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The Role of the University Library in Achieving the University World-Class Status

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Introduction

HEIGHTENED globalization and internationalisation of higher education as well as the imperative for the production of excellent human capital have foisted on the 21st century the concept of a world-class university. It is believed that quality higher education is the major driver of national development, advancement, quality of life and comparative competitiveness in the knowledge economy. Bunting, Cloote and Schalkwyk (2014) conceptualised world-class universities as reflecting excellence in research, academic freedom, intellectual interest, governance and funding. It is a university with reputation of outstanding and sustained excellence in research, teaching, funding, facilities, stimulating ambience, governance, institutional processes and procedures (Altbach, 2015 and Aula & Tenari, 2011). Without prejudice to the plethora of perspectives in the literature on world-class university, Alden and Lin provided an almost exhaustive characteristics of a world-class university as detailed below:

Alden and Lin (2004:12) summarised the essential features and characteristics of a world-class university as follows:

(1)   has an international reputation for its research;
(2)   has an international reputation for its teaching;
(3)   has a number of research stars and world leaders in their fields;
(4)   is recognised not only by other world-class universities, e.g., United States of America Ivy League, but also outside the world of higher education;
(5)   has a number of world-class departments (e.g., not necessarily all);
(6)   identifies and builds on its research strengths and has a distinctive reputation and focus, e.g. its "lead" subjects;

(7)   generates innovative ideas and produces basic and applied research in abundance;

(8)   produces path breaking research output recognised by peers and prizes, e.g. Nobel Prize Winners;

(9)   attracts the most able students and produces the best graduates;

(10)   can attract and retain the best staff;

(11)   can recruit staff and students from an international market;

(12)   attracts a high proportion of postgraduate students, both taught and research; attracts a high proportion of students from overseas;

(13)   operates within a global market and is international in many activities, e.g. research links, student and staff exchanges, throughput of visitors of international standing;

(14)   has a very sound financial base;

(15)   receives large endowment capital and income;

(16)   has diversified sources of income, e.g., government, private companies sector, research income, overseas student fees;

(17)   provides a high quality and supportive research and educational environment for both its staff and students, e.g., high quality buildings and facilities/high quality campus;

(18)   has a first-class management team with strategic vision and implementation plans;

(19)   produces graduates who end up in positions of influence and/or power, e.g. movers-and shakers, e.g. Prime Ministers and Presidents;

(20)   often has a long history of superior achievement, e.g. Oxford and Cambridge in the United Kingdom and Harvard in the United States of America;

(21)   makes a big contribution to society and our times;

(22)   continually benchmarks with top universities and departments worldwide;

(23)   has the confidence to set its own agenda.

The concept of building world-class universities has gained traction in the global community. It is further stimulated and driven by the emergence of various university ranking agencies like The Times Higher Education World University Ranking, Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) (Shanghai Jiao Tong), Webometrics Ranking and SCImago Institutions Rankings (Haupt, S., 2016 and Alsawaha, A.M, Al-Alawi, A.I. and Al-jayyousi, O., 2021).

Every university is now taking deliberate steps to adhere to the indicators and parameters of excellence as provided by the ranking agencies. The indicators

preponderantly revolve around top-notch learning and research, internationalisation, institutional reputation, global impact and visibility. Prospective students, parents, donor and grant agencies, employers, professional bodies, multinational corporations and other stakeholders recognise top ranking position of universities as a measure of distinction and prestige. The foremost ranking universities are university of Oxford, California Institute of Technology, Stanford University, University of Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, MIT. African universities appearing within the threshold of 251-300 in the world are dominated by South African Universities; University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, University of Witwatersrand, then University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa and Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. The University of Ibadan that led the Nigerian table occupies a distant 6th position in Africa, UNILAG 10th, Covenant 17th, University of Ilorin, University of Nigeria (UNN) and OAU all occupied the 46th positions in Africa (Okebukola, 2022). Graduates of world-class universities occupy a pride of place in the global perception. They are adjudged to have obtained quality university education.

It should be noted however that a quality university education is impossible without a quality university library. UNESCO (2014) defined library as "an organised collection of books and periodicals in electronic or in printed form or any other graphic or audio-visual materials and services of librarians who are experts at finding an organised information and at interpreting such materials as are required to meet the informational, research, educational or recreational need of the users". There are basically four types of libraries, namely: academic library, special library, public library and National library.

University library, which is a subset of academic library denotes a library or library system established, administered and funded by a university to meet the information, research and curricular needs of its students, faculty and staff (Reitz, 2004). The University library is central to birthing astute graduates and ensuring global competitiveness in scholarship and research. Libraries represent humanity's most successful attempt at democratising knowledge, hence it is said "any people that is starved with books, will suffer intellectual malnutrition, stagnation and atrophy". The latent propensity is such that the perspective and culture of a people can be altered by the activities of the libraries.

