Librarian's Role in Digital Economy in Establishing an Intelligent Academic Community

Ismail Ali Bashir[1], Misa Mohammed Musa[2]

[1,2]Department of Library and Information, School of Science and Technology

Abstract: In today's dynamic world, emerging trends are particularly important in academic library settings. This study scrutinises the vital role of academic librarians play in the perfection of digital literacy as well as lifelong learning, in addition to their contributions to the development of an informed society. Using semi-structured interviews with librarians, and other members of the academic community, the study employed qualitative methods. Thematic coding was used for data analysis in order to determine themes and patterns in participant responses. Key themes were identified from the data using the NVivo application software. In highlighting the importance of librarians and information professionals in a digital society, the study reveals how librarians support the growth of an intelligent society and promote digital inclusion while navigating opportunities and challenges. It also discovered that the practical consequences, especially for librarians and educators. In addition to discussing issues like scarce funding and quick technical advancements. The study addresses issues like rapid technological advancements and insufficiency funding, and it draws recommendations for how academic libraries can help librarians fulfil their crucial role. The results also point out that the roles of librarians are becoming more dynamic and technology-focused, fluctuating to meet the needs of the community and equipping up with technological advances.

Keyword: Digital literacy, information literacy, research support, Lifelong Learning

INTRODUCTION

In the emerging trends, verse array of online resources are available for students. In the digital economy, services and data are focused more on digital information, intelligent communication is taking place, and more intelligent interaction is emerging as industries and services become more digitally data and knowledge-oriented (Bukht & Heeks, 2017). Academic libraries in the other hand are primarily served as information centres. Though, as digital content has developed and the need for academicians and individual scholars to be digitally literate has increased, academic libraries' primary purpose has changed dramatically (Chowdhury, 2019). An intelligent society, according to Castells (2010) and Li (2020), is made up of individuals who have access to information, are proficient in a variety of technological domains, and possess digital literacy. Since they assist users in navigating a vast collection of knowledge and informational spaces, facilitate the digital inclusion of the academic community, and support lifelong learning within communities. In the same vain (Zhang and Chen (2024) also asserts that individuals who are informed, capable of using technology in various contexts, and possess digital literacy constitute an intelligent society. Academic librarians are therefore essential implementers in achieving this goal, since, as they facilitate the academic community's digital inclusion, assist users in navigating a universe of knowledge and informational spaces, and support lifelong learning in the academic communities (Li, Rao, & Wan, 2022).

Over the past 20 years, there has been changing functions and roles of academic librarians. The traditional role which termed as custodians or keepers of books has experienced a substantial transformation. Published books, journal, and other reference material collections had to be arranged and maintained by librarians. They functioned primarily on cataloguing and making physical formats of information accessible. The introduction of digital technology has caused librarians to adapt, though, an increasingly diverse approach to handling electronic resources, including e-books, online databases, and digital archives. This resulted from the digitization of libraries. Because of this revolution, academic

librarians now have to organize and manage digital collections in order to ensure accessibility and preservation in a world that is becoming more and more digital (Jones and Lee, 2022). Research studies demonstrates that academic librarians are increasingly active in creating online educational resources and leading workshops on digital literacy (Li, Rao, & Wan, 2022). Digital literacy and the Digital Divide Digital literacy is the fundamental and foundational skills in the digital economy, and librarians are now viewed as "digital facilitators" who help close the gaps in a crucial role in today's digital economy (Hartnett & Tapia, 2020). Equal access to digital resources is made possible in large part by academic libraries (Carbo, 2021). This digital divide separates those with access to contemporary ICT from those without.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The body of work on digital literacy is expanding, there are no reasonable amount of studies that particularly address librarians' roles in the digital economy in relation to the idea of an intelligent society. By investigating how librarians view their contributions to lifelong learning and digital literacy within the context of the digital economy. This research work seeks to close that gap. Hence individual researchers, and academicians must look for an innovative competencies of diverse literacy skills because the digital economy has brought about advanced strategies that have changed the processes embraced in knowledge creation, sharing, and access. Libraries serve as vital information centres that support in community adaptation, and academic librarians who are digitally literate use information resources. Therefore, it is essential to look for and explore the multitudinous roles that librarians play in both the academic community and intelligent societies, which could be accomplished by fostering access to digital resources and encouraging learning practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do librarians view their evolving roles in the digital economy?
- What methods do librarians use to support patrons of academic libraries become digitally literate?
- How do academic librarians encourage lifelong learning and contribute to an intelligent society?

OBJECTIVES

- To examine the ways in which librarians help create an intelligent society in the digital age.
- To determine ways to help academic library patrons become more digitally literate
- To recognise the current and prospective roles of librarians in a world that is becoming more digital.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
DIGITAL LITERACY AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

In the digital economy, the emerging role of librarians as custodians of books has been transformed meaningfully. Digital literacy is an essential skills. Equal access to digital resources is made possible in large part by academic libraries (Carbo, 2021). Creating an intelligent society is hindered by the digital divide between those with and without access to contemporary ICT (Peng & Tao 2022). Particularly for under-privileged and marginalized communities.

