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NAVIGATING ECONOMIC REALITIES ON THE ROLE OF SYSTEM LIBRARIANS IN DIVERSIFYING REVENUE IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NORTH-EAST, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined the role of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria. The study was guided by four objective and one hypothesis A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 27 system librarians from six selected Federal University Libraries in North-east, Nigeria, namely Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Federal University Kashere, Federal University Wukari, Modibbo Adama University, University of Maiduguri, and Federal University Gashua. The entire population was adopted for the study using an enumerative approach. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that system librarians were not substantially involved in diversifying revenue in university libraries, with a cluster mean of 2.47. Most digital library services were also not effectively utilized as significant sources of revenue generation, with a cluster mean of 2.49. However, system librarians made some contributions through specialized electronic information services, digital marketing, online document delivery and fee-based online services. The findings further revealed that inadequate funding, poor internet connectivity, high electricity costs, inadequate technical skills, shortage of qualified personnel and obsolete ICT infrastructure were major challenges affecting the sustainability of revenue-generating digital services, with a cluster mean of 3.20. The hypothesis test showed a significant positive relationship between the roles of system librarians and revenue diversification ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.004$).

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Keywords: System librarians, revenue diversification, digital library services, revenue generation, university libraries.

Introduction

University libraries have traditionally been regarded as the "heart" of the university because they support teaching, learning, research, and community development through the provision of information resources and services. During periods of stronger economic growth, Nigerian university libraries were able to expand their collections and services to meet the academic needs of their institutions. However, the current economic realities characterized by inflation, rising subscription costs for electronic resources, exchange-rate instability, and inadequate government funding have significantly affected their operations. University libraries mostly depend on the generosity of university administration to survive because they are under the jurisdiction of their parent institutions. However, because the library's needs frequently outweigh the management's available resources, this assistance is frequently regarded as inadequate (Agbanu & Ezekwibe, 2025).

The situation has become more challenging with the increasing dependence of higher education on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). University libraries are now expected to provide access to digital databases, institutional repositories, online reference services, and other technology-driven information services, all of which require substantial financial investment. Although universities have continued to expand in terms of student population, academic programmes, and research activities, funding allocated to libraries has often remained insufficient to meet these growing demands. In response to the constant budget cuts, libraries around the world have adopted various strategies such as revenue generation and marketing activities to compensate for the budget cuts due to unfavorable financial conditions (Baada et al., 2022).

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University libraries are engaging in several activities to generate revenue internally to improve their service delivery and daily operations. Ajayi et al (2021) defined internally generated revenue as any income an organization or an entity earns that has not been budgeted yet or released and within the university library context, it can be defined as the revenue generated locally by the library that is earned and expended by the statutory allocations of the university often not budgeted. Expanding revenue base is very necessary for university libraries to meet up with a lot of tasks that require financial obligations. This study therefore examines the role of system librarians in diversifying revenue streams in university libraries as a strategy for navigating contemporary economic realities in Nigerian higher education institutions.

Statement of the Problem

While library staff are expected to drive these revenue initiatives, the role of system librarians remains largely underexplored. System librarians, with expertise in ICT, database management, digital services, and library automation, are uniquely positioned to identify and manage technology-driven revenue streams such as e-resource consortia, digitization services, data analytics, and paid ICT training. However, system librarians in university libraries in North-East, Nigeria are navigating current economic realities to diversify revenue, the strategies they employ, and the challenges they face. University libraries in Nigeria are appear to have a severe funding constraints due to economic downturns, reduced government subventions, and rising costs of maintaining information resources. This challenge is more pronounced in North-East, Nigeria where insecurity, infrastructural deficits, and institutional underfunding have further strained library operations. To sustain services, many university libraries have had to explore alternative and diversified revenue sources beyond statutory allocations. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the role of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries in North-East, Nigeria, with a view to understanding the strategies, opportunities, and constraints involved in navigating prevailing economic realities.