The moment we persuade students to cross that threshold into a library, we have changed their lives forever, and for the better (Obama, 2021). It is the realisation of the foregoing that made Sheldon (2013) to assert that "libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination and that they open up widows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, thus contributing to improve our quality of life". The University library provides opportunity for reading a wide variety of books, viewing audio-visual resources. The extent to which people will be creative, informed, knowledgeable, and instrumental to national development will be

determined by the availability and the content of the library services in their immediate locality (Nkiko, 2008).

Toye (1985: 2), a one-time Vice-chancellor of the University of Ilorin, once remarked, "if we have no laboratories and we lack the funds to recruit lecturers, the enterprise of teaching and learning in universities could continue if we had a well-stocked and up-to-date library". Without prejudice to the efficacy of the other organs of the university system, the intendment of the assertion is to underscore the utility and omnibus nature of the university library. The library is the heart and life-line of any citadel of learning. The quality of scholarship in a university is predicated on the robustness, availability and utilisation of resources. Nkiko and Okuonghae (2021:121-140) noted that:

> The National Universities Commission understands the indispensability of a university library to a quality education and thus places high premium on its adequacy in content and requisite facilities as well as the conduciveness of the general ambience. The criteria for the evaluation or accreditation of programs in the Nigerian Universities revolve around the following parameters: staffing (32%), academic content (18%), physical facilities (27%), library (18%), funding (3%), and employer's rating (2%). For a full accreditation status, a program is required to score 70% and above in the library component. University libraries are, therefore, pivotal to learning, teaching and research. The university library ensures that the university community has unfettered access to comprehensive and current learning resources in various formats (NUC, 2012).

The proprietors and management of Elizade University recognise the centrality of the University library in the quest of a world-class university status and have consistently maintained a trajectory of building a virile library system that is capable of supporting the laudable vision and mission. Elizade University Library provides compelling and robust hybrid resources for teaching, learning and research. It is automated with KOHA Integrated Library Software and the bibliographic details of its collections are in electronic format and accessible through remote login from anywhere and anytime in the globe. The holdings range from print collections, digital resources, curated open educational resources, institutional repository, video documentaries and other multi-media resources. It has an aesthetic ambience that is captivating, welcoming, secure, conducive, serene, friendly and well-designed spaces which engender inspiration, reflection, creativity and innovation. The library staff consists of enthusiastic and highly motivated professionals and para-professionals who value diversity, excellence and have requisite skills to offer innovative services and exceptional experience to its ICT-savvy and sophisticated community of users (Nkiko, 2019).

University Library and World-Class Status

Having discussed the general perspectives of the University library as the fulcrum upon which all academic activities revolve. It is crucial to establish the specific contributions of the University Library in achieving the would-class status of the parent institution. Modern university library otherwise known as 4IR (fourth industrial revolution) University Library facilitates the attraction and retention of international scholars and students as they are assured of availability of comparable metropolitan learning ambience for effective scholarship. Nkiko and Okuonghae (2021:121-140) and Regalado and Smale (2015), conceptualised the 41R University Library as "a hybrid library that brings together the best of the physical and digital to create learning hubs and that some of the characteristics include: Preponderance of digital natives as library users, increased demand for seamless access to online resources, virtual operations, e-library services, online scholarly communication, mobile technologies, social media application, digital curation and preservation". The virtual component of Elizade University library mitigates the challenge of digital divide, thus provides equitable access to global information resources for outstanding scholarship irrespective of geographical location and socio-economic status. An indigent student in Ilara-Mokin empowered by the Elizade University library has equal access to global knowledge with his aristocratic counterpart in Boston who has access to the Harvard University Library resources.

Elizade University Library complements and enriches formal classroom curricular and acts as a broadening influence on lecturers and students. It should be noted that the modern pedagogy for effective teaching is flipped classroom and blended learning. It is a departure from the traditional mode of lecturers engaging in copious disperse of information to students using class time. It involves students interacting with learning materials, studied same prior to the actual face- to -face lecture. Students only come to class to clarify ambiguities, fill identified gaps in knowledge, ask relevant questions and concretise ideas previously learned from the University Library. This process is also complemented by learning in the form of watching video lectures, listening to podcasts, perusing enhanced e-book contents as well as online collaboration with peers (Nkiko, 2021). Elizade University Library has been most effective in mediating this paradigm shift in teaching pedagogy resulting in deeper and profound comprehension of the curricular by students. The University Library helps the students to explore, experiment and discover facts and knowledge for themselves. It helps to cultivate and nurture in them the virtue of independent intellectual enquiry which is the gateway to lasting knowledge.

Elizade University Library plays critical and complementary role in the supervision of students' projects/dissertations/theses. From topic conceptualisation, literature search and review as well as application of appropriate referencing and

citation styles. The Library is usually inundated with the task of providing requisite guidance to the students in this regard. The University Library is engaged in the shared responsibility of actualising the academic needs of students and scholars beyond its routine professional assignments. Other roles of the University Library in actualising world-class status of the University include:

Open Scholarly Communication

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015) describes "open scholarly communication as a process of sharing and disseminating research findings conducted by researchers for free availability to the global communities". The University library ensures global visibility and open access to the University's research output and other scholarly publications. It actualises this onerous task through the establishment and maintenance of robust institutional repository, Open Educative Resources (OER), and influencing lecturers to publish in reputable open access outlets.

