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Leadership Roles in Building Resilient University Libraries and a Sustainable Workforce for Enhanced Education in Nigeria

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Abstract: University libraries are pivotal in fostering dynamic and resilient academic environments by facilitating effective learning, teaching and research endeavours. However, the ability of these libraries to fulfil their mandate hinges significantly on visionary leadership. Drawing from the insights of Michael Gibbson and contemporary leadership theories, this article explores the critical role of leadership in enhancing the resilience and relevance of university libraries in Nigeria. It scrutinizes the challenges posed by ineffective leadership, which often stems from issues such as ethnic patronage and compromised selection processes. Moreover, it underscores the necessity for proactive leadership that can navigate the complex terrain of university politics and resource allocation to bolster library collections and services. By examining the relationship between leadership styles and organizational culture, the article emphasizes the importance of cultivating a supportive work environment that fosters innovation and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, it advocates for continuous training and development initiatives to equip library leaders and their staff with the necessary skills to adapt to evolving demands and technologies. The article provides valuable insights for policymakers, administrators and practitioners seeking to strengthen the resilience and efficacy of academic libraries' leadership in Nigeria and beyond.

Introduction

The aim of building proactive university libraries is to assist in their development of dynamic and resilient nature to significantly respond to the tradition of ensuring effective learning, teaching and research. It also includes the building of sustained interest in generating scientific and technical knowledge in all fields of human endeavour. This is to ensure the dissemination of practical applications and use for the continued sustenance of Knowledge Space (K-Space)/Information Space (I-Space) for societal development. In practical terms, it takes a resilient university library to build a resilient university to sustain an efficient communication chain for knowledge creation, sharing and dissemination for societal development. These are what leadership roles entail. Michael Gibbson writing as far back as 1998 addressed the issue of the dynamics of the universities teaching, learning and research that the libraries domiciled in them were established to serve. Generally from the corpus of knowledge, the dynamics of the universities were readily seen through their commitments to knowledge generation, conservation and ex-

tension, and 'the university libraries are their greatest allies in this commitment' (Chidi, Nwosu & Udo-ayanwu, 2019, p. 478).

The research outputs in libraries are temporized yet instruments to dispel ignorance through the provision of knowledge that provides direction and light to both individuals and the society. Widely documented in extant literature in librarianship is the claim that the university library is the nerve centre and educational focal point in every university environment. For any university to be able to deliver on its mandate as a centre of academic excellence, producing tons of valuable knowledge for development, is a function of the university libraries, most of which are in dire need of "visionary leadership with innovative approach as key quality to building and retaining resilient university library workforce" (Abas & Asghar, 2010, p. 5). The underlying significance of this submission rests with the fact that a society that is unable to manage the knowledge it generates or can generate so easily to populate its knowledge space nurtured over the years will be dependent on other societies that could manage their knowledge for survival. Every society through the instrumentalities of university has something of value to contribute to the well being of the fast evolving global village. For a university library to deliver on this assistive corporate mandates, efficient leadership driven by the university librarian remains invaluable. The university librarian is well-regarded as the professional that knows the knowledge/information terrains of the immediate and outlying locations where knowledge and/or information-based resources can be acquired to support universities' core mandates of teaching, learning, research and community development. Leadership style is very important for having effective service delivery in an academic environment. Adekoya and Guobiazor (2023) asserted that academic libraries should be democratic in their leadership approach as this will strengthen effective leadership styles that will significantly enhance commitment and resilience among university librarians in Nigeria.

A leader is someone who influences the behaviours, opinions or attitudes of others; while leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals (Robbins et al., 2013, p. 368). According to Villanova University (2019), leaders are typically the figureheads of organizations and for good reasons; while workers depend on a strong management team to coordinate and ensure that everyone else knows their job role. There are good leaders and there are bad leaders. The headship of our focus is the laissez-faire librarian that is able to grapple with the challenges not only inherent in management and maintenance of the values of the profession; but in the projection of the library for expanded relevance and optimization of the benefits by the comity of library users. The distinction between effective and ineffective leadership remains central to the performance of academic libraries. Evidence suggests that the persistent decline in service quality across many academic libraries can be attributed to ineffective leadership, which undermines both professional standards and user satisfaction. A particularly problematic trend is the dominance of laissez-faire leadership, wherein library heads abdicate responsibility for addressing managerial

challenges, sustaining the core values of librarianship and strategically advancing the library's role within the academic enterprise. Such passive leadership not only weakens institutional relevance but also constrains the capacity of libraries to optimize their resources and fully serve the scholarly community.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper was to explore the leadership role in building resilient university libraries for enhanced education. Specifically, the paper:

