

Law Library in the 21st Century: The Need for Reform

By

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Introduction

The essence of setting up any library is to serve clients and librarians are key in delivering this service using appropriate available resources. To remain a relevant part of the institution that created the library, this objective must be assiduously achieved.

Library had kept pace with human development/civilization since the advent of historic period when record keeping for reference evolved. The 'library' used cuneiforms and hieroglyphics (drawings or curves of objects on stones used by the early man to pass messages or keep records of things), scrolls (Pieces of parchments or papyri joined together), paper and book at various times, when those objects were the medium of carrying/passing information, to give service.

Now again a new communication/writing medium is fast dominating the landscape while the book is giving way as an effective vehicle of information/library service. Again it is necessary for the librarians to adapt to the inevitable change.

This paper seeks to bring out the character of changes in the 21st century library arena, the skills and the tools required for service for any librarian aspiring to stay in contention. It is hoped that at the end the overwhelming advantages in favour of the 21st century library would ignite a professional passion for those left behind to gladly join in the digital race.

What is a Law Library?

A law library, for the purpose of today's discussion is the library set to provide legal materials to assist judicial officers, other members of the court and their clients in case of the court, law scholars and students in academic institutions and other law officers in ministries, police stations and other law related bodies.

This narrow centeredness on resources and clients in definition enabled it to fall under the category of a special library.

A special library is set to provide information on a particular discipline to a targeted person/organisation, rather than general materials for general public. Examples include medical library in the hospital, agric library in agric related institutions etc. Their purpose is narrow; the scope/width of concern is to attend to the immediate needs of a targeted client(s).

Law Library in the past

Without restriction to specialization the law library is like any other library in traditional characteristics. Therefore, in the traditional setting, the library(**including law library**) is defined by [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) “as a place set apart to contain books, periodicals, and other materials for reading, viewing, listening, study, or reference, as a room, set of rooms, or building where books may be read or borrowed.” This is very acceptable and convenient for our discussion today.

This kind of law library houses its materials in a location(s) and waits for information seeker(s) to come and use(at the premises) or borrow for a certain time. The tasks of the librarian in this situation are to physically engage in collection development, processing, presenting, preserving and weeding the library materials. When presenting them, he/she most often acts as guide to the physical location without much personal affiliations.

Some Specialized Services by Law Librarians

Apart from the regular reader services, law librarians also offer other specialized services to individual/group client(s). These services include the following:

1. SDI
2. CAS
3. Indexing
4. Abstracting
5. Translation

6. Literature Search

7. Bibliographic Listing etc.

These services mentioned above provide good platform for extended interpersonal relationship between librarian and patron. Normally, it takes a little while for the librarian to satisfy client's quest because the tools of the trade are traditional (print based).

Changes in the 21st Century

Time is transient, the 21st century is the current century that began January 1, 2001 and would end December 31, 2100. It simply rolled in and entered seamlessly without breaking any order or convention to mark a distinct new beginning or end of an era. Living through the times is a continuous activity and things continue to move on naturally. Things grow, human population develops, their needs and institutions grow, including the library.

The 21st century began with remarkable changes that emanated in the previous one. It came with "a rise in the global economy and third world consumerism... and an increase in the power of private enterprise". Underneath the above mentioned concerns are two factors of science and technology that propelled information explosion to a new level. Those factors are computer and internet. Their arrival gave information generation and transmission new, easier, more available medium, requiring new skills for management. That has a huge impact on library and librarianship.

With computer and internet the specialized services (SDI, CAS, Indexing, Abstracting, Translation, Literature Search, Bibliographic Listing etc.) mentioned above would actually take shorter time to render. The library of the 21st century is a well-tailored platform to deal with them and therefore places the librarian with the right opportunity to be more useful and more efficient.