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Objectives

1. Examine the roles of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent of revenue generated through digital services by system librarians in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.
3. Assess the areas of contribution of system librarians in revenue diversification in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.
4. Identify the challenges affecting system librarians in sustaining revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the roles of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of extent of revenue generated through digital services by system librarians in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?
3. What are the areas of contribution of system librarians in revenue diversification in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?
4. What are the challenges affecting system librarians in sustaining revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the roles system librarians and revenue diversification in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.

Literature review

The evolution of systems librarianship mirrors the broader transformation of libraries in response to technological change, as Singh and Nyaichyai (2023) explain in

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their discussion of shifting professional demands. In its early stages, systems librarianship developed to address the growing complexity of library automation, with practitioners responsible for maintaining integrated library systems, troubleshooting technical problems, and managing server-based infrastructures, a focus that Kemp (2023) identifies as central to sustaining cataloguing, circulation, and acquisitions functions. These responsibilities were primarily technical and backend-oriented; yet, as libraries increasingly adopted web-based platforms and expanded into digital collections, the librarianship scope of systems expanded accordingly. Satyakumar (2023) notes that this expansion introduced responsibilities such as system configuration, data migration, and the management of digital content platforms, gradually broadening the role beyond operational stability toward one that engaged with the emerging digital library environment. In contemporary contexts, systems librarianship has become a multifaceted specialization that integrates technology, institutional strategy, and user-centered service design. Nur (2023) highlights how systems librarians now coordinate discovery layers, authentication services, digital repositories, and integrations with learning management systems, work that requires collaboration with IT specialists, academic staff, and administrators to ensure alignment with organizational goals. This collaboration has also brought about the need for advanced skills in areas such as data analytics, cybersecurity, UX design, and metadata standards. Sa'ari et al. (2024) argue that these expanded responsibilities have redefined systems librarians as not merely technical support staff but strategic contributors to innovation, infrastructure sustainability, and the transformation of information access in the digital age.

Systems librarianship has developed into a multifaceted specialization that merges technological expertise with the foundational principles of library science. At its core, the role involves the design, implementation, and ongoing enhancement of the technological systems that sustain library services, a responsibility Pierre Robertson (2023) identifies as central to professional practice. These systems range from integrated library systems and discovery platforms to authentication protocols, digital repositories, content management

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tools, and learning management system integrations, as described by Makinde et al. (2025). Nascimento (2023) notes that within many institutions, the systems librarian functions as the technical backbone of the library, ensuring the reliability of digital infrastructures that enable circulation, cataloguing, collection access, and online engagement. In this sense, the role remains critical not only for technical stability but also for the seamless functioning of the broader library ecosystem.

A systems librarian oversees and maintains a library's computers and software. In this role, you update library databases and ensure that library software and hardware are working correctly. When the library needs to get new computers or update programs, the systems librarian collaborates with IT professionals to develop applications that improve library services for patrons, such as a more streamlined method of cataloging and searching for resources. Your job duties may also include implementing the new program, training library staff in using the automated systems, and troubleshooting hardware problems. Some systems librarians may also have shifts at the reference desk, helping patrons find what they need on library shelves and within the online catalog.

The term systems librarian has attracted several definitions which varies contextually based on such factors as the size and type of the library, responsibilities of the systems librarian. Systems librarians play an important role in academic libraries. They are professionals that are grounded in libraries and ICTs, and also see that these two fields converge and work seamlessly together as a whole (Mole, 2023). The evolution in the library systems has resulted in tremendous changes in the roles, skills and abilities required of them.

Mole (2023) listed the roles of systems librarians to include: ILS management, network design and management, server administration, training, documentation, support, application development, planning, budgeting, specification, purchasing, technology exploration, system evaluation, communication and coordination. The study also reported some specific skills expected of a systems librarian to include: ability to use data structures

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related to library materials, classification of knowledge, information storage and retrieval systems, desktop and network operating systems, programming, database design and maintenance, systems troubleshooting, information standards and protocols.