1. Examined the role of leadership in building resilient university libraries in Nigeria.
2. Identified the challenges that hinder effective leadership in university libraries.
3. Discussed the impact of leadership styles on workforce development and service delivery in university libraries.
4. Proffered practical strategies for fostering visionary leadership and institutional resilience in university libraries.

Leadership Theories and Their Application

The attempt to clarify modern leadership as a concept “may be traced back to James MacGregor Burns’ 1978 definition of transformational leadership, linking leaders and followers and focusing on leaders who use the values and motives of followers to achieve goals” (Herold 2015, 1). Agreeing with John P. Kotter in his citation, Herold (2015, p. 1) saw “leadership as establishing direction by creating a vision; aligning people to carry out that vision through communication and the creation of support coalitions; motivating and inspiring people to overcome barriers to change, whether political or resource-based; and the producing change often to a dramatic degree”. Leadership as Ryan et al. (2015, p. 6) would have it, “is an illusive variable in terms of rationally deciding what it is and who has it to the extent that it is essential to move academic librarianship forward is accepted, and leaders need to be identified and nurtured is agreed”. This is generally to the effect that leadership in libraries, particularly university libraries, must come to terms and align their knowledge and practice with “tighter management and greater flexibility” (Gibbons, 1998, p. 8). Hernon (2010), however, argued that in addition to focusing on a shared vision, leadership is about giving people confidence to meet the organisational expectations and to serve as change agent particularly to underscore the need to secure resilience libraries and librarians’ services to sustain the unfolding knowledge economy while at the same time meeting the expanding and complex needs of contemporary team of smart library users. Thus, leadership is a critical factor in sustaining institutional goals and objectives. Liden et al. (2025) further averred that leaders attempt to motivate and enable followers to contribute towards achieving collective goals; hence, leadership is defined by ac-

tion. This supports the perspective of Ikolo (2019, p. 1) “that there is an increasing need for library leaders to provide articulate, strategic leadership that will not only motivate subordinates to be totally committed to their jobs but also ensure that the relevance of the services offered by the library remains above board”.

Leadership and Resilience in University Libraries

Just as Achebe (1998, p. 1) blamed “the trouble with Nigeria simply and squarely on failure of leadership”, there is also a problem with university libraries in Nigeria which seem to be blamed directly on a miscarriage of leadership by university librarians who are appointed to revamp ailing libraries and strengthen their effectiveness in service delivery through the instrumentality of improved acquisition and management of required resources. Information resource acquisitions by university libraries, aimed to oil the wheels of advancements in knowledge creation, discoveries and generation besides learning, teaching and research in the universities, are guided by the demands and requirements of the various disciplines, faculties and colleges within the universities. Malhotra (2008, p. 115) citing Churchma (1971) observed that “knowledge resides in the user and not in the collection; and it is how the user reacts to a collection of information that matters”. The question as we have learned in our graduate studies is how many of the headships of university libraries are politically literate and perceptive enough to play the politics with Vice Chancellors and their financial teams, particularly the Bursars, whose objectives in most cases run contrary to the well-being and development of the university libraries needed to leverage and sustain the effectiveness of the institutions. Any library without acquiring substantial relevant information materials that will be beneficial to the research drive of the university, faculty and the students, will not be able to sustain the cardinal aim of the university to produce world-class research outputs following from insightful discovery; and the value and superiority of the knowledge created through research.

