

# Intellectual Freedom and the Impacts of Electronic Resources in Academic Libraries

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper discussed the provision of electronic resources and free access to intellectual works which is widely recognized as one of the priority in academic libraries.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** This paper adopted an exploratory method with extensive literature review for the study. The article critically explained the role and importance of academic libraries in providing electronic resources using information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. Equally, it discussed the intellectual freedom and library bills of right for access to information resources and its interpretations.

**Findings:** The study revealed that the emergence of ICT has repositioned the frontiers of academic libraries resources, operations, and services as well as expectations of user access. The interpretation of intellectual freedom as a practiced principle in libraries, however, is not quite a clear cut. The free access to information via internet and other information technologies today make it possible to maintain the status of intellectual freedom globally and academic libraries play a great role in achieving such goals.

**Practical Implication:** The impacts of electronic facilities and resources remain vital in academic libraries for scholarly accessibility and efficient services delivery. Academic libraries should ensure free access to information resources while protecting intellectual right.

**Originality/Value:** the paper conclude that there should be an explanation to the constant tension between freedom of thought, expression, access and the constitutional interpretation.

**Keywords:** Academic library, Intellectual Freedom and Electronic Resources.

**Paper type:** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Intellectual freedom as a concept in librarianship means freedom to think or believe what one will, freedom to express one's thoughts and beliefs in unrestricted manners and means, and freedom to access information and ideas regardless of the content or viewpoints of the author(s) or the age, background, or beliefs of the receiver. Advance in information and communication technologies in the twenty first century has brought tremendous changes in access to intellectual resources. The emergence and use of information technology is the century's most significant development affecting scholarly communication. The application of computers to information processing has brought several products and services to the scenes.

The use of electronic resources today in daily life is as a result of the ICT advancement. Electronic resources means sources that are

available in electronic form, it may be books, databases, journals, full text articles, pictures, photographs, images, music, & other multimedia. These resources delivered via Android Phone, Tablets, Laptops, Computer with the help of Internet. Other similar terms used for E- resources are web sources, digital resources and online resources. Electronics resources are sources, which provide on time information in electronics format, the information is available at any time as per need of researchers, students, scholars and other library users.

Consequently, the academic community has undergone tremendous changes during these years, assuming new dimensions influenced by technology-driven applications. Sharma (2009), states that "the transition from print to electronic medium apart from resulting in a growth of electronic information, has provided users with

new tools and applications for information seeking and retrieval. Free access to information resources becomes easy using the electronic gadgets. Writing on the advantages of electronic resources, Dadzie (2007) writes that electronic resources are invaluable research tools that complement the print – based resources in a traditional library setting. Their advantages, according to her include: access to information that might be restricted to the user due to geographical location or finances, access to more current information, and provision of extensive links to additional resources related contents.

Electronic resources are invaluable research tools that complement the print-based resources in a traditional library setting. The Internet and the Web are constantly influencing the development of new modes of scholarly communication; their potential for delivering goods is quite vast, as they overcome successfully the geographical limitations associated with the print media. Further, the distribution time between product publication and its delivery has been drastically reduced. The Internet can be used for efficient retrieval and meeting information needs. This is very important for university libraries since most of them call for more and more research work and the free access to intellectual works.

This rapid emergence and development of electronic information technologies therefore makes it possible to envision radically different ways of organizing the collections and services the library has traditionally provided. While libraries approach a crisis point in financing collection development, these new technologies offer possible ways to mitigate costs and revolutionize ways to access information and provide users with the free access to intellectual resources.