Traditionally, the library is known to be a NO NOISE ZONE, but with the developments indicated above things changed. In *Library Journal*, Schwartz, M. (2013) wrote an article titled “How to Become a 21st Century Librarian” where she says: “If you want quiet and lots of time to read, think again. Today’s libraries are full of collegial, and sometimes even downright noisy, collaboration, creation, and community activities”. That is to say group discussions, presentations, online conversations, teleconferencing etc. take place in the library. She adds that: “modern librarians need to be comfortable and conversant with technology, be willing and able to speak in public, and possess people skills and a commitment to lifelong learning, as the profession and the expertise necessary for success are constantly changing.”

“Emerging tech is just one part of the bigger picture” says Stephens (2017) when he looks at other changes that happen to the library. Even sitting arrangement in the 21st century library is not the traditional permanent type. Activities mentioned above may require the formation of small groupings to cater for occasional group needs. Though this may seem social, the need to view a shot by a group, witness a broadcast etc. could necessitate changing sitting arrangement. Such things are now regular and have important impact on library service, clients’ satisfaction and patronage. So, the new library is now not only about collecting useful information, processing and preserving, it is also a social centre.

But that does not steal away library’s core value as information provider; the injection of these social aspects only further nourishes it. Emphasis on technological changes, in this discussion, takes the driving seat essentially because they touched on the primary apparatus that make up the library and service delivery.

In 1931, Ranganathan came up with his five laws of library science. The laws are as follows: Books are for use; Every reader his/her book; Every book its reader; Save the time of the reader;

and The library is a growing organism (Wikipedia). It is my humble opinion that the new technology that evolved and enmeshed the library has not changed the laws, it only introduced new modus operandi. To live in the present information world, information sourcing, processing, presenting and preserving (librarianship) styles must change.

Law Library in the 21st Century

Again, irrespective of specialization a law library reflects its likes across the fields. Therefore, as a result of the welcome intrusion of computer and the internet, the definition of the library now is different from the previous one provided by Wikipedia. It says: “a library is a collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. **It provides physical or digital access to material, and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both** (emphasis mine).

The highlighted part of the last paragraph introduced the missing aspect (digitization) in the library of old, materials that could be used outside the physical library. This definition fits what Wikipedia calls hybrid library: “a mix of traditional print library resources and the growing number of electronic resources”, a combination of tradition and modernity, the book and the computer.

It is no surprise though; that continuous development in the field is not done with us yet. No sooner than we settle to celebrate hybrid libraries than we are challenged with the entry of a more advanced one, the digital library, the paperless library. This brings us to the crux of the matter, the need to embrace ICT as a positive agent of change and the corresponding need to follow/catch up with its phenomenal speed. In time to come, it is anyone’s guess that digital library could be the conventional library.

In an article titled; *Adopt or Adapt Office Hours*, Stephens, M. (2017) says “Library and Information Service (LIS) has become a technology-driven field. Information technology is impacting every industry right now, and libraries are no different. This is not going to change—you can’t escape it...” This agrees with Matthews, K.(2015) opinion when he says “the internet has largely replaced the go-to resource for information culture.”It is a transition that does not respect the type of library you manage, your location in the world or the people you serve.

The discussion above does not insulate law library or any special libraries in particular. The effect is general and pervading. Once an innovation is introduced the impact runs across. Practitioners therein struggle to adopt the new ways and stay current to remain relevant. The clients of the law library are learned men and women of this society and their library must continue to support that status.

The danger of deciding to remain with the traditional library means you are inclined to feeding clients without-dated or stale information. No researcher is happy with that much less a judicial or legal officer partaking in the administration of justice. Therefore, to agree to plunge into the 21st century librarianship would mean to give our clients the benefits listed below.

Benefits:

1. Access to legal information from anywhere around the world. You do not need to travel to any specific location to access legal information/resources of the law library.

