Scholarly Communication: Academic libraries should develop a joint training plan for librarians regarding changing library users' needs and scholarly communication. In this light, university management should provide funding for training. Provide proper training to librarians to meet present-day exigencies in scholarly communication.

Lack of Motivation: University authorities at the surveyed universities, in collaboration with library directors, should recruit, train and allocate performance incentives to academic librarians who have distinguished themselves in service delivery. They will be more motivated to innovate. Chief librarians should involve their staff in innovative projects, encouraging them to become more engaged and

change their attitude.

Lack of Passion for the Profession: The government should provide special status for academic librarians to address the lack of passion for the profession. Academic librarians have a special discipline like doctors, teachers and so on. A special status will drive passion for the profession.

Management should recruit LIS professionals to work in academic libraries and provide a convivial working environment. It could rejuvenate the missing passion for the profession.

Poor Working Conditions: University authorities should improve the working conditions of librarians. Management should provide and equip offices for academic librarians with state of the art facilities like internet, Wi-Fi and computers.

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