### **Academic Libraries**

Libraries serve as highways to the forest of intellectual ideas by acquiring, organizing, processing and storing information in retrievable form and providing tools that can be used to access the information. Materials, including those that are useful for education and other interests have continuously been written and published by many scholars since the ancient civilizations. These intellectual products are kept in libraries, museums and other repositories for users' consumption. The academic library serves as the pivot around which academic activities

revolves in tertiary institutions. Ubogu and Okiy (2011) have pointed out that academic libraries are those attached to universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other similar higher institutions of learning. Adeniran (2011) while agreeing with Ubogu and Okiy's assertion also added that academic libraries serve research needs of students and staff. A list of what may be found in today's library, according to Brown (2007), includes: books, periodicals, films, recordings, computer databases, and competent human resources. In the view of Ugwuanyi, Okwor and Ezeji (2011), the abundance of information resources provided by libraries makes them a potential learning environment in a university. They therefore advocate that a good academic library should provide multifunctional environment within the library space as this would create a platform for individuals to achieve set goals.

As a focal point for teaching, learning, and research, it is expected to provide standard information resources. Today, academic libraries are struggling to keep their place as the major source of inquiry in the face of emerging digital technology. Digital technology has revolutionized not only the way information is packaged, processed, stored, and disseminated, but also how users seek and access information. Academic libraries no longer restrict themselves to print services such as collection development, cataloguing and classification, circulation and reference services, current awareness, selective dissemination, and other bibliographic services, but have extended their efforts to interdisciplinary concepts and computer software and hardware and telecommunication engineering and technology. As observed by Campbell (2006), "numerous creative and useful services have evolved within academic libraries in the digital age: providing quality learning spaces, creating metadata, offering virtual reference services, teaching information literacy, choosing resources and managing resource licenses, collecting and digitizing archival materials, and maintaining digital repositories". Academic libraries presently are faced with not only the decision on what books and journals to acquire to satisfy faculty and students but also on how to remain relevant in the digital era, mindful of low budgets and resentment on the part of institutional administrators. There is also the issue of library users opting for alternate, more convenient, and "qualitative" sources of information (the Internet). As Lombardi (2000)

notes, users will prefer more computer content, more and more computer indices, digitized finding aids, digital repositories of articles, online access to newspapers, etc. Libraries also struggle with when, how, who, and where to begin digitization efforts, while keeping in mind that hesitation in the digitization of institutional archives will result in relinquishing the function to another institutional repository host. The consequence is repositioning of academic libraries resources, operations, services and skills. Resources today occur in hybridized form: print and electronic, and therefore services provided and skills possessed by professionals in these libraries should reflect that trend.

Academic library is not just a repository, or a service provider like any other, or a place for study: it is all these things. It is also a partner in research and in teaching in the mother institution. The reasons to value academic libraries are as follows:

- The library continues to fulfill its role as the heart of the university, despite the move away from print and towards electronic resources. The work the library undertakes contributes directly to the institution's academic mission and to equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to achieve academically and to maximize their employability. Investment in e-resources has a direct impact on the productivity of an institution. Where academics and students have good access to e-content, effectively the library is now open 24 hours irrespective of building opening hours, and finding books and journals has become fast and immediate, freeing time up for the research and for teaching. For an individual university, good quality library resources can help attract and retain academic high flyers and contribute to the prestige of an institution. Universities which invest in their library see a return in terms of the quality of the grant applications they are able to make, and ultimately therefore to grant income.
- The library is much more than a passive repository for knowledge. For the undergraduate, the library as a place, and the library as a service are central to their experience of university. The library represents an important point of continuity for students during their time at university as does their relationship with its staff. This growing understanding of the role of the

librarian as a student advisor is now helping to drive convergence between the library and support services. The quality of the library is more important even than teaching contact time for prospective students considering which university to attend. Investing in the teaching and support services offered by the library can increase the employability of a university's graduates. The ability for source and manage information, and to use electronic resources and technology effectively, are skills which are highly valued by employers and the universities with libraries that spend more on materials and employ more staff also have greater retention rates.