2. Round the clock (24/7) accessibility–no restriction to operating hours.

3. Funding is less expensive because there are little or no costs associated with constructing/purchasing/leasing large physical building; maintenance of the facility; utilities (water, electricity, gas, phones, internet); staff (fewer people are needed to develop, maintain, and support a digital law library)
4. Multiple users can access the same resource at the same time (though some resources may have a limit to the number of users who can access it at the same time)
5. Users can have immediate access to most current resources - access isn't delayed or prohibited due to holds, restrictions for in-library use only, or incorrect shelving, etc.
6. There is no physical degradation of the resource due to handling, storage, or vandalism.
7. Digital law libraries aren't limited in terms of size.
8. Digital law libraries can potentially cater better to the needs of clients by providing materials that users want and actually use. Some resources may only be officially purchased by the library from a vendor once a certain number of users have accessed the item. In this sense, items that are rarely or never used are not added into the collection and are not paid for, saving the library money.
9. The law librarian could also digitize internally (locally) generated materials (court rulings, decisions, conference, seminar papers etc.) by the judges of his court, renown scholars of his institute etc., upload same on the web to share with others.

With all these advantages we are obliged to try our best shot at reforming/modernizing to the benefit of clients.

Structure of the Reform

One of the definitions of reform as presented in dictionary.com suits our purpose in this paper. It states that reform is “to change to a better state, form, etc.; improve by alteration, substitution, abolition, etc.” All the key words in this definition would be operational when we agree to reform. Yes, we are changing for the better and we shall improve by alteration, sometime substitution and when necessary, abolition.

The title of this paper suggests there is need to reform the law library into a 21st century one. It suggests that the law library in Nigeria is behind time. Other countries did not allow it. In fact other sectors in Nigeria did not allow it. Many universities in Nigeria have tried and succeeded in modernizing their libraries. Also, the banking sector in Nigeria has a very successful story in reforming from traditional operations. If others could do it, the law library could also try.

To get to the root of the problem and have a clear view of where we are going, we need to ask the following questions: who is responsible for holding the law library back? And who is to reform it? However, to explore on how to reform the law library would answer those questions and gradually lead us to the way of our object of desire; the 21st century law library.

If we aspire to have a law library in tune with current changes in the field we must agree to reform in areas that are necessary.

These areas include:

1. Change from the librarian (attitudinal, knowledge and skills)
2. Library Reform (building, space and tools)
3. Client (attitude and skills)
4. Financing
5. Recession

Law Librarian's skills

Generally speaking, the skills law librarian requires are those that would enable him perform to satisfy the quest of client. Such includes the skill to source, process, present when needed and

preserve for future use. We here are all familiar with these chores, using the print materials (paper/book) as the main materials of service. But now there's a new kid on the block and the rules have changed.

Need for Skills Reform

As information medium shifts away from print based to electronic, requirements to operate in this environment differ. The librarian should be the first object of change if he is to stay afloat in the profession.

- a. Attitudinal Reform** is his/her first point of entry. He must accept that the change is real and not only here to stay but always improving. Schwartz (2013) acknowledges the importance of librarians changing their mind set in the 21st century. She warns anyone interested in joining the profession to “before deciding librarianship is right for you, make sure you understand what today’s librarians do...because technology is so interwoven with librarianship”, among other things.

Elke Bruton was quoted by Schwartz and I paraphrase herthus; that the librarian should wake up by assuming into a leadership position, strive to succeed and always consider their impact on people. What in my view Bruton is trying to say is that librarian must not only lead to the change but to also ensure people go through it satisfactorily.

Stephens (2017) says “mind-set is often more important than a single technology. Probably the best fit for today’s thriving information centre is someone who has mastered the mind-set that there will always be a cutting-edge technology just over the next hill, and the best response to that tech is, “Bring it on.” He is here talking about a librarian who is not afraid to change, a professional who goes out to look for the change in order to adopt it for use is the professional of the time.

b. Skill Reform

After getting the proper psychological adjustment, the librarian needs to acquire practical ICT skills to enable him use the medium effectively. We hear people say “you cannot give what you do not have”. It is not enough to believe in ICT but to be able to use it is the road to service.