Libraries offer the resources and know-how to bridge this gap (Li, Rao, & Wan, 2022). The fundamental abilities required in the digital economy are known as digital literacy. According to Carbo (2021), academic libraries are essential for ensuring that everyone in academic community has access to digital resources. One of the main challenges to creating an intelligent society is the digital divide between those with and without access to contemporary ICT (van Dijk, 2017). The infrastructure and knowledge that academic libraries offers can help and support close this gap, particularly for downgraded and mistreated communities (Li, Rao, & Wan, 2022).

INFORMATION LITERACY AND RESEARCH SUPPORT

In the digital age, information literacy has become crucial, especially for students, teaching staff as well as researchers. The number of online information sources has increased significantly, and librarians are being requested to teach individuals how to find, locate, evaluate, and use information efficiently. Numerous academic libraries support students and scholars develop these essential skills by providing webinars, workshops, one-on-one consultations, and online resources. In addition, academic librarians support researchers with managing citations, gaining access to research data, and using digital tools appropriately (Taylor & Williams, 2023). Accordingly, as digital tools and platforms develop, librarians have constantly adapted various techniques and teaching methods to make sure that users are fully equipped to browse through, navigate an ever-expanding information landscape as digital tools and handle a persistently changing information environment.

DIGITAL RESOURCES AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT

High proliferation of digital resources in academic libraries is one of the prevalent transferrals of the digital age. Librarians are increasingly in charge of managing a substantial collection of digital materials, such as online databases, institutional repositories, e-books, and electronic journals. The essential responsibilities is to guarantee that the academic community always has access to these resources (Smith & Adams, 2021). On the other hand, there are particular complications in planning and controlling access, such as navigating intricate copyright regulations, guaranteeing fair use, and dealing with subscription-based access concerns. Academic librarians frequently support open access publishing and endeavour to make it easier for all and sundry to have free and fair access to scholarly publications.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Academic librarians participate in interdisciplinary research projects over time, acting as collaborators rather than merely custodians of information. Librarians facilitate collaboration across disciplines by assisting researchers in organizing and accessing a wide range of digital resources through their contributions to academic teams. In addition to support research, librarians are essential in building both virtual and physical collaborative spaces that encourage creativity and innovation, for instance maker spaces and digital labs (Martin & Lee, 2024). These cosmoses give students the necessary resources to explore cutting-edge technologies and participate in experiential learning with the help of these cosmoses.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND LIBRARIES

One of the main focuses of academic libraries' missions is now lifelong learning. According to various scholarly publications, libraries are developing into community learning centres that offer chances for education and individual development (Hanna, 2020). Various programs that promote career advancement, skills development, and cultural enrichment for a diverse user community are seeing an increase in the involvement of academic librarians (Peng & Tao 2022)

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Over the years, a number of encounters have been observed in the field of librarianship, despite its numerous expansions. The main cause for concern is confidentiality issues surrounding the digital storage of academic and personal data. Librarians must make sure digital collections are safe and user privacy is maintained, while preserving access to important scholarly materials (Brown and Green, 2023). Furthermore, the rapid advancement of technology presents difficulties for the preservation of digital content. As technology advances, librarians must create plans to guarantee sustained access to digital content and guard against data loss. With a greater emphasis on data management, digital scholarship, and the incorporation of cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning into academic teaching and learning as well as research, librarians' roles in the academic community are likely to continue growing in the future.

In a nut shell, the era of digitalization, the function of librarians in the academic community has advanced significantly. Originally responsible for maintaining print materials, librarians now play a essential role in promoting digital and information literacy, managing information, and assisting with research. In order to guarantee access to these resources, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and teach information literacy, librarians are essential as academic libraries continue to grow their digital collections and services. Although issues like access, privacy, and digital preservation still exist, librarianship has a bright future ahead of it with plenty of chances for innovation and ongoing support of academic achievement.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN
A qualitative approach was used to explore academic librarians' experiences and perspectives in depth (Creswell, 2013). The study focuses on understanding librarians' roles through their own narratives, making qualitative interviews an ideal choice.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING STRATEGY
A purposive sampling method was used to select participants based on their professional experience with digital resources and public engagement. Participants in this study were purposively selected based on their experience working in academic libraries. Ten librarians and eight academic staff were randomly chosen to represent a diverse range of library environments as well as the academic community, and to provide varied perspectives on their evolving roles in the digital economy (Li, Rao, & Wan, 2022).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS
Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, which allowed for open-ended responses while guiding participants to deliberate specific aspects of their roles in the digital economy. Accordingly, the interview questions focused on the librarian's perceptions of their evolving roles in supporting lifelong learning, and adapting to the demands of the digital economy. The skills they impart to diverse categories of users in the academic community, and the strategies they use to support information and digital literacy skills support services (Hanna, 2020).