### **Intellectual Freedom**

All human beings have the fundamental right to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, and to express their thoughts in public. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the right to know and the freedom to express are two aspects of the same principle. Since the right to know is inherently linked to the freedom of thought and conscience and all other fundamental human rights, argues the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 2007), freedom of thought and freedom of expression are necessary conditions for the freedom of access to information, linchpin of librarianship. Arguably, the right to know and the freedom to express are two aspects of the same principle. One may have the knowledge about an issue but choose not to express it due to various factors, which may include intimidation. It is also plausible for one to have an opinion about an issue without necessarily being well-informed relying, perhaps, on perceptions. Notwithstanding these observations, that freedom of expression is realized by the preservations of the right to know is understandable.

The importance of intellectual freedom is further confirmed by the number of multi-lateral institutions that have endorsed the Declaration: United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (Article 9), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and fundamental Freedoms (Article 10), the international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and other similar conventions. By ratifying the Universal Declaration and other Instruments, nation states bind themselves to its provisions that must then be reflected in the law and practice of the country (Byrne, 2000).

### **Libraries and Intellectual Freedom**

Intellectual Freedom generally deals with the right to say, do and think without restrictions. Libraries provide access to ideas, no matter how unpopular. It deals with access to and expression of ideas. A formal definition of intellectual freedom authored by the American Library Association (ALA) describes intellectual freedom as "the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored" (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom 2007).

The library, as a social institution, plays a crucial role in the formation of the intellectual potential of society and must, therefore, respond to changes that take place in the country (Sayenko, 2002). The right to think what we please and say what we think serves as the bedrock principle upon which all ideas are based. According to Sutton (2001) to a library, intellectual freedom takes the form of the right to receive ideas, that is, to access information and the library is first and foremost a place to access information, making intellectual freedom central to the mission of the library profession. The library's historical role as an educational institution has been the provision of materials to enhance the development of individual's abilities, interests and knowledge. Therefore, the state of intellectual freedom in libraries is an important indication of the progress of democracy in a nation.

The purpose of the Intellectual Freedom Principles is to give an outline as to how and where the principles fit into an academic library setting, and provide guidance for the librarian in executing his or her duties. The principles are:

- The general principles set forth in the Library Bill of Rights form an indispensable framework for building collections, services, and policies that serve the entire academic community.
- The privacy of library users is and must be inviolable. Policies should be in place that

maintains confidentiality of library borrowing records and of other information relating to personal use of library information and services.

- The development of library collections in support of an institution's instruction and research programs should transcend the personal values of the selector. In the interests of research and learning, it is essential that collections contain materials representing a variety of perspectives on subjects that may be considered controversial.
- Preservation and replacement efforts should ensure that balance in library materials is maintained and that controversial materials are not removed from the collections through theft, loss, mutilation, or normal wear and tear. There should be alertness to efforts by special interest groups to a bias collection through systematic theft or mutilation.
- Licensing agreements should be consistent with the Library Bill of Rights, and should maximize access.
- Open and unfiltered access to the Internet should be conveniently available to the academic community in a college or university library. Content filtering devices and content-based restrictions are a contradiction of the academic library mission to further research and learning through exposure to the broadest possible range of ideas and information. Such restrictions are a fundamental violation of intellectual freedom in academic libraries.
- Freedom of information and of creative expression should be reflected in library exhibits and in all relevant library policy documents.
- Library meeting rooms, research carrels, exhibit spaces, and other facilities should be available to the academic community regardless of research being pursued or subject being discussed. Any restrictions made necessary because of limited availability of space should be based on need, as reflected in library policy, rather than on content of research or discussion.
- Whenever possible, library services should be available without charge in order to encourage inquiry. Where charges are necessary, a free or low-cost alternative (e.g., downloading to disc rather than printing) should be available when possible.

- A service philosophy should be promoted that affords equal access to information for all in the academic community with no discrimination on the basis of race, values, gender, sexual orientation, cultural or ethnic background, physical or learning disability, economic status, religious beliefs, or views.
- A procedure ensuring due process should be in place to deal with requests by those within and outside the academic community for removal or addition of library resources, exhibits, or services.
- It is recommended that this statement of principle be endorsed by appropriate institutional governing bodies, including the faculty senate or similar instrument of faculty governance.

