Current State of Librarianship in Nigeria, Examining the Perceived Challenges, Adaptive Innovations, and Future Pathways

By

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Abstract

Librarianship in Nigeria is at a pivotal transition point, shaped by rapid technological shifts, evolving user expectations, and persistent structural constraints. This article assesses the present landscape of the profession by analyzing three core dimensions: systemic challenges, emerging innovations, and prospective trajectories. The ***perceived challenges*** *remain largely infrastructural and institutional. Key issues include chronic understanding of public and academic libraries. Inadequate ICT infrastructure and intermittent power supply, limited digital literacy among both librarians and users, and a skills gap between traditional cataloging practices and modern information management demands. Professional recognition and remuneration are also cited as barriers to talent retention, alongside policy gaps in national library development and copyright enforcement in the digital era. Despite these constraints,* ***adoptive innovations*** *are gaining attraction. Academic and research libraries in particular have embraced open access repositories, institutional digital libraries, and the integration of library management systems such as KOHA and DSpace. social media outreach is being used to extend access beyond physical locations, especially for youth and underserved communities. Partnerships with international organizations and donor-funded projects have facilitated training programs in data curation, research support and information literacy. There is also a growing emphasis on rebranding librarianship through community engagement and advocacy for information as a public good. Looking ahead, the* ***future pathways*** *point toward a hybrid model that blends physical and digital services. The article highlights the need for continuous professional development, curriculum reform in library schools to emphasize data science and AI literacy, and strong public private partnership to address funding deficits. Policy harmonization at the federal and state levels, coupled with investment in broadband infrastructure, is identified as critical for scaling digital access. Ultimately, the sustainability of Nigerian librarianship will depend on repositioning librarians as information strategists and knowledge brokers within the broader national development agenda. This synthesis suggests that while challenges are substantial, the profession is demonstrating resilience and strategic adaptation, with technology and collaboration serving as the primary levers for transformation.*

Keyword: *Librarianship, perceived challenges, adoptive innovations and future pathways*

Introduction

For decades, Nigerian librarianship has operated under a familiar set of constraints: underfunded libraries, outdated infrastructure, and curricula slow respond to digital transformation. These constraints have shape training, services delivery, and public perception of the profession for decades.

Yet the landscape is shifting. Driving by the rapid diffusion of ICT, policy reforms from NUC and NBTE, and a new generation of librarians trained in digital skills, Nigerian libraries are experimenting with creative solutions to old problems (Ocholla and Shongwe 2013). From open access initiative to mobile library service and digital literacy programs, the profession is redefining its value in a knowledge-driven economy.

This article traces that evolution-from constraint to creativity and asks what it will take to sustain it through 2030. It examines the current state of librarianship in Nigeria, identifies key drivers of change, and outline pathways for curriculum development, professional practice, and institutional collaboration that align with Nigeria's national development agenda. In doing so, it argues that the future of librarianship lies not in waiting for resources, but in leveraging creativity, partnerships, and technology to expand access and impact.

➢ Perceived challenges of Librarianship in Nigeria

Librarianship in Nigeria has evolved from largely print-based practice to one increasingly shaped by digital transformation. However, this transition has been constrained by a set of interrelated challenges that librarians perceives as limiting professional growth, service delivery, and alignment with global standards (Aina 2006). These challenges can be grouped into infrastructural, skills-based, funding, policy and professional identity domains.

1. Infrastructural and Technological Constraints

The most frequently cited barrier is inadequate ICT infrastructure, Nigeria university librarian report that unstable electricity supply, poor internet connection, and insufficient ICT facilities hinder the development of digital repositories, electronic resources management, and open access initiatives (Olorunda 2023). These infrastructural deficits restrict libraries' ability to support research visibility and scholarly communication in line with global open science expectations. The problem extends to library schools, where many lack appropriate ICT facilities for training, resulting in graduates with limited hands-on experience in library automation and digital services. This creates a digital divide not only between Nigeria libraries and their global counterparts but also among institutions within the country.

2. Skill and Curriculum Deficiencies

Alongside infrastructure gaps, there are persistent concerns about professional skills and curriculum relevance. Recent studies show that while future academic librarians demonstrate moderate awareness of disruptive trends such as artificial intelligence, open access, and digital technologies in technical skills including data analytics, digital literacy, and the use of AI tools (Fricke 2024). Confidence in managing electronic resources and leading technological projects remains low. These gaps are partly attributed to curricula that are divergent across institutions and slow to incorporate modules on digital literacy, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and information ethics. Consequently, many practitioners fell inadequately prepared to navigate the demands of modern library management.