As far back as 1998, Gibbons had unearthed the fact that

“Universities of the future will develop many more and different kinds of links with surrounding society. They will increasingly be ranked in terms of their connectivity to the distributed knowledge production system and their relevance as determined by their efficiency in drawing upon the resources of the distributed knowledge production system. Pointed out that “universities still enjoy a privilege place in the distributed production system.” (p. 10)

In this connection, Obinyan (2013) re-emphasized the corporate objectives of the libraries and the assistive requirements that must be provided to secure the desired outcomes. She noted that the central purpose of libraries is to provide

access to information. The shift to computer-based technical operations and more especially, the advent of library materials in electronic form indicate the prospect of radical changes in the means of library service. The library needs to sustain its high motivation by providing just-in-time services that will meet user's needs for relevant information resources. Electronic resources offer creative possibilities for expanding access as well as changing learning behaviour and academic research. The new emerging roles of librarians require that they acquire greater knowledge and information management skills if they are to provide information services to support the pedagogic needs of modern learning and instruction. digital transformation of a library is a function of a University librarian. Thus, library leaders must effectively integrate digital tools to improve access and meet evolving users' needs in university environments (Fasola, 2024).

Transformational leadership is characterized by vision, inspiration and individualized consideration as such characteristics tend to foster organizational resilience by promoting adaptability, innovation and employee commitment (Sharief, 2024). Good leaders are those that "seek every opportunity to communicate and mentor others in an effort to clarify team objectives" (Villanova University, 2019). Unfortunately, this crème of the crop of excellent leaders required to turn things around in the university libraries is in short supply, otherwise the age-long underfunding, wastages of allocation of funds and poor collection development would have long been mitigated. Fasola (2024), in his study on leadership style and library digital transformation, revealed that transformational leadership was the predominant style of leadership in private university libraries in Nigeria and this has great implications in the staff commitment and service delivery. Library information resources are also affected by the choice of leaders in the library. Collection development is a vital process in creating library holdings, be it an academic, special or public library. It is often said that collection development is one of the most important and responsible activities in the library. In fact, the utilization of library depends upon the quality of its collection (Obinyan et al., 2019).

The Leaders/managers

Leadership, management and organizational development are all parts of the same process, mainly enhancing the capacity of organizations and the people within them to better achieve their purpose (Bolden 2010, p. 117). Babarinde (2016, p. 24) observed that

"like Odysseus' Monster, our campus monsters also have one eye and eat people for their meals. Their one eye on power and the privileges it provides. Teaching, non-teaching staff and students who would rather that this eye – be turned in the direction of responsibilities and grandiose visions provide the ingredients for the meals

of the monster. With their one eye on power, they throw out, sack, attack, humiliate, hand-over to the state for safekeeping all those that seek to turn their eye towards the responsibilities of power.” (p. 24)

According to Babarinde (2016, p. 18), every organization is distinguished by the character of its leadership. This is underpinned by the fact that it is through the eyes of the leadership “that the organization is perceived and assessed because it is the leaders that shape the destiny of the organization through their thoughts and actions”. The persistent decline in the quality of university education in Nigeria is fundamentally symptomatic of ineffective institutional leadership. Research demonstrates that effective leadership practices are critical for sustaining quality teaching, research, and community service in universities, while weak leadership undermines these outcomes. For example, a study of universities in Cross River State found that transformational leadership significantly enhances institutional sustainability by improving teaching effectiveness, research output, and community engagement (Nnaji & Unamba, 2024). Similarly, an investigation into managerial impediments in universities in Rivers State revealed that infrastructural deficiencies, financial constraints and the effects of brain drain are closely tied to weak leadership capacity, thereby limiting institutional performance (Dawari & Robert-Okah, 2021). More broadly, governance studies emphasise that leadership in Nigerian higher education must strategically engage issues of governance, finance and accountability if universities are to improve standards and achieve their goals (Agboola, 2019).

Warren and Burt (2003, p. 99) argue that visionary leadership entails articulating a vision that is both contextually relevant and well aligned with the organization and its times. Such leadership establishes a standard of excellence, provides clarity of direction and purpose, and generates enthusiasm and commitment among stakeholders. A visionary leader also communicates a vision that is clear and easy to grasp, while drawing upon the organization’s distinctive strengths to secure competitive advantage. Ultimately, visionary leadership is characterized by ambition and the capacity to inspire progress (Tran, 2023).