There is no doubt that an academic librarian who scrupulously adheres to the above intellectual freedom principles will be by and large affirming academic freedom and enhancing the professional efficacy of librarianship.

### **The Interpretation of the Library Bill**

Library policies and procedures that effectively deny minors equal and equitable access to all library resources and services available to other users violate the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights*. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users.

Article V, of the *Library Bill of Rights* states: "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." The "right to use a library" includes free access to, and unrestricted use of, all the services, materials, and facilities the library has to offer. Every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources, based solely on the chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation of users violates Article V.

Libraries are charged with the mission of providing services and developing resources to meet the diverse information needs and interests of the communities they serve. Services, materials, and facilities that fulfill the needs and interests of library users at different stages in their personal development are a necessary part of library resources. The needs and interests of each library user, and resources appropriate to meet those needs and interests, must be determined on an individual basis. Librarians

cannot predict what resources will best fulfill the needs and interests of any individual user based on a single criterion such as chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation. Equitable access to all library resources and services shall not be abridged through restrictive scheduling or use policies.

Libraries should not limit the selection and development of library resources simply because minors will have access to them. Institutional self-censorship diminishes the credibility of the library in the community and restricts access for all library users.

Children and young adults unquestionably possess First Amendment rights, including the right to receive information through the library in print, sound, images, data, games, software, and other formats.<sup>1</sup> Constitutionally protected speech cannot be suppressed solely to protect children or young adults from ideas or images a legislative body believes to be unsuitable for them.<sup>2</sup> Librarians and library governing bodies should not resort to age restrictions in an effort to avoid actual or anticipated objections because only a court of law can determine whether or not content is constitutionally protected.

The mission, goals, and objectives of libraries cannot authorize librarians or library governing bodies to assume, abrogate, or overrule the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians. As "Libraries: An American Value" states, "We affirm the responsibility and the right of all parents and guardians to guide their own children's use of the library and its resources and services." Librarians and library governing bodies cannot assume the role of parents or the functions of parental authority in the private relationship between parent and child. Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that only parents and guardians have the right and the responsibility to determine their children's—and only their children's—access to library resources. Parents and guardians who do not want their children to have access to specific library services, materials, or facilities should so advise their children.

Librarians and library governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free, equal, and equitable access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, or format. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Lack of access to information can

be harmful to minors. Librarians and library governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors.

### **Electronics Resources**

Electronics resources are sources which provide on time information in electronics format. The information is available at any time as per need of researchers, students and other library users. Electronics resources are enabled by technical capability to create, search, and use enormous amount of information. Electronics Resources are e-book, e-journals, e-newspaper, database, bibliographic database etc. Electronic resources help library users, especially faculty, to be more productive. For example, electronic resources allow faculty to integrate resources into their proposals, articles, and reports regardless of location and to explore interdisciplinary research (Luther, 2008). There are various E- resources, which are used in library services such as E-books, E-journals, E-magazines, E- reference books, E- newspapers, E-thesis, E-dissertation, CD/DVD etc. Electronic book is a portable hardware & software book that can display a large quantity of readable textual information to the user. The importance and wide ranging scope of electronic resources for general communication, information retrieval and instructional delivery to support teaching and research activities in tertiary educational institutions is acknowledged worldwide. According to Ray and Day (1998) the importance and wide ranging scope of electronic resources for general communication, information retrieval and instructional delivery to support teaching and research activities in tertiary educational institutions is acknowledged worldwide. The literature also shows that a number of relevant studies have been carried out on the use of electronic resources by lecturers, research scholars and students worldwide. General user opinion towards the use of electronic resources, in particular CD-ROM, has been positive, with students enjoying the use of these resources and finding relatively few problems while using them.