It is only with these skills that you would know what your needs are, how to organize them and how to communicate to clients. It is also these skills that would enable you know the character of appliances required for proper handling, storage and preservation.

Similarly, when you get requisite skills you gain courage and it increases your effectiveness in advising management on policy decisions. When management appreciates your contributions, it further enhances the image of library as an important organ of the organisation. With sufficient skills you get to know more on how to manage resources more efficiently.

“Play, explore, and experiment” is what Stephens (2017) encourages librarians to engage in, to become proficient. The idea is for the librarian to continue to “seek out an opportunity to test drive the tech and think about how it might play a role in the lives of your patrons”. To him a librarian must not be a master of all applications but should have a fair grasp around to allow him operate conveniently.

Library Reform

After accepting the gospel of change, and after digesting sufficiently nourishing ICT diet, enough to enable him profess and attract funding, the librarian must then address his service platform (his library) for proper adjustment. The equipment to source may include various kinds of computer systems and internet. The computer systems may include items the

organisation supply and those the clients may possess. Some of these may include:

- a) Hardware
 - i. Desktop
 - ii. Laptop
 - iii. Tablets
 - iv. Smart telephones
 - v. Televisions
 - vi. Radios
 - vii. Various kinds of e-readers etc.
- b) Software
 - i. EBooks
 - ii. Ejournal
 - iii. Legalpedia
 - iv. Law pavelion
 - v. Databanks
 - vi. Commentaries
 - vii. Documentaries
 - viii. Films
- c) Social Media
 - i. whatsApp
 - ii. teleconference
 - iii. Skype
 - iv. Facebook
 - v. Twitter
 - vi. YouTube
 - vii. BBM
 - viii. Linkedin
 - ix. Emails
 - x. Blogs
 - xi. Googleplus, etc.

Clients' Attitude

This step is to the centre of activity, the client. Satisfaction of the client is the purpose of establishment of any library. Therefore when mode of service is changing consideration must be given to clients' willingness to adapt.

Televisions, computer and many other ICT facilities are quite visible in our homes, schools, offices, supermarkets, transport organisations etc. but the most rampant of the techno gadgets is the smart phone. Expectedly, everyone must have had an encounter with them one way or another. It is from this point that the librarian would begin to build the interest of client into accepting them as more useful tools of receiving library service.

However, these experiences differ, while many are willing learners, others remain sceptical or even timid. But since there is no going back on the progress, the librarian should insist on encouraging the benefits of using electronic resources to his clients. Gradually, he could create training session to those requiring so to further build their interest.

To psych-up clients into accepting and adopting the electronic library could be a gradual activity. Availability of hardware to try their hands on could speed up familiarization and ability to use the equipment. So, while the librarian could allow free use of ICT FACILITIES in his care, he should as well educate clients on the various types of hardware they could use as sources of information.

Financing Reform

Most librarians I meet are eager to change from the traditional to digital but the challenge is predicated on many factors but the most important one is; **death of the reading culture** which subsequently led to insufficient funding of the library.

Another factor that contributes to the problem is that **initial steps in migrating to ICT are expensive**. Providing sufficient hardware and software (antivirus, upgrade of systems etc.) to users could take so much funds especially when there is nothing on the ground.

Continuous and timely subscription of internet might not be easy from the start, but once client is familiar with the service it becomes a familiar expenditure.

Subscription of useful e-books, e-journals, professional sites etc is another task that we should pay attention to otherwise we might not enjoy the full benefits of the migration. Unlike the traditional library where to acquire means to own, the case is different here and the frequent subscription cost could be tasking.

The issue of recurring new developments in the ICT could ask for much. In this instance, careful attention should be paid not to be trapped by applications that do not add value but only drain our pockets. Any new developments should be of distinct additional value to be taken on board.

Local and international training and retraining of staff is another fund guzzling engagement. Here, whenever any new applications come all law librarians should be trained, but when that is not possible a staff or two could go and later train the remaining in the office. This could conserve training funds as well as allow library not to miss any new developments in the field.