Once created, the organization’s vision becomes its banner, a symbol that sets a direction for actions that will create the intended future, in which case the vision needs to be seen everywhere, at all times, appearing in the organization’s publications, management reports, stakeholder reports and financial presentations, project proposals and requests for expenditure, in budgets and plans, policy manuals and work standards (Christopher & Thor, 2011, p. 8). Due to the lack of visionary leadership in our university libraries, most university librarians have inadvertently relinquished their statutory functions, thereby setting the stage for the streaming of lacklustre services from the university libraries. This diminutive and pervasive hues of leadership in most of our universities, and the attached libraries “established for the generation and propagation of knowledge have become

a haven of anti-intellectualism demonstrated through what Eskor Toyo as far back as 1998 listed as: corruption, admission irregularities, ethnicity, nepotism, tyranny and fragrant illegality, sloppy administration, sycophancy, degradation of scholarly colleagues and hostility to academic staff unions” (Babarinde, 2016, p. 24). It was revealed that leadership training in libraries is on a low ebb and that library leaders needed to be visionary and innovative with effective communication and social skills to encourage a collaborative, agile culture in academic institutions (Ashiq et al., 2021).

Training and retraining are imperative for a workforce that must be able to adjust to changing situations and times according to the dictates of their profession to be able to serve credibly the needs of the customers. Such training and retraining must be documented and backed by corporate organizational policy.

Leadership Types

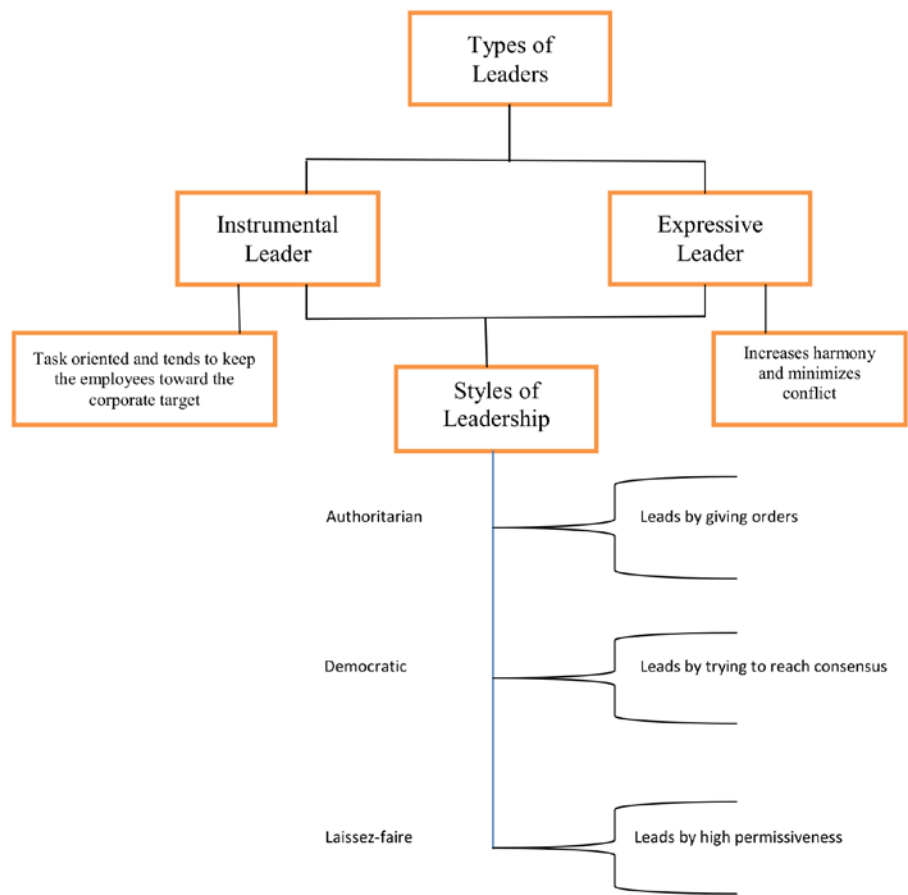


Figure 1: Leadership Type
Sources: Authors, (2025)

ically influence organizational culture within academic libraries, shaping norms, values and behaviours among staff.

