

EMPOWERING ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN SELECTED LIBRARIES IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the contributions, challenges, and strategies for empowering academic librarians in selected tertiary institutions in Sokoto State, Nigeria. Adopting a descriptive survey design, guided by three (3) research questions with the entire population of fifty-two (52) professional academic librarians across four (4) institutions, data collected through a validated structured questionnaire. Fifty (50) completed instruments were retrieved and analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that academic librarians play crucial roles in research support, knowledge dissemination, user education, and institutional intellectual output. However, their effectiveness is hindered by challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient ICT infrastructure, limited training opportunities, poor recognition in decision-making, and low remuneration. The study also identified strategies for strengthening librarianship, including regular professional development, increased involvement in institutional policy and academic planning, improved ICT facilities, adoption of innovative practices such as artificial intelligence and digital repositories, and formal recognition of librarians as academic staff. The paper concludes that addressing these barriers through targeted reforms will enhance the visibility, relevance, and contributions of academic librarians to the growth of the library and information science profession and the academic mission of higher institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Academic librarians, Professional empowerment, Research support, Challenges, and Strategies*

Introduction

Academic librarians play an indispensable role in the growth and sustainability of the library and information science (LIS) profession. Traditionally associated with cataloguing and circulation services, their responsibilities have expanded significantly in the 21st century to include information literacy instruction, digital resource curation, research support, open science facilitation, and scholarly communication management (Eze & Uzoigwe, 2021; Okonedo & Adigun, 2022). As the academic landscape becomes increasingly shaped by technological innovation and the digital economy, librarians have emerged as key stakeholders in the knowledge ecosystem supporting faculty, students, and researchers in navigating complex information environments (Akintunde, 2020; Jiyane & Jiyane, 2023).

In contemporary higher education, academic librarians are not only custodians of knowledge but also critical enablers of teaching, learning, and research excellence. Their capacity to develop user-centered services, manage institutional repositories, support bibliometric analysis, and facilitate data-driven research has positioned them as essential partners in academic planning and delivery (Nwalo & Ogbomo, 2021; Nkanu & Okon, 2024). The shift towards open educational resources (OER), artificial intelligence (AI), and digital scholarship further reinforces the strategic relevance of academic librarians in supporting innovation and quality assurance in higher institutions (Afolabi & Adesina, 2023).

In Nigeria, academic librarians have contributed meaningfully to national development through their involvement in research dissemination, capacity building, and curriculum enhancement. However, their roles are often underrecognized and underutilized within institutional and policy frameworks (Issa et al., 2020; Lawal & Ibrahim, 2024). Persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, outdated ICT infrastructure, minimal career

progression opportunities, and limited involvement in decision-making continue to impede their full professional expression (Nwokocha & Okafor, 2018; Adeniran & Ajayi, 2023).

In Sokoto State, which hosts major higher education institutions like Usmanu Danfodiyo University and Sokoto State University, academic librarians are at the forefront of efforts to sustain academic quality. Nonetheless, they face systemic and institutional challenges including budgetary constraints, insufficient training, and a lack of modern digital infrastructure. These barriers threaten not only the effective performance of librarians but also the broader advancement of the LIS profession within the region (Garba & Bello, 2023; Ibrahim & Musa, 2024). It is within this context that this study investigates the contributions, challenges, and strategic enhancement of academic librarianship in selected academic libraries in Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Academic librarians are fundamental to the advancement of research, teaching, and learning in tertiary institutions. Despite their professional significance, their roles are frequently undervalued and excluded from institutional planning and governance. In Sokoto State, many academic libraries operate under constraints such as inadequate funding, obsolete infrastructure, and a shortage of professionally trained personnel all of which limit their capacity to deliver effective services. Moreover, the library and information profession continue to grapple with issues such as poor professional recognition, minimal involvement in policy formulation, and limited opportunities for career development. This persistent marginalization undermines both the growth of academic librarians and the evolution of the LIS profession. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the contributions, challenges, and

strategic pathways for empowering academic librarians in selected libraries in Sokoto State, Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What are the contributions of academic librarians to the development of the library and information profession in selected libraries in Sokoto State?
2. What are the major challenges faced by academic librarians in their professional practice in selected libraries in Sokoto State?
3. What strategies can be adopted to enhance the professional capacity and recognition of academic librarians in Sokoto State?

