Self-sustaining library services through strategic fee-based initiatives: a roadmap for academic library administrators in Nigeria

*Olaseigbe, Yetunde Faith
Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria,
Jericho, Ibadan, Oyo State
Olasfaith2015@gmail.com

Ozonuwe, Opene Sunday
Crawford University Library, Igbesa, Ogun State.
openeozonuwe@crawforduniversity.edu.ng

Ogunojemite, Abosede Tola
Afe Babalola University Library, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State
Michealtola@yahoo.com

Rotimi, Racheal Ajibola
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.
ajibolarotimi964@gmail.com

Giwa, Ayokunle Oluwadamilola
Ekiti State Polytechnic, Isan-Ekiti, Nigeria.
ayokunlegiwa03@gmail.com

Ogundana, Ayomide Ayoola
Venite University,
Iloro-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.
ademeedey@gmail.com

Abstract
This study investigates the potentials of fee-based library services as a self-sustaining model for academic libraries in Nigeria, addressing funding challenges and enhancing service delivery. A review of existing literature and empirical findings reveals that strategic fee-based initiatives can generate revenue, promote innovation, and improve user satisfaction. The study identifies ten fee-based services, including digitization, research assistance, citation management, digital literacy training, virtual reference services, interlibrary loan services, study space reservations, technology lending, digital media conversion, and data management and curation. However, challenges such as poor planning, user resistance, and inadequate marketing hinder the effectiveness of fee-based services. To overcome these challenges, the study recommends market research, user education, targeted marketing, service quality improvement, accountability, and

user feedback mechanisms. By implementing these strategies, academic libraries in Nigeria can develop self-sustaining fee-based services, diversify revenue streams, and enhance their contributions to academic success and national development. This study provides a roadmap for library administrators to navigate the transition to fee-based services, ensuring the long-term sustainability of academic libraries in Nigeria.

Key words: Fee-based services, academic library, financial sustainability

Introduction

The library is a vital component of academic institutions, playing a crucial role in supporting teaching, learning, and research activities. Academic libraries are essential for fostering academic excellence, innovation, and knowledge dissemination in higher education institutions. As Idhalama and Krubu (2018) assert, the library is a crucial turning point that guarantees effective information gathering, archiving, retrieval, and distribution, all of which support academic endeavours. That is to say, the library might be considered the lifeblood of educational establishments, providing a variety of informative services that centre academic pursuits and leisure activities on it. The library is a centre of knowledge that draws in students, researchers, and academics alike. It is the centre of attention. Libraries may be thought of as being everywhere in society since they serve so many different kinds of institutions, groups, and communities. Their contribution to societal and national development, scholarship, economic growth, social inclusion, and community participation is substantial, and their position in education is only the beginning (Eyerinmene and Ekeruche, 2023). In order to achieve successful results, libraries are critical in meeting consumers' information demands. Libraries are the main suppliers of information, which is an essential resource for human survival. Information transmits knowledge, ignites change, bolsters concepts, and improves our comprehension of events, as such libraries could be said to be the foundation of knowledge distribution because they gather, process, store, retrieve, and distribute information for use.

However, Nigerian academic libraries have financial difficulties. As a result, their present financing falls short of what they require, making their future seem bleak (Igyuve and Ashaver, 2014; Onuoha and Chukwueke, 2020). Consequently, there is a chance that funding for academic libraries which may augment existing funding sources and guarantee the long-term sustainability of library services will be found in a self-sustaining fee-based service. Libraries might improve their services and collections, create new revenue sources, and better serve their patrons' needs by implementing fee-based programs.

This study aims to examine the possibility of fee-based library services to improve academic libraries' financial sustainability and self-sufficiency in Nigeria. Insights into the many fee-based services that may be provided, their impacts on library operations, and the difficulties libraries encounter in putting these services into place are the main goals of the study. In order to ensure academic libraries' long-term viability and capacity to adapt to the changing requirements of its patrons, the ultimate objective is to offer advice on how they may effectively integrate fee-based services into their operations.

Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of the study;

    1. To explore the concept of fee-based library services and their potential in enhancing financial sustainability and self-sufficiency in academic libraries in Nigeria.

    2. To identify the various fee-based services that can be offered by academic libraries, such as digitization services, research assistance, citation management, digital literacy training, virtual reference services, interlibrary loan services, study space reservations, technology lending, digital media conversion, and data management and curation.

    3. To examine the effects of fee-based services on self-sustaining library operations, including generating additional income, encouraging innovation, and providing value-added services.

    4. To investigate the challenges faced by academic libraries in implementing fee-based services, such as poor planning, lack of quality services, resistance from library users, inadequate expertise, and issues with accountability and remittance.

    5. To provide recommendations for academic libraries to overcome these challenges and successfully implement fee-based services.

Concept of Fee-Based Library Services

According to Igyuve and Ashaver (2014), fee-based services are those offered by libraries to defined user groups who may or may not be the major clientele of the institution for a cost. Examples of these services include research book loans and article delivery. In libraries, fee-based services are not new; users are always charged for the services they get. In addition to providing services to both library users and non-users, they allow libraries to generate a significant amount of additional revenue that is reinvested in the service with the goal of better pleasing customers.