Robbins et al. (2013) citing The New York Times (2010, January 17) observed that “management, at least as it is known in years gone by is dying as formal organizational structures are giving way to flatter, less bureaucratic, less formal structure” (p. 503). Continuing from the perspective of analytical lenses provided by The New York Times regarding leadership (2010, January 17):

“today, leaders are celebrated for triumphing over structure rather than for working well within it. Innovative companies like Apple, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Groupon were born and thrive, thanks not to a multilayered bureaucracy but to an innovative idea that was creatively executed by a flexible group of people freely collaborating. Management in those companies exists to facilitate, rather than control ... Yet management theory and practice continue to hew to a 1957 mode of thinking” (p. 503).

“Managers who are still guided by the old habits and processes of command and control, rather than ways to unleash the full potential of the membership—previously known as “employees”—hold their company back from developing the resilience and flexibility it needs to respond to rapidly changing technologies and markets. And that will be the difference between a business that succeeds and one that struggles, or dies.” (Pór, 2015, p. 1)

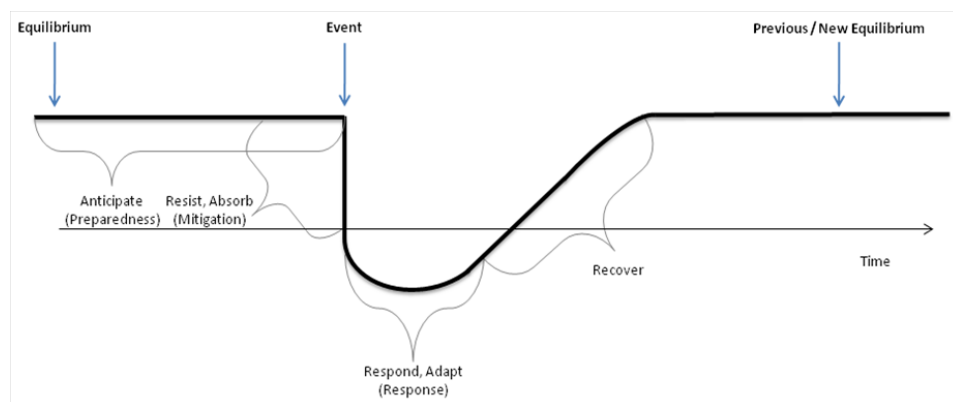


Figure 3: Components of Resilience and the Timing of an Adverse Event

Source: Carlson et al. (2012)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Leadership is an essential element in achieving high performance in libraries. Libraries all over the world have served as one of the most sustainable infrastructures for disseminating information to the general public, regardless of management styles adopted. In recent years, building resilient university library-

ies via leadership role is an important discourse, with librarians holding essential roles in their development and implementation. The resilience and effectiveness of university libraries in Nigeria are intrinsically linked to visionary leadership. This paper has illuminated the significant impact of leadership on the ability of libraries to fulfil their mandate as centres of knowledge creation, dissemination and community development. It has highlighted the detrimental effects of ineffective leadership, such as compromised service delivery and diminished relevance, and underscored the imperative for proactive and visionary leadership that can navigate the challenges of the academic landscape.

Moving forward, it is essential for stakeholders in higher education to prioritize leadership development initiatives tailored to the unique demands of university libraries. Embracing modern leadership paradigms that emphasise collaboration, innovation and customer-centricity will be instrumental in fostering resilient and future-ready libraries. Moreover, concerted efforts are needed to address systemic issues such as political interference and inadequate resource allocation, which often impede the ability of university libraries to thrive. By fostering a culture of excellence, continuous learning and adaptability, university libraries can position themselves as indispensable assets in the knowledge ecosystem.