Bibliometrics

This involves understanding and evaluating the pattern, impact, relevance and utility of research outputs. World-Class Universities are usually ranked high on volume of publications indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science databases as well as citations per faculty. The University library provides bibliographic instructions and information literacy skills to lecturers and students aimed at optimising their citation profiles and research capabilities. The intervention of the University library in this regard helps researchers to gain mastery on the issues of journal impact factor, citation index, visibility on social web platforms such as Google scholar, Mendeley, Research-Gate, zotereo, academic.edu and almetrics. Bibliometrics is useful in ascertaining intellectual productivity of the academic staff and mapping out requisite research collaborations and linkages which is a major feature of world-class universities.

Preconditions for Effective Contribution of the University Library to the World-Class Status

Basic preconditions must be entrenched for the University Library to constitute a hallmark of the University learning and scholarship experience as well as contribute effectively to the crystallisation of the world-class status of its parent institutions. The preconditions include but not limited to:

Purpose-Built and Modern Library Physical Space

The physical library space evokes a mental picture of learning and research as

predominant essence of the University. The library building must be artfully designed to represent unmistakable and recognizable campus landmark. It should reflect the truism that "inspired learning happens in inspired building". The modern library building must provide a welcoming, conducive, secure, screen, aesthetic spaces that are technologically enabled and engender inspiration, reflection, creativity, innovation as well as collaboration (Nkiko, 2019). The requisite spaces are: learning commons, research commons and makerspaces. Learning Commons involves delineating separate spaces for quiet and collaborative learning. Beyond the hitherto traditional silent and individualistic arrangement, there is need for an ambience that allows for group study, socialisation and participatory learning. Research Common is dedicated to postgraduate students and researchers. It consists of technological resources, seminar rooms, teleconferencing facilities, areas for discussion and relaxation as well as services which support research endeavours (Balci, 2011 and Mabweazara, 2018). The makerspace in the library provides a platform for hands-on training on projects, teamwork, incubation of ideas, access to relevant tools and materials, mentoring, skills acquisition and product development.

Robust Hybrid Library Collection

World-class universities showcase the robustness of their library collections as a unique selling point. It is indeed an integral and distinctive feature of outstanding tertiary institutions. The value of a university library is measured by the quality, diversity, comprehensiveness and size of its collection. The University library must therefore build balanced collections that support adequately the vision and mission of its parent institution for today and the future. The quality of scholarship in a university is proportional to the content of its library collections. All academic programmes in the university require varied, authoritative, up-to-date, and excellent scholarly digital and analogue materials to meet the overall goal of delivering high quality education. University libraries subscribe to a wide spectrum of electronic databases containing avalanche of electronic books and journals as well as facilitate access to curated information resources and the global information networks.

Virtual Operations and Full Automation

One of the imperatives for a modern University is the need for virtual operation and full automation of library routines and processes. It presupposes interactive and multifaceted access points for quick and easy retrieval and navigation of the entire library holdings. It provides virtual services to patrons who cannot come to the library physically thereby ensuring borderless engagement through the cyberspace. It is characterised by the availability of Web Online Public Access Catalogue as a replacement of the card catalogue, online transaction, electronic theses and dissertations, deployment of scanners and barcode labels, biometric

systems, provision of self-service machines with RFID functionality, electronic security gates, CCTV, automated bindery systems as well as application of artificial intelligence and robotics to library services.

Adequate Power Supply, Bandwidth and ICT Infrastructure

Uninterrupted electricity supply is a fundamental requirement for an effective digital library operation. Sufficiency of bandwidth that guarantees speed internet access is non-negotiable. The absence of these two factors would render electronic resources and other digital provisions as mere decorations in the library. The adequacy of power supply, bandwidth and other requisite ICT-infrastructure is critical for the sustainability of a world-class University library.

Robust Funding

Effective and dynamic university library is capital intensive and requires robust funding which must be regular and predictable for meaningful planning and execution of strategic projects. There may be need to look for alternative sources of funding to augment proprietors' efforts and mitigate financial constraints in achieving envisioned and laudable goals. Many world-class universities thrive on their endowment initiatives. This is a credible option requiring strategic articulation to identify and leverage on institutional network and goodwill to attract donors.

Conclusion

A modern University Library is tangential to the crystallisation of a world-class University. It is central to birthing astute graduates and ensuring global competitiveness in scholarship and research. World-class universities boast of exceptional library resources and facilities which provide invaluable and incredible support to teaching, learning and research. Elizade University is poised to building a hybrid university library system that would become a hub of attraction and intellectual tourism to the African academics. The University Library is automated and accessible globally through internet browser. It maintains a robust institutional repository which archives and showcases the research output of the University for open access. It has multifaceted collections ranging from print to digital resources, curated open educational resources, video documentaries and other multimedia resources. The avalanche of library resources in Elizade University makes possible for the provision of innovative services to its students, faculty and external patrons.

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