3. Funding and Human Resource Limitations

Inadequate funding remains a structural constraint affecting both practice and education. Limited budgets restrict the acquisition of current e-resources, maintenance of ICT systems, and staff development programs (Okiy 2014). Library schools face additional challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teaching staff, contributing to a brain that further weakens program quality. At the institutional level, high levels of organizational constraints in public university libraries have been linked to reduced job performance among librarians, suggesting that resource scarcity affects not only tools but also morale and productivity.

4. Policy and Professional Status Issues

Professional credibility is undermined by policy and governance challenges. Nigeria librarians have raise concerns about the appointment of unqualified individuals to head libraries, arguing that such practices weaken institutional efficiency and compromise service quality (Oladokun, Ogunjimi, Oyetola et.al). Delay in registration with the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) and the non-registration of some degree holders further fragment the professional pipeline. Weak institutional policies on open access, digital preservation, and ICT adaptation also slow the implementation of innovative services.

5. Emerging and Identity Related Challenges

The rise of predatory journals, unethical open access publishing, and the misuse of AI in scholarly communication present new ethical and operational challenges for Nigerian librarians (Nigerian Education News). These issues demand new competencies in information literacy and

research integrity that many practitioners feel unprepared to address. At a deeper level, scholars have noted an ongoing identity crisis within the professional catchphrase. This ambiguity affects public perception and the profession's ability to advocate effectively for its role in national development.

Collectively, these challenges illustrate why Nigeria librarianship is perceived as operating "from constraint." Addressing them requires coordinated interventions in infrastructure investment, and professional advocacy. The following section examines how these constraints are being met with creative responses and outlines pathways for progress toward 2030.

➢ Adoptive Innovations in Nigerian Librarianship

Despite infrastructural and policy constraints, Nigerian librarians have adopted a range of innovations to expand services delivery, improve access, and reposition libraries within the knowledge economy (Okiy 2014). These innovations are driven by the need to remain relevant amid digital disruption, user expectation shifts, and curriculum reforms.

1. Digital Repositories and Open Access Initiatives

Institutional repositories have become a key innovation across Nigerian universities. Librarians are leading the digitization of theses, dissertations, and research outputs to increase visibility and preserve institutional memory (Ezeani and Ezema 2020). This shift aligns with the global open access movement and is supported by curriculum changes that now include modules on digital libraries and institutional repositories. The adoption remains uneven due to ICT and funding gaps, but where implemented, repositories have improved access to local scholarship and reduced reliance on foreign journals.

2. ICT Integration in Service Delivery

Librarians have moved beyond traditional circulation and reference services to adopt ICT enabled services (Fricke 2024). Common innovation includes:

- **Library automation:** Use of Koha DSpace, and other open-source systems for cataloguing, circulation, and OPACs.
- **Virtual reference and chat services:** Especially adopted during and after COVID-19 maintain user engagement.
- **Digital literacy programs:** Training for students and faculty on information retrieval, referencing tools, and database use.

The 2022 NUC CCMAS and ICT courses such as Introduction to ICT in library & Information Science, Library Automation, and Library Application Software, creating a pipeline of graduates better equipped to sustain these innovations (National University Commission 2022).

3. Mobile and Outreach Services

To address low physical access and rural exclusion, some libraries have adopted mobile library services and outreach programs. These use mobile devices, WhatsApp, and SMS to deliver current awareness services, selective dissemination of information, and training to users outside the library space (Nwachukwu and Ogunyemi 2021). This is a low-cost innovation that leverages existing mobile penetration in Nigeria.

4. Adoption of AI and Emerging Technologies

While still at an early stage, there is growing experimentation with AI tools for cataloguing, plagiarism detection, and chatbots for reference services. Librarians report moderate awareness of

AI and digital technologies, though technical skill, remain a gap (Aliyu 2025). Workshops and hands-on sessions organized by libraries are beginning to bridge this gap.

5. Collaborative and Consortia Models

Resources sharing through consortia like the Nigerian University Libraries Consortium has allowed smaller institutions to access e-resources they could not afford individually (Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria 2020). Librarians also collaborate on capacity building through workshops, webinars, and professional association like NLA and LRCN.