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Concept of Academic Librarianship

Academic librarianship refers to the professional practice and responsibilities undertaken by librarians within higher education institutions to support teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. Academic librarians serve as custodians of knowledge, managers of learning resources, facilitators of scholarly communication, and partners in institutional development (Corrall, Kennan & Afzal, 2023). Their roles have evolved significantly from traditional custodianship of print materials to dynamic functions involving digital resource management, instructional support, research data services, and information literacy training. In the Nigerian context, academic librarians are essential actors in bridging knowledge access gaps and enhancing research productivity within universities (Aina, 2020).

Professional Growth of Academic Librarians

Professional growth involves continuous learning, skill acquisition, career development, and active participation in professional activities that enhance one's competencies and contributions. It includes formal education, attendance at workshops and conferences, research publication, participation in professional associations, and attainment of recognized certifications (IFLA, 2023). For academic librarians, professional growth is vital not only for individual advancement but also for aligning library services with institutional goals and responding effectively to technological and pedagogical transformations. Studies have shown that librarians who engage in continuous professional development demonstrate higher levels of innovation and adaptability (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013).

Institutional Impact of Academic Librarians

Institutional impact refers to the measurable contributions of academic librarians to their parent institutions in areas such as teaching and learning support, research facilitation, administrative services, accreditation processes, and community outreach. According to Ocholla and Mostert (2020), academic librarians play a pivotal role in advancing institutional missions by fostering a knowledge-based culture and supporting quality assurance mechanisms. Their impact is further amplified through collaboration with faculty, provision of digital scholarship services, and management of institutional repositories, which enhance the visibility and accessibility of institutional research outputs (Corrall et al., 2023). Librarians remain central in fostering information literacy and supporting faculty research in Nigerian universities (Ogbomo and Ezeani 2021). Similarly, Olanrewaju (2022) emphasized that librarians' contributions to institutional repositories and curriculum support promote both scholarly visibility and professional development.

Empirical Review

Contributions of Academic Librarians Several empirical studies have highlighted the critical contributions of academic librarians. For instance, Nwalo (2022) emphasized their role in promoting information literacy among students and faculty, which directly influences academic success. Aguolu (2021) noted that academic librarians contribute to institutional research competitiveness through their involvement in research support services, including citation management, literature search assistance, and training in plagiarism prevention. Similarly, Ocholla and Mostert (2020) found that librarians in African universities contribute significantly to digital transformation by leading the adoption of institutional repositories and facilitating access to open educational resources (OERs).

Challenges Faced by Academic Librarians Despite their relevance, academic librarians face numerous challenges that hinder professional growth and institutional impact. In Nigeria, these include inadequate funding, limited training opportunities, lack of modern infrastructure, and poor recognition within academic hierarchies (Aina, 2020). Ocholla and Mostert (2020) also highlighted issues such as technological obsolescence, job insecurity, and underutilization of librarians in university strategic planning. Moreover, a UNESCO (2022) report noted that many African academic libraries struggle with poor internet connectivity and outdated ICT tools, limiting access to digital resources. Adepoju and Akintoye (2022), observed that the digital divide continues to hinder innovation in Nigerian academic libraries. Limited recognition in institutional decision-making. Chigbu (2021), stressed that academic librarians are often treated as auxiliary staff rather than academic partners. Collectively, these challenges not only demotivate librarians but also constrain the capacity of libraries to contribute meaningfully to teaching, research, and national development.

Institutional and Policy Frameworks

The institutional and policy environment significantly influences the effectiveness of academic librarians. Studies by IFLA (2023) and Corral et al. (2023) revealed that supportive policies, such as clear promotion criteria, funding for professional development, and inclusion in governance structures, enhance librarian motivation and performance. However, in Nigeria, implementation gaps and bureaucratic bottlenecks often undermine these policies (Aguolu, 2021). The TETFund initiative, while impactful, is yet to comprehensively address the professional needs of librarians across various institutions (Nwalo, 2022).

Strategies for Empowerment and Enhancement

Empirical studies recommend several strategies to enhance the professional capacity of academic librarians. These include investment in ICT infrastructure, structured training programs, mentorship opportunities, and integration of librarians into academic leadership roles (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013; IFLA, 2023). Aina (2020) emphasized the need for curriculum reforms in Library and Information Science education to incorporate emerging trends such as artificial intelligence, digital preservation, and research data management. Furthermore, collaborative networks and international exchange programs can expose librarians to global best practices. Okorie and Nnadozie (2021), advocated continuous training as essential for professional relevance in a rapidly changing digital environment. Olalekan (2024), also highlighted the transformative potential of emerging technologies for service innovation in Nigerian libraries. The recommendation for formal recognition of librarians as academic staff echoes the advocacy of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA, 2023), which has campaigned for equal status with faculty members. If implemented, these