DATA ANALYSIS
The data was analysed through thematic content analysis by coding. Identifying patterns and themes in participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using NVivo application software, data were organised into strategic themes, such as evolving roles, digital literacy, lifelong learning, and challenges faced in adapting to the emerging trends of technological advances.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The key findings and results of the study were organised into strategic themes as follows

EVOLVING ROLES IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Participants noted that the traditional librarian role has expanded from book-cantered responsibilities to roles requiring advanced digital skills. This includes provision of teaching and technology support. Academic librarians described themselves as "guides" in the digital dominion, often serving library patrons to navigate complex digital resources, and tools (Participant A). In the same vain, participants repeatedly designated themselves as "information navigators," assisting patrons with digital tools and resources (Participant C).

This transferral backings with a study by Peng and Tao (2022) who highlights librarians as fundamental representatives in digital literacy for both teaching and learning.

PROMOTING DIGITAL AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Several academic librarians perceive themselves as "digital facilitators," leading webinars, online classes, and workshops on basic computer skills, internet safety, and digital resource navigation (Participant B). According to Carbo (2021), these roles are energetic in serving and assisting clienteles familiarise to a digitalised world. One of the participant further enlightened that, "Our role goes beyond books; we are equipping individual users and scholars with requisite skills they need for a digital society" (Participant C). Others reported hosting workshops on digital skills, such as internet safety, using digital devices, and navigating online resources. These initiatives have been especially important in reaching individuals with limited digital access. (Participant D).

SUPPORTING LIFELONG LEARNING

Academic librarians are indispensable agent in stimulating lifelong learning. Offering programs that provide to all categories of users, from initial literacy for young children to technology training for older adults (Participant D). As noted by Sayers (2019), libraries have transformed into centres for continuous learning and personal development. Similarly, libraries have become community centres for lifelong learning, offering a range of classes and programs. One participant shared that "libraries are no longer silent spaces, but vibrant hubs where people come to learn and connect." (Participant B).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Participants recognised resource constraints as a major barrier, with inadequate funding for new technology or training (Participant E). Participants also cited budget limitations as a main contest in providing up-to-date digital resources. Nonetheless, they also saw opportunities to expand services through partnerships with local organizations and technology companies. (Participant A). Yet, they also noted that partnerships with local organizations and increased community awareness could provide new opportunities for expanding digital literacy programs (Zhang & Chen, (2024).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- **For Libraries:** Libraries should consider investing in ongoing digital training for librarians and ensure access to the latest technological tools. These efforts will help librarians better support their communities and meet the demands of the digital economy (Hartnett & Tapia, 2020). Libraries are to be inspired to support ongoing professional development for librarians to stay current with technological advances.
- **For administrators and policy makers:** Officials are encouraged to provide stable funding to academic libraries to support digital literacy initiatives, particularly in underserved communities (Carbo, 2021).
- **For Educational Institutions:** Institutions can partner with academic libraries to offer joint digital literacy plans, leveraging library resources to enhance users' skills for the digital economy (Gorman, 2015). This will strengthen digital literacy programs for students.

CONCLUSION

It is pertinent to highpoints that the evolving role of librarians in supporting an intelligent society within the digital economy. As information facilitators and lifelong learning advocates. Academic librarians are invaluable in bridging the gap between individuals and the digital resources needed to thrive in a digital economy. Their roles has become more dynamic and technology-focused, fluctuating to meet the needs of the community and equipping up with technological developments. By fostering digital literacy and lifelong learning, helping bridge digital divides, enabling individuals to thrive in a technology-driven world. Librarians contribute to the development of an intelligent society prepared for future challenges. By investing in libraries, society can harness the full potential of librarians as central figures in building digitally inclusive and informed communities. However, there are issues regarding the rapid

technological advancements and insufficiency funding, and how academic libraries can help librarians to fully equip with the required skills to fulfil their crucial role.

RECOMMENDATION

Findings from this study point to several possible themes for further investigation. Professional librarians in various institution can work with a formalised set of standards to evaluate and assess teaching, learning and student performance, the experiences of students and teaching staff, instructors, information and digital literacy in an academic community.

As a result, this has been further recommended by Dike and Amucheazi, (2021) and Li, Chen and Wang, (2021) that the effectiveness of the academic library should be promoted and evaluated in an innovative ways possible. As such, in repositioning the impact on educational and research achievements and academic excellence. Academic library and information services should exercise good governance through

- Demonstrate commitment to the initiation of information and digital literacy programs
- Promotion of information and digital literacy through social media platforms
- Promotion of information and digital literacy through newsletters and annual reports
- Developing a program of principles, goals and objectives
- Developing strategies for the effective evaluation of academic achievements in digital economy

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