

GLOBAL ISSUES IN THE 21ST CENTURY LIBRARIANSHIP: A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE.

LEAD PAPER PRESENTED BY

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Introduction

Global issue describes any social, economic, political or environmental problem that affects the global community, possibly in a catastrophic way. The major global issues which are interconnected are; economy, transportation, communication, population, shelter, food supply energy, environmental, health and natural resources. These major issues are further broken down into several sub-divisions as depicted by the following figure:

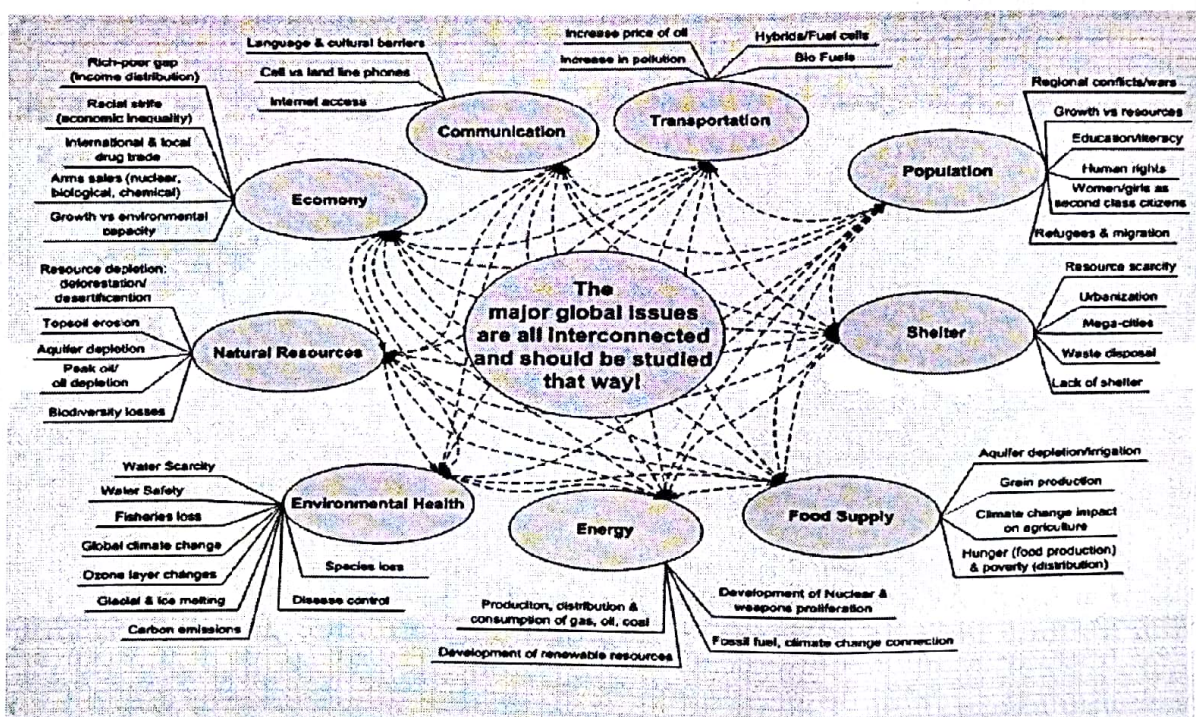


Figure 1: The Major Global Issues and their Interconnections. (Source: www.geni.org)

Also known as World problem, global issue respects no continental boundary or field of life. It affects all field of life including librarianship. A librarian is a professional who is trained and educated to deal with information in a wide variety of formats and settings and for all categories of users (Wordi, 2010). He/she assists library users to navigate into the tour of internet and evaluate information efficiently. Stressing on the status of librarians in the 21st century, Rao and Babu as cited in Shakeel and Bhatti (2012) ascertained that “due to the advent of Internet, World Wide Web and proliferation of online catalogue, the role of librarian has been changed. Now, a librarian is more efficient and has new roles as intermediary, facilitator, end-user trainer/educator, web organizer & designer, researcher, interface designer, knowledge manager/professional and sifter of information resources”.