### **Impact of Electronic Resources in Libraries and Information Resource Centers:**

There are several reasons to use the electronic resources in libraries. These can be summarized as follows:

- Increase the technological development. Easy to access and search. Ever increasing price rate of the print journals. Irregular publication and the long time gap between publication of a journal and its availability in the market. Problems related to conversion rate of foreign currencies. Lower price per user or free. Low searching time and availability of vast amount of the electronic resources.
- Librarians should be strong advocates of open access to information regardless of storage media. When purchasing electronic information resources, libraries should thus attempt to empower themselves during contract negotiations with vendors/network providers/licensors to ensure the least restrictive access in current and future products.
- Libraries themselves along with any parent institution and consortia partners should also communicate their intellectual freedom concerns and public responsibilities in the production of their own electronic information resources.
- Librarians must be aware of patron confidentiality laws on library records for their particular state and community. In accordance with such laws and professional ethical responsibilities, librarians should ensure and routinely review policies and procedures for maintaining confidentiality of personally identifiable use of library materials, facilities, or services. These especially include electronic circulation and online use records. Hence, libraries and their consortiums should ensure that their automated circulation systems, other electronic information resources, and outside provider services strive to conform to applicable laws and the library's ethical duty to protect confidentiality of users.
- Electronic records on individual use patterns should also be strictly safeguarded. Software and protocols should be designed for the automatic and timely deletion of personal identifiers from the tracking elements within electronic databases. System access to computer terminals or other stations should also be designed to eliminate indicators of the research strategy or use patterns of any identifiable patron. For example, the efforts of the last user of a terminal or program should not remain on the monitor or be

easily retrievable from a buffer or cache by subsequent users. Library or institutional monitoring for reserving time on the machines and the amount of time spent in electronic information resources should be similarly circumspect in protecting the patron's privacy rights.

- Libraries and their institutions should provide physical environments that facilitate user privacy for accessing electronic information. For instance, libraries should consider placing terminals, printers, and access stations so that user privacy is enhanced. Where resources are limited, libraries should consider time, place and manner restrictions.

### Access to Information Resources

Selection begins with the institution's mission and objectives. The librarian performs an initial selection from available resources, and then the user makes a choice from that collection. Many electronic resources, such as CDs, are acquired for the library's collection in this traditional manner. Collections consist of fixed discrete items.

When libraries provide Internet access, they provide a means for people to use the wealth of information stored on computers throughout the world, whose ever-changing contents are created, maintained and made available beyond the library. The library also provides a means for the individual user to choose for him or herself the resources accessed and to interact electronically with other computer users throughout the world.

Libraries should play a proactive role in guiding parents to the most effective locations and answers. Library websites are one starting place to the vast resources of the Internet. All libraries are encouraged to develop websites, including links, to Internet resources to meet the information needs of their users. These links should be made within the existing mission, collection development policy and selection criteria of the library.

The role of libraries is to provide ideas and information across the spectrum of social and political thought and to make these ideas and this information available to anyone who needs or wants it. In a democracy libraries have a particular obligation to provide library users with information necessary for participation in self-governance. Because access to government

information is rapidly shifting to electronic format only, libraries should plan to continue to provide access to information in this format, as well.

### Conclusion

The emergence of information and communication technology has repositioned the frontiers of academic library resources, operations, and services as well as expectations of user access. The interpretation of intellectual freedom as a practiced principle in libraries, however, is not quite so clear-cut. The free access of information via internet and other information technologies today make it possible to main the status of intellectual freedom globally and academic libraries play a great role in making available information resources available and accessible to users. This article has clearly explained the significance of academic libraries in providing free access to information resources and services using the electronic devices. Electronic resources remain vital in academic libraries for scholarly accessibility and efficient services delivery by librarians. However, there should be an explanation on the constant tension between freedom of thought, expression, and access and the constitutional interpretation.

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