Libraries, particularly those at universities and other educational institutions, have long sought solutions to the problem of inadequate funding by turning inward and creating or joining various forms of creative self-help initiatives (Adebayo & Adegbore, 2021). This has allowed them to raise the necessary funds to meet the needs of their users and even exceed their expectations. There is a plethora of opportunities for university libraries to increase their revenue beyond the recurrent subventions and capital grants received from their parent school. Some of the ways that libraries in Nigeria make money are by photocopying services, fines for overdue books, selling copies and out-of-date publications, and charging for the use of rare or exceptional objects (Aina & Adeyemi, 2023). Over the years, several university libraries have embraced the concept of revenue-generation activities to enhance library services through new projects (Ogunbodede & Afolabi, 2024). University libraries, according to some research, rely heavily on revenue from the parent institution for its formal locations.

Methodology

This research adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was relevant to this study because it provided a comprehensive and systematic way of collecting vital data on the role of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries under study. The population of this study comprised of system librarians of the selected federal University Libraries in Northeast Nigeria which are: Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi State, Federal University Library, Federal University Kashere Gombe State, Federal University Library, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida Library, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Ramat Library, University of Maiduguri, and University Library, Federal University Gashua, Yobe State. The target population for this study comprised 27 library staff of the six (6) selected Federal University libraries in

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North-East, Nigeria. The entire population was used for this study; as enumerative, which is in line with work of Thompson (2020), opined that the entire population under study can be adopted if it is manageable in terms of cost and accessibility or subject of the study. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used in analyzing the data, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used in testing the null hypotheses.

Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

Response Rate

The study distributed 27 (100%) questionnaires to the respondents in the libraries under study, 23 (85.2%) were completed, returned, and considered valid for analysis, whereas 4 (14.8%) were not returned.

Research Question 1: *What are the roles of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?*

What are the roles of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries?

Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
System librarians facilitate the provision of fee-based electronic information services		2.61	1.03	Agree
System librarians support the development of institutional repositories and digital products for income generation		2.43	1.04	Disagree
System librarians assist in developing library websites and portals for revenue-generating services.		2.35	0.98	Disagree
System librarians monitor the use of digital services to identify potential revenue opportunities	**23**	2.39	1.03	Disagree
System librarians identify digital opportunities that can generate revenue for university libraries		2.57	1.04	Agree
System librarians use technology to improve the marketing of library products and services.		2.52	0.99	Agree
Cluster Mean		**2.47**	**1.02**	**Disagree**

The results show that the roles of system librarians in diversifying revenue in university libraries are generally low. The highest-rated role was facilitating the provision

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of fee-based electronic information services (Mean = 2.61, SD = 1.03), followed by identifying digital revenue opportunities (Mean = 2.57, SD = 1.04) and using technology to improve the marketing of library products and services (Mean = 2.52, SD = 0.99), all of which were rated Agree. However, respondents disagreed that system librarians support the development of institutional repositories and digital products for income generation (Mean = 2.43, SD = 1.04), monitor digital-service use to identify revenue opportunities (Mean = 2.39, SD = 1.03), and assist in developing library websites and portals for revenue-generating services (Mean = 2.35, SD = 0.98). The cluster mean of 2.47 (SD = 1.02), which is below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicates an overall Disagree decision. This show that system librarians are not substantially involved in diversifying revenue in university libraries this has related with the work of Okoro and Olowunkere (2024) found that although ICT facilities and services have considerable potential for generating alternative revenue in Nigerian academic libraries, their utilization for revenue generation was constrained by inadequate ICT maintenance and support, rapid technological changes and insufficient technical expertise among library personnel. The study recommended strengthening ICT units and employing technically skilled personnel to improve the use of ICT facilities for revenue generation. This finding supports the present study, which found that system librarians are not substantially involved in revenue diversification in university libraries.

Research Question 2: *What is the level of extent of revenue generated through digital services by system librarians in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?*

What is the level of extent of revenue generated through digital services by system librarians?

Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
Fee-based access to electronic databases generates revenue for the university library		2.83	1.02	Agree
Online information retrieval services generate revenue for the university library		2.57	1.06	Agree
Digitisation services generate revenue from external users and organisations.		2.39	1.04	Disagree

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Electronic document delivery services generate revenue for the library	**23**	2.43	1.03	Disagree
Online research support services generate revenue for the library		2.48	1.08	Disagree
Digital reference services generate revenue through fee-based consultations		2.26	1.01	Disagree
Cluster Mean		**2.49**	**1.04**	**Disagree**

The results indicate that the extent of revenue generated through digital services by system librarians is generally low. Fee-based access to electronic databases recorded the highest mean (2.83, SD = 1.02), followed by online information retrieval services (2.57, SD = 1.06), and both were rated Agree. However, respondents disagreed that digitisation services (Mean = 2.39, SD = 1.04), electronic document delivery (Mean = 2.43, SD = 1.03), online research support services (Mean = 2.48, SD = 1.08), and digital reference services (Mean = 2.26, SD = 1.01) generate revenue for the library. The cluster mean of 2.49 (SD = 1.04), which is slightly below the criterion mean of 2.50, resulted in an overall Disagree decision. The finding show that most digital library services have not yet been effectively utilised as significant sources of revenue generation this is connected with the work of Okoro and Olowunkere (2024) found that although ICT facilities and services have the potential to provide alternative sources of revenue for academic libraries in Nigeria, their effective utilisation for revenue generation was constrained by inadequate ICT maintenance and support, technological changes, and insufficient technical expertise among library personnel. The study recommended improved funding, ICT infrastructure and technical expertise to enhance revenue-generating activities. This finding supports the present study, which revealed that most digital library services have not yet been effectively utilised as significant sources of revenue generation.

Research Question 3: *What are the areas of contribution of system librarians in revenue diversification in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?*

What are the area of contribution of system librarians in revenue diversification?

Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
Online document delivery services.		2.61	1.03	Agree
Marketing of library services through digital platforms.		2.70	1.05	Agree
Digital research support services.	**23**	2.43	1.04	Disagree

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Development of fee-based online services.	2.52	1.08	Agree
Provision of specialised electronic information services.	2.73	0.84	Agree
Technical consultancy services	2.26	1.01	Disagree
Cluster Mean	**2.49**	**1.04**	**Disagree**

The results indicate that the areas of contribution of system librarians to revenue diversification are generally limited. The highest-rated area was the provision of specialised electronic information services (Mean = 2.73, SD = 0.84), followed by marketing of library services through digital platforms (Mean = 2.70, SD = 1.05), online document delivery services (Mean = 2.61, SD = 1.03), and development of fee-based online services (Mean = 2.52, SD = 1.08). These areas were all rated Agree. However, respondents disagreed that system librarians contribute through digital research support services (Mean = 2.43, SD = 1.04) and technical consultancy services (Mean = 2.26, SD = 1.01). The cluster mean of 2.49 (SD = 1.04) is slightly below the criterion mean of 2.50, resulting in an overall Disagree decision. This implies that contribution of system librarians to revenue diversification is low, although they make some contributions through specialized electronic information services, digital marketing, online document delivery, and fee-based online services this is related with the study of Nse and Agim (2019) examined alternative income-generation methods in Nigerian academic libraries. The study identified several income-generating activities, including internet access charges, printing and photocopying, reservation fees and other library services, but also reported factors that could hamper income generation.

Research Question 4: *What are the challenges affecting system librarians in sustaining revenue in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria?*

What are the challenges affect system librarians in sustaining revenue?

Statement	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
Inadequate funding for maintaining digital revenue-generating services.	**23**	3.30	0.88	Agree
Poor internet connectivity affects the sustainability of digital services		3.26	0.86	Agree
High cost of electricity and alternative power supply affects digital service sustainability		3.35	0.87	Agree
Inadequate technical skills among system librarians affect revenue sustainability		3.04	0.96	Agree

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Shortage of qualified system librarians affects the continuity of revenue-generating services	3.09	0.98	Agree
Obsolete computer hardware and software limit the sustainability of digital services	3.17	0.98	Agree
Cluster Mean	**3.20**	**0.92**	**Agree**