It is a known fact that libraries have witnessed significant changes in recent years due to some of these global issues such as education/literacy, growth vs environmental capacity, growth vs resources, resource depletion/scarcity, global climate change, regional conflicts/wars, language & cultural barriers, internet access, among others. This change is also brought about by the advent of information and communication technologies which is aimed at addressing these global issues. The traditional methods of information acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination have given way to electronic means of communication. While the developments and application of ICT in library operations have improved and facilitated the dissemination of information and access, it has equally provided new roles in information provision, dissemination and transfer. The librarian no longer plays a passive role rather he assumes an active role, he is no longer a custodian of books but the gateway to a multitude of information sources (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). Haber (2011) posits that while providing books was a standalone function for libraries throughout the last few centuries, their offerings have evolved with the digital age to meet the changing needs of their patrons.

Librarianship in Nigeria is not divorced from this global issues or changes in librarianship. Therefore, to meet the global or local users' demand, there is need to change the focus of librarianship in Nigeria.

The 21st Century

The 21st century is the millennium of information otherwise known as information age. It is also seen as the era of explosion of information output and information sources. It is known as the beginning of knowledge age. New patterns of work and new business practices have developed and as a result, new kinds of work with new and different skills are required (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). In this century, the meaning of knowledge has changed. In the minds of experts, represented in books and classified in disciplines, knowledge is no longer what it used to mean. It is now thought of as being like a form of energy, as a system of networks and flows. In the knowledge age (i.e. 21st century), librarians are also known as knowledge workers, they need to be able to locate, assess and represent new information quickly and as well communicate it to others. They need to be adaptable, creative and innovative and be able to understand things as a system or big picture level.

Print materials are no longer sufficient to store information. CDROM databases, electronic document delivery, automated cataloguing, circulation systems and online information retrieval (OPAC) has become the order of the day (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). Ostrow as cited in Eguavoen (2011) admits that the advent of the Internet, digitization and the ability to access library and research materials from remote locations have also created dramatic changes by the end of the 20th century. Ramzan (2004) asserts that developments like expert systems, wireless networks, virtual collections, interactive Web interfaces, virtual reference services, and personal Web portals bring about greater changes since the start of the new millennium. Moghaddam (2009) is of the view that as information technologies, information systems and information networks have been developing, this century has also witnessed a dramatic change in users' information seeking pattern as patrons' expectations for a distance service delivery across library services have increased; patrons have come to expect a wide variety of automated push and or pull services from libraries and from a distance (Byamugisha, 2010).

Librarianship in the 21st Century

As the traditional custodian of information, librarians in the 21st century need to be aware of these significant changes and as such employ their technological know how and intellectual masterpiece in order to retain the leading role of the libraries in supporting teaching, learning and research and the goals of its parent body at large. This means that the 21st century librarian will have to be armed with competent skills that will enhance the provision of effective library

services to meet clients changing information needs. Literature abound on the competencies and skills needed for the 21st century library professional. Tennant (1999) identifies important personal characteristics and skills required of a competent 21st century librarian, these are:

1. The capacity to learn constantly and quickly;
2. Flexibility;
3. Innate scepticism;
4. Propensity to take risks;
5. Abiding public service perspective;
6. Good interpersonal skills;
7. Skill at enabling and fostering change; and
8. Capacity for and desire to work independently.

Omekwu (2003) added that a 21st century librarian should have:

1. Basic knowledge of computers and their capabilities;
2. Competency with search engines, internet facilities, e-mail, internet navigator tools, web browsers and web file formats;
3. Competency with database software;
4. Internet development and management know-how.

Also, some of the 21st century skills according to Krishnan (2011) include;

1. Communication and collaboration,
2. Creativity and innovation,
3. Critical thinking and problem solving,
4. Media literacy,
5. ICT literacy,
6. Flexibility and adaptability.

Good numbers of librarians specifically in Nigeria are familiar with the skills and/or characteristics aforementioned but the challenge is how to harness these skills for effective library services.

Challenges Facing the 21st Century Librarianship in Nigeria

Lack of Competency: some librarians in Nigeria lack competency to take on the challenging roles/expectations of the 21st century information service delivery. They are unenthusiastic to technology and perceive the application of information technology to library management as an aberration. This being the case, they are indisposed to embrace new technology (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). Tanawade (2011) asserts that many librarians lack confidence in the face of increasing information technology. This tends to slow down service delivery and retards productivity. It can be said that one of the factors which slows down the adoption of information technologies by Nigerian or African Librarians stem from the technologically backwardness of the country or continent at large.

Recommendation: In order to solve the issue of this technological backwardness in this part of the world, librarians in Nigeria should partner with other librarians in other parts of the world where these technologies emanate from.