strategies could enhance the visibility, morale, and overall contributions of librarians to institutional and national development.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003), which explains how innovations are adopted and implemented within social systems. The theory is relevant in understanding how academic librarians adopt new technologies, practices, and roles in response to institutional and professional demands. It also provides a lens to examine the barriers and facilitators of change within library environments. Additionally, the IFLA LIS Competency Framework (2023) serves as a guiding standard for identifying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective academic librarianship in the 21st century.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reviewed highlights the dynamic transformation of academic librarianship and its indispensable role in advancing institutional development. Academic librarians are central to research support, information literacy, and the digital reconfiguration of library services. However, their professional effectiveness is often hampered by structural, technological, and policy-related constraints. Addressing these limitations requires deliberate reforms through enhanced institutional backing, coherent policy frameworks, continuous capacity development, and the integration of emerging technologies. Such interventions will not only reinforce the visibility and relevance of academic librarians but also consolidate the contribution of libraries to broader national development objectives.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to examine the contributions, significance, and challenges of academic librarians without manipulating variables. The population consisted of all 52 professional librarians across four tertiary institutions in Sokoto State: Usmanu Danfodiyo University (23), Sokoto State University (16), Umaru Ali Shinkafi Polytechnic (8), and Shehu Shagari College of Education (5). Due to the small size, a census approach was used, covering the entire population.

Data were collected through a structured Likert-type questionnaire aligned with the research questions. Content validity was ensured through expert review by three scholars in the Department of Library and Information Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. The instrument was personally administered, and 50 copies were duly retrieved. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), with a 50% benchmark for determining significance in responses.

Results and Discussions

1: What is the role of academic librarians in the development of the LIS profession in selected libraries in Sokoto State?

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the respondents on the role of academic librarians to the development of LIS profession in selected libraries in Sokoto state

S/N	Item statements	N	A Freq. (%)	R Freq. (%)	D
1	Academic librarians play a key role in research support services.	50	46(92%)	4(8%)	A
2	Librarians contribute significantly to the dissemination of knowledge.	50	36(72%)	14(28%)	A
3	Librarians support teaching and learning through user education.	50	41(82%)	9(18%)	A
4	Academic librarians collaborate with faculty to improve curriculum.	50	27(54%)	23(46%)	A
5	Librarians contribute to the intellectual output of their institutions.	50	39(78%)	11(22%)	A

Key: N= Sample size, A= Accepted, R= Rejected, and D= Decision

Table 1 shows that academic librarians play vital roles in developing the LIS profession. Respondents strongly agreed that librarians contribute significantly to research support (92%), knowledge dissemination (72%), teaching and learning through user education (82%), curriculum collaboration (54%), and intellectual output (78%).

These findings highlight that academic librarians are indispensable in strengthening the LIS profession through their engagement in teaching, research, and knowledge management. The high level of agreement on their role in research support and user education underscores their continuing relevance in academic environments. This aligns with the observations of Ogbomo and Ezeani (2021), who noted that librarians remain central in fostering information literacy and supporting faculty research in Nigerian universities. Similarly, Olanrewaju (2022) reported that librarians' contributions to institutional repositories and curriculum support promote both scholarly visibility and professional development. However, the relatively lower agreement on curriculum collaboration (54%) suggests limited involvement of librarians in academic planning, echoing the concerns of Adebayo (2023), who argued that librarians are often sidelined in strategic academic decision-making. This result implies that while librarians are recognized for their core professional duties, their potential to shape curriculum and policy remains underutilized.

2: What are the challenges faced by academic librarians in their professional practices in selected libraries in Sokoto State?

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of the respondents on the challenges faced by academic librarians in their professional practices in selected libraries in Sokoto state

S/N	Item statements	N	A Freq. (%)	R Freq. (%)	D
1	Inadequate funding limits library development.	50	49(98%)	1(2%)	A
2	Lack of ICT infrastructure affects service delivery.	50	40(80%)	10(20%)	A
3	Limited training opportunities hinder skill	50	42(84%)	8(16%)	A

	development.				
4	Rapid technological change is difficult to keep up with.	50	27(54%)	23(46%)	A
5	Academic librarians are not adequately recognized in institutional decision-making.	50	26(52%)	24(48%)	A
6	Career advancement opportunities are limited in academic libraries.	50	33(66%)	17(34%)	A
7	Low salary and job satisfaction affect morale and performance.	50	47(94%)	3(6%)	A

Key: N= Sample size, A= Accepted, R= Rejected, and D= Decision

Table 2 indicates several challenges facing librarians: inadequate funding (98%), low salary and job satisfaction (94%), lack of ICT infrastructure (80%), limited training opportunities (84%), rapid technological change (54%), lack of recognition in decision-making (52%), and limited career advancement (66%).