6. Rebranding Library Spaces

Some academic libraries are rebranding spaces into “learning commons” and “Innovation hub” that integrate makerspaces, digital labs, and collaborative study areas (IFLA 2019). This reflects a shift from libraries as book repositories to libraries as centers for knowledge creation and digital literacy

- **Why these Innovations Matter**

These adoptive innovations show that Nigerian librarians are not passive in the face of constraint. Instead, they are leveraging, and partnerships to create new service models (IFLA 2019). The innovations also align with the IFLA Global Vision and Nigeria’s development goals of 2030, which emphasize digital literacy, research support, and inclusive access to information.

- **Future pathways for Nigerian Librarianship**

Librarianship in Nigeria is shifting fast from "just books and shelves" to "information, tech, and community impact" here are the key pathways shaping the next 10-15 years:

1. **Digital & Tech-Driven Librarianship**
   This is the biggest shift
- **Digital Libraries & Institutional Repositories:** Universities like UNILAG, ABU, and UI are already building IRs for theses, journals, and research output.
- **AI & Data Librarianship:** Using AI for cataloguing, chatbots for reference, and data management for researchers. Librarians will become data curators.
- **Library Automation:** More libraries moving to KOHA, Virtua, and cloud-based system instead of manual processes.
- **Cybersecurity & Digital Preservation:** Protecting Nigeria's digital heritage, e-books, and government records

2. **Specialized & Subject Librarianship**
   General librarianship alone won't cut it anymore
- **Health Librarians:** Supporting hospitals, NCDC, and medical research with evidence-based information.
- **Law Librarians:** For courts, law firms and NIALS.
- **Agricultural & Rural Information librarians:** Working with NAL, ADP, and farmers to bridge info gaps.
- **Business & Financial Information Librarians:** For banks, CBN, SMEDAN and startups needing market data.

3. **Community & Development Librarianship**

Libraries as community hubs, not just quiet spaces.

- **Public Library Transformation:** Partnership with NGOs and government to make public libraries into ICT plus skills centers. Think coding classes, CV writing, Entrepreneurship training.
- **Rural Information Centers:** Using solar-power libraries plus mobile library vans to reach underserved areas.
- **Literacy & SDG Alignment:** Libraries diving SDG 4 Education, SDG 5 Gender, and SDG 16 Access to Information.

4. **Information Entrepreneurship**
   Librarians creating their own jobs.
- **Information Consultancy:** competitive intelligence, research services and information audits for companies.
- **Content Creation & Knowledge Management:** Managing corporate knowledge bases, archive, and intranets.
- **E-learning & Educational Technology:** Developing digital courses, curating OER, and supporting distance learning with NUC and NBTE.

5. **Policy, Advocacy & Leadership**
- **Advocacy:** Pushing Nigerian research to be global visible.
- **Copyright & Information Law:** Librarians advising on FAIR use, plagiarism, and digital rights.
- **Professional Leadership:** More Nigerian librarians in LRCN, NLA leadership, and global bodies like IFLA to influence policy.

6. **Skills Nigerian Librarians Need Going Forward**

S/No.	Skill	Why it Matters
1	**ICT & Coding Basic**	To manage library system, websites, and databases
2	**Data Literacy**	To support research and teach data management
3	**Digital Content Curation**	To preserve Nigerian content online
4	**Marketing & UX**	To make libraries attractive to Gen Z
5	**Grant Writing & Partnership**	To fund projects and modernize libraries

Key Drivers

1. **LRCN Act & professionalization:** The Librarians Registration council is pushing for standards and licensing.
2. **Internet & Mobile Penetration:** Over 100m internet users demand for digital library services
3. **NUC Benchmarks:** Universities and other higher academic institutions now require e-library and librarian involvement in research support.
4. **Global Trends:** AI misinformation, and the need for verified information puts librarians at the center.

Bottom Line

The future Nigerian librarian won't just be a "custodian of books". They will be a tech specialist, data manager, community developer, and information entrepreneur.

The pathway you choose depends on interest:

- Techy?'n Digital Librarianship, AI data
- People focused? 'n Community, Public School Librarianship
- Research focused? 'n in Academic, Special, Knowledge Management

However, sustainability depends on three factors

1. **Continuous skills upgrade** for librarians in ICT, data, and AI
2. **Stable funding** for infrastructure and software licensing
3. **Policy support** from institutions and government to institutionalized these practices

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