Lack of Technological Awareness/Technology literacy: Some professional librarians lack the requisite technological literacy needed for a 21st century library service. Technological literacy can be viewed as the ability to responsibly use appropriate technology to

communicate, solve problems, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, design and create information to improve learning in all subject areas and acquire life long knowledge and skills in the 21st century (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). Edem (2008), states that the major challenge facing the 21st century library is not under funding but the inadequate technological know-how on the side of librarians and information professionals in the third world countries. Lack of basic skills in the use of information technology has hinders the advancement of librarianship in Nigeria. Anyira (2011) adds that librarians without a well-developed ICT skill cannot render effective library services, thus, lack of skills among librarians constitute a major obstacle to service delivery in the 21st century.

Recommendation: To solve the issue of lack of technology literacy in relation to numerous information technologies available worldwide, librarians and information professionals should embark on ICT skill acquisition training so as to acquire the necessary skills require to withstand the 21st century technological requirements.

Diminishing Resources vs Increasing Growth: Resource such as money is the tendon that attaches a library/information centre to effective information service provision. Money is needed for the acquisition of information and communication technology equipment, for internet subscriptions, staff training, emolument and maintenance (Emezie & Nwaohiri, 2013). The strength of a library lies in its information resources both print and online. Funds are needed to cater for a whole range of services in the library of the 21st century yet government subventions in the education sector are not adequate. This is sometimes due to the depletion rate of available monetary resources against the increase in population growth. The problems hindering the adoption and application of IT by Nigerian librarians/libraries and Africa at large include apathy and inadequate funding as funding is essential to excellent library services.

Recommendation: Libraries should not depend only on local source of funding. They should also device a means of raising income internally.

Lack of Students' Interest in the Profession: With the miniaturisation of disciplines into many other sub-disciplines due to the problem of information explosion, student (mostly undergraduate) in the librarianship profession lack interest in the profession thereby not ready to make contribution therein (Alhassan, 2005). This has present or future impact on librarianship in the 21st century as these students are to be the future stakeholders in the profession.

Recommendation: To solve this problem, students should be more expose to the prospect of the profession and they should also be given the opportunity to attend seminars and workshops where they will be opportune to meet and interact with stakeholders in the profession. This will serve as a kind of motivation to them.

Lack of Curriculum Review/Use of Outdated Curriculum: Some library schools in Nigeria lack updated curriculum for student learning. This also affects the students' interest in the discipline. The school curriculum should be reviewed in line with technological advancement and students should be exposed to the practical application of these technologies to the library management. In addition to teaching them the application of the technologies, they should also be taught how to develop/produce this technology. This will aid local-made technologies which are easily modifiable to suite our local environment.

General Recommendations

1. Librarians should acquire technical skills, IT skills, managerial skills and communication skills to work in digital environment.

2. To keep the librarians up-to-date and well aware of the new trends in the profession, continuing education and development programs (CEDP) should be started by Library Associations and LIS Schools.
3. It is recommended that Library Associations working in the country should organize useful training courses, seminars and conferences which may help in preparing well versed librarians in the country.
4. All issues related to librarian's scale, promotion and salary must be resolved on priority basis so that the librarians may get mental satisfaction and work with devotion.
5. Scholarships, fellowship and awards should be offered to promote professional competition among the professionals.
6. LIS curriculum must be restructured keeping in view the new technological trends in the profession and demand of job market in digital era.
7. Professionals' standards, norms must be developed for quality of services in libraries and information centres.
8. Apprenticeship programs should be offered to the newly qualified B.Sc/B.Tech (LIS/LIT) and M.Sc/M.Tech (LIS/LIT) students.
9. Adequate technical facilities such as well-furnished Internet laboratory equipped with modern tools for providing digital services to the users must be provided in every LIS Schools/Departments.
10. Appointment of IT teachers having specialization in computer science or information technology and can adapt the knowledge to library development and services. This is necessary for developing IT skills among the students in real sense.
11. There should be a National Policy to control the demand and supply of LIS professionals in the country.
12. LIS curricula must be revised in developing countries to incorporate all new technical skills which are required by the librarians to navigate smoothly into the voyage of digital information. It should be revised after every two years according to the new trends in the profession.
13. Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Nigeria should help libraries in acquiring modern infrastructure for providing variety of resources to the clients

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