The results reveal that financial and infrastructural limitations are the most pressing challenges, with nearly all respondents citing inadequate funding and poor remuneration. This finding is consistent with Yusuf and Lawal (2020), who emphasized chronic underfunding as a barrier to effective library service delivery in Nigerian universities. The challenge of insufficient ICT facilities reflects earlier studies by Adepoju and Akintoye (2022), who observed that the digital divide continues to hinder innovation in Nigerian academic libraries. Limited recognition in institutional decision-making (52%) further resonates with the argument of Chigbu (2021), who stressed that academic librarians are often treated as auxiliary staff rather than academic partners. These challenges have broader implications: they not only demotivate librarians but also constrain the capacity of libraries to contribute meaningfully to teaching, research, and national development.

What are the strategies for enhancing the role of academic librarians in selected libraries in Sokoto State?

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of the respondents on the strategies for enhancing the role of academic librarians in selected libraries in Sokoto state

S/N	Item statements	N	A Freq. (%)	R Freq. (%)	D
1	Regular training and professional development should be prioritized	50	37(74%)	13(26%)	A
2	Librarians should be more involved in policy and academic planning	50	45(90%)	5(10%)	A
3	Institutions should provide better ICT facilities for librarians	50	36(72%)	14(28%)	A
4	Innovative practices such as AI and digital repositories should be adopted	50	41(82%)	9(18%)	A
5	Strengthening library associations will improve advocacy and growth.	50	26(52%)	24(48%)	A
6	National policy should formally recognize librarians as academic staff	50	33(66%)	17(34%)	A
7	Librarians should be encouraged to publish and conduct research.	50	47(94%)	3(6%)	A
8	There should be clear promotion and career progression guidelines	50	29(58%)	21(42%)	A

Key: N= Sample size, A= Accepted, R= Rejected, and D= Decision

Table 3 shows that respondents strongly supported strategies such as regular training and professional development (74%), greater involvement of librarians in policy and academic planning (90%), improved ICT facilities (72%), adoption of innovative practices such as AI and digital repositories (82%), formal recognition of librarians as academic staff (66%), and encouragement to publish and conduct research (94%).

The strategies identified emphasize both professional empowerment and institutional support. The strong consensus on professional development and research productivity reflects a growing recognition that librarians must remain active contributors to scholarly communication. This agrees with the findings of Okorie and Nnadozie (2021), who advocated continuous training as essential for professional relevance in a rapidly changing digital environment. Similarly, the call for the adoption of AI and digital repositories supports recent arguments by Olalekan (2024), who highlighted the transformative potential of emerging technologies for service innovation in Nigerian libraries. The recommendation for

formal recognition of librarians as academic staff also echoes the advocacy of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA, 2023), which has campaigned for equal status with faculty members. If implemented, these strategies could enhance the visibility, morale, and overall contributions of librarians to institutional and national development.

Summary of the major Findings

1. The findings shows that academic librarians have significant role in supporting research, knowledge dissemination, supporting teaching and learning among others.
2. It was also revealed that inadequate funding, limited staff training opportunities, rapid obsolescence in ICT facilities, etc. were among the challenges that hinder academic librarians from their smooth professional practices
3. Furthermore, the findings showed that regular training and professional development, involvement of academic librarians in policy and academic planning, institutions should provide better ICT facilities for librarians were among the strategies for enhancing the role of academic librarians

Recommendations

1. Academic library stakeholders should prioritize regular training and professional development of their academic librarians
2. Government should endeavor to adequately fund the academic libraries, and recruit more professional academic librarians for effective service delivery
3. The institution's decision makers should carry along library in policy and academic planning so as to contribute immensely in enhancing academic mission of their institutions

4. Innovative practices such as AI and digital repositories should be adopted in academic libraries in order to cope up with current trends

Conclusion

Academic librarians play a vital role in supporting the core functions of higher education institutions, including research, teaching, and learning. As the academic landscape evolves, librarians are increasingly expected to contribute to knowledge dissemination and digital scholarship. However, their effectiveness is hampered by challenges such as inadequate funding, limited professional development opportunities, and outdated ICT infrastructure in libraries in Sokoto state. The research recommended among others that there is need for regular training, strategic involvement in institutional planning, improved ICT resources, and the adoption of innovative technologies. Addressing these issues will significantly enhance the contribution of academic librarians to the overall academic mission of their institutions.

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