We therefore appeal for adequate funding to enable us catch up with other professional colleagues around the world. The ultimate beneficiary of excellent law librarian is the rule of law. All concerned with research to carry out their duty would have it at the quickest possible time. The time taken to locate important information to make judicial pronouncements is hastened. All monies spent in not delaying justice is money well spent.

Reform in a Recession

Schwartz (2014) says “few libraries were untouched by the economic downturn of the 2000s.” She was talking about the US recession and when it was over they had a challenge on how to catch up for the lost time. Now, there is recession in Nigeria and

times are hard for financing government projects, including those of the library. The task before us is therefore not an easy one.

In spite of the recession, we have to justify our employment. We must look for ways to deliver service. Stephens, M. (2017) says “the best librarians will be creative, fearless, and curious about everything—what people want and how we might deliver services...” This plainly makes it necessary for librarians to be innovative, creative and deliver the service they are paid for.

No doubt resources are scarce and the court has other important expenditure to contend with. Since shortage of funds affects every project, the librarian must devise ways and means of utilize available resources optimally. To do that he should consider the following:

- a. He should be moderate in request.
- b. He should phase out needs according to priorities for a successful transition.
- c. He should find means of cooperation with other colleagues
- d. He should find means of cooperation or collaborate with sister libraries
- e. He could look for cheaper alternatives to his needs
- f. Use tools personally available to clients

Conclusion

In spite of the obvious expensive starting cost the advantages of going digital by far rules in its favour. Staying traditional only keeps you further from the unfolding developments in ICT and in your profession.

Administration of justice in Nigeria today is clogged with many difficulties. Judges have too many cases, prisons so congested, state prosecutors too few to be effective, at the end the administration of justice suffers huge setback. Therefore, it is only fair, on our part, as information professionals, to help ease work for judicial officers by embracing ICT as a means of sourcing and providing needed information speedily.

Law library belongs to an important arm of governance in this country. To keep it away from following the path of natural development means two things; (i) to deny the legal industry the necessary service to its keep practitioners learned and (ii) to render the profession of librarianship irrelevant.

Here, it could be acceptable to say that, to do justice to the law library, our employers need to provide sufficient funds for equipment and training for the realization of the 21st century library. On the part of the librarians, the willingness to join the band wagon is a necessary requirement that cannot shied away from. Librarians must put in more serious personal effort in following the natural trend of their profession.

SOME GREAT LAW LIBRARIES IN THE WORLD

1. High Court of Australia Library
2. Supreme Court of Victoria and Melbourne (Australia)
3. Dalhousie Law School, Sir James Dunn Law Library (Canada)
4. Bergen University Law Library (Norway)
5. Bodleian Law Library (Oxford, UK)
6. Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library (London)
7. Squire Law Library (Cambridge, UK)

The above sites could be reached on:

<http://ials.sas.ac.uk/great-law-libraries-world>

THE FOLLOWING ARE IN THE US

1. Columbia Law School, Arthur Diamond Law Library
2. Harvard Law School Library
3. University of Chicago, D'Angelo Law Library
4. University of Virginia Law Library
5. Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library
6. New York University School of Law LIBRARY

They could equally be reached on:

<http://ials.sas.ac.uk/great-law-libraries-world>

LEGAL DATABASE

1. Bodleian Law Library
<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/law/popular-link/databases>
2. Online Law Databases – Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/category:online_law_databases
3. Duke University School of Law
<https://law.duke.edu/lib/lresources/>
4. Harvard Law School
<https://hls.harvard.edu/library/research/find-a-database/>
5. Waterlex Legal Database
www.waterlex.org/waterlex-legal-database
6. Squire Law Library
<https://www.squire.law.ca.ac.uk/electronic-resources/legal-databases>

NIGERIAN LAW RESOURCES

1. <http://nigerianlawresources.com>
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