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Role przywódcze w budowaniu odpornych bibliotek uniwersyteckich i zrównoważonej siły roboczej na rzecz lepszej edukacji w Nigerii

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łowa kluczowe: szkolnictwo wyższe; przywództwo; skuteczność organizacyjna; Odporność; Rozwój siły roboczej; Biblioteki uniwersyteckie

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treszczenie: Biblioteki uniwersyteckie odgrywają kluczową rolę we wspieraniu dynamicznych i odpornych środowisk akademickich poprzez ułatwianie efektywnego uczenia się, nauczania i prowadzenia badań. Jednak zdolność tych bibliotek do wypełniania swojego mandatu zależy w dużej mierze od wizjonerskiego przywództwa. Opierając się na spostrzeżeniach Michaela Gibbsona i współczesnych teoriach przywództwa, artykuł ten bada kluczową rolę przywództwa w zwiększaniu odporności i znaczenia bibliotek uniwersyteckich w Nigerii. Analizuje wyzwania związane z nieskutecznym przywództwem, które często wynika z takich kwestii, jak patronat etniczny i nieuczciwe procesy wyboru na stanowisko. Co więcej, podkreśla konieczność proaktywnego przywództwa, które potrafi poruszać się w skomplikowanym kontekście polityki uniwersyteckiej i alokacji zasobów w celu wzmocnienia zbiorów i usług bibliotecznych. Badając związek między stylami przywództwa a kulturą organizacyjną, artykuł podkreśla znaczenie kultywowania wspierającego środowiska pracy, które sprzyja innowacjom i zadowoleniu klientów. Ponadto opowiada się za ciągłymi szkoleniami i inicjatywami rozwojowymi, aby wyposażać liderów bibliotek i ich pracowników w umiejętności niezbędne do dostosowania się do zmieniających się wymagań i technologii. Artykuł zawiera cenne spostrzeżenia dla decydentów, administratorów i praktyków dążących do wzmocnienia odporności i skuteczności przywództwa bibliotek akademickich w Nigerii i poza nią.

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Die Rolle von Führungskräften beim Aufbau widerstandsfähiger Universitätsbibliotheken und einer nachhaltigen Belegschaft für eine bessere Bildung in Nigeria

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S tichwörter: Hochschulbildung; Führung; Organisationsleistung; Resilienz; Personalentwicklung; Universitätsbibliotheken

Z

Z usammenfassung: Universitätsbibliotheken spielen eine Schlüsselrolle beim Aufbau dynamischer und widerstandsfähiger akademischer Milieus, indem sie effektives Lernen, Lehren und Forschen ermöglichen. Ihre Fähigkeit, diesen Auftrag zu erfüllen, hängt jedoch in hohem Maße von einer visionären Führung ab. In Anlehnung an Erkenntnisse von Michael Gibbson und zeitgenössische Führungstheorien analysiert dieser Artikel die zentrale Rolle der Führung bei der Stärkung der Resilienz und der Bedeutung von Universitätsbibliotheken in Nigeria. Er untersucht die Herausforderungen, die sich aus ineffektiver Führung ergeben, die häufig auf Probleme wie ethnische Patronage und ineffiziente Auswahlprozesse zurückzuführen sind. Darüber hinaus wird die Notwendigkeit proaktiver Führung hervorgehoben, die in der Lage ist, sich im komplexen Umfeld der Universitätspolitik und der Ressourcenallokation zu bewegen, um Bibliotheksbestände und -dienste zu stärken. Durch die Analyse des Zusammenhangs zwischen Führungsstilen und Organisationskultur betont der Artikel die Bedeutung der Herausbildung eines unterstützenden Arbeitsumfelds, das Innovation und Kundenzufriedenheit fördert. Zudem plädiert der Artikel für kontinuierliche Schulungen und Entwicklungsinitiativen, um Bibliotheksleiter und ihr Personal mit den notwendigen Kompetenzen auszustatten, die es ihnen ermöglichen, sich an sich wandelnde Anforderungen und Technologien anzupassen. Der Artikel liefert wertvolle Erkenntnisse für Entscheidungsträger, Verantwortliche und Praktiker, die die Resilienz und Effektivität der Führung von akademischen Bibliotheken in Nigeria und darüber hinaus stärken wollen..