The results indicate that system librarians face substantial challenges in sustaining revenue-generating digital services. The most prominent challenge is the high cost of electricity and alternative power supply (Mean = 3.35, SD = 0.87), followed by inadequate funding for maintaining digital revenue-generating services (Mean = 3.30, SD = 0.88) and poor internet connectivity (Mean = 3.26, SD = 0.86). Respondents also agreed that obsolete computer hardware and software (Mean = 3.17, SD = 0.98), shortage of qualified system librarians (Mean = 3.09, SD = 0.98), and inadequate technical skills among system librarians (Mean = 3.04, SD = 0.96) affect the sustainability of revenue-generating services. The cluster mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.92), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, resulted in an overall Agree decision. This indicates that inadequate funding, poor internet connectivity, high electricity costs, inadequate technical skills, shortage of qualified personnel, and obsolete ICT infrastructure are major challenges affecting the ability of system librarians to sustain revenue-generating digital services in university libraries this has corroborated with the work of Shittu, Gbenu and Sessi (2025) examined the management and funding of university libraries in Nigeria. The study identified insufficient funding, lack of trained personnel, inability to provide adequate internet facilities, obsolete computer hardware, epileptic electricity supply, and inadequate staff strength as major challenges confronting university libraries. The authors recommended increased financial support and improved infrastructure to enable libraries to meet contemporary service demand.

H_{01}: *There is no significant relationship between the roles system librarians and revenue diversification in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.*

PPMC test on relationship between the roles system librarians and revenue diversification in university libraries in North-east, Nigeria.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Decision
Roles of system librarians in diversifying revenue	23	2.47	1.02	0.58	0.004	Sig.

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Revenue generated through digital services	2.49	1.04

The result shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between the roles of system librarians and revenue diversification in university libraries in Northeast Nigeria. The r-value of 0.58 indicates a moderate positive relationship, meaning that greater involvement of system librarians in revenue-diversification activities is associated with increased revenue generation through digital services. The mean scores were 2.47 (SD = 1.02) for the roles of system librarians and 2.49 (SD = 1.04) for revenue generated through digital services. Since the p-value of 0.004 is less than the 0.05 significance level, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the roles of system librarians and revenue diversification is rejected. This implies that the roles performed by system librarians have a significant relationship with revenue diversification in university libraries in Northeast Nigeria this has corroborate with the work of Madukoma, and Okoro (2026) examined entrepreneurship skills and venture creation in university libraries in South-West Nigeria. found that librarians' entrepreneurship skills had a significant positive influence on venture creation ($\beta = 0.343$, $p < 0.001$). Archiving and digitization services were among the most prevalent ventures, while consultancy and other information-based ventures were less developed.

Recommendations

1. University library management should increase the involvement of system librarians in revenue diversification by assigning them specific responsibilities in developing, managing and marketing digital revenue-generating services.
2. University authorities should provide adequate funding and modern ICT infrastructure to enable system librarians to effectively utilize digital library services as sustainable sources of revenue.

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3. System librarians should receive regular training in digital entrepreneurship, electronic information services and digital marketing to strengthen their capacity for revenue generation.
4. University libraries should improve internet connectivity and electricity supply and provide reliable alternative power sources to ensure continuous delivery of revenue-generating digital services.
5. University management should recruit qualified system librarians and ICT personnel while encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives such as digitization, technical consultancy and specialized electronic information services.

Conclusion

The study concludes that system librarians make some contributions to revenue diversification in university libraries in Northeast Nigeria, but their overall contribution remains relatively low. Although system librarians contribute through specialized electronic information services, digital marketing, online document delivery, fee-based electronic databases and other digital services, these activities have not been sufficiently developed and diversified to constitute substantial sources of alternative revenue for university libraries. The findings further indicate that the level of revenue generated through digital services is low, with only selected services such as fee-based access to electronic databases and online information retrieval recording relatively higher levels of utilization. The study also concludes that several factors constrain the ability of system librarians to sustain and expand revenue-generating digital services. Inadequate funding, poor internet connectivity, high electricity and alternative-power costs, inadequate technical skills, shortage of qualified personnel, and obsolete ICT infrastructure were identified as major challenges.

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