    Fee-based services are seen by Josiah and Patrick (2023) as a series of steps required to guarantee that librarians continue to meet the needs of their clients and deliver the right value in return. Fee based services are the only way to ensure that sufficient funding is made available. A library's and its related information centres' responsibility to its users can only be adequately fulfilled with the provision of enough financial resources. Anyaoku (2012) is of similar view that one way to boost library funding and deal with the challenges brought on by technology improvements is to offer fee-based library services. In addition to generating a respectable amount of extra cash that is reinvested in the library service to try to better satisfy users, this enables libraries to offer services to both non-users and users.

    Additionally, by providing these fee-based services, libraries may be able to address the demands of its current patrons while also offering new and contemporary services. Additionally supporting this viewpoint, Akidi and Chukwueke (2019) believe that fee-based services will encourage library patrons to value the services they receive because cost is a relative concept. As such, the rationale for any fee-based service offered by the library is based on the understanding that in order to encourage patrons to part with their cash for specific services, the library must be innovative enough to enhance what is already offered and also roll out new offerings that will appeal to both current and prospective patrons and make them willing to pay. Therefore, fee-based services in academic libraries guarantee that the staff and the librarian always devise original and

creative approaches to the production and customisation of services and products, which will help to draw and keep patronage.

The following services are fee-based library services:

Josiah and Patrick (2023) listed various library services such as bindery, photocopying, internet/typesetting services, membership registration, clearance services, overdue charges, laminating services, Library bookshops, editorial work, publishing and printing.

1. **Bindery Services:** According to Aghauche, Obiamalu and Nduchekwe (2018) in order to ensure the lifetime of the physical collection and retain the integrity of the content, libraries provide bookbinding and conservation services to repair and preserve worn-out or damaged items.

2. **Photocopying Services:** Akalumhe, Bamgbose, Sulaiman and Gbenu (2019) indicated that libraries provide reproduction services, which allow users to make copies of publications such as articles, chapters, or snippets for study, personal use, or copyright compliance purposes.

3. **Internet/Typesetting Services**: Libraries provide internet connection and typesetting services, enabling users to access online resources, produce papers, and print items, so promoting research, learning, and productivity (Josiah and Patrick (2023)

4. **Membership Registration:** Harum, Khambari and Harum (2023) posited that libraries need users to register for membership, which allows access to library materials, services, and borrowing rights, while also simplifying user data management and circulation statistics.

5. **Clearance Services:** In order to ensure a seamless transition and preserve an accurate user record, libraries offer clearing services to attest that customers have returned all borrowed books, paid any overdue fees or penalties, and behaved with library policies (Harum, Khambari and Harum, 2023)

6. **Overdue Charges:** In order to discourage late returns, promote appropriate borrowing habits, and raise funds for library operations, libraries levy fines or penalties for overdue materials (Edewor, 2010)

7. **Laminating Services:** Obuah and Omehia (2022) revealed in their studies that libraries provide laminating services to strengthen, waterproof, and preserve papers, posters, and other items for long-term storage or exhibition.

8. **Library Bookshops:** Ajay and Madan (2016) stated that some libraries provide bookshops or sales rooms where users may buy books, journals, and other resources at reduced costs. This allows the libraries to earn extra money while giving users easy access to pertinent items.

9. **Publishing and Printing:** Libraries can offer publishing and printing facilities that let users create excellent publications in print and digital forms, such theses, dissertations, and research papers (Ajay and Madan, 2016)

Other Self-sustaining Fee-Based services that can be provided by the Academic libraries in Nigeria

1. Digitisation Services: Toyo (2017) referred digitisation services as the reformatting of print and paper materials in support of the Library's objective to preserve and offer access to its digital holdings. Libraries may digitise rare or delicate materials, making them available online while keeping the originals. Academic libraries may generate additional cash while both preserving and providing access to their unique collections by charging for digitisation services.

2. Research Assistance: A Research Assistant according to Stevano and Deane (2019) is a professional that helps with research projects by doing literature searches, managing data, and keeping files for project researchers. Libraries may provide in-depth research support, such as literature reviews, data analysis, and methodology advice. By providing research help services, academic libraries could create money through fee-based contracts with academics, departments, or other organisations, supporting the library's goal while mitigating expenses.

3. Citation Management: Mvula (2023) described citation management might be described as the instruments used to extract references/citations during the research writing process. As a result, rather of having to go back and track all of the sources used in an article after completion, citation tools assist can managing all bibliographical information while researching. This may save researchers time and energy while also keeping citations organised and easily accessible. Academic libraries can provide citation management tools and training to assist users in properly organising references and formatting citations. Libraries may create income by offering citation management software and training for a charge, while also helping users optimise their research workflow and reduce plagiarism. Libraries may also monetise their citation management expertise by offering premium products and training, charging customers for enhanced features, customisation, or personalised assistance. At the same time, fee-based citation management services would allow libraries to capitalise on their role in promoting academic integrity while also earning revenue through self-sustaining subscription-based access to citation tools and expert coaching.

4. Digital Literacy Training: Digital literacy can be characterised as the ability to utilise technology successfully, as well as the knowledge and skills required to do so securely and ethically (Tinmaz, Lee and Fanea-Ivanovici, 2022). Libraries may provide digital literacy training in areas such as information definition and articulation, information retrieval skills, search methods, information appraisal and usage, source evaluation, and basic computer skills. Academic libraries can generate significant revenue by charging for digital literacy training while also providing users with essential skills for effectively navigating and evaluating online information, allowing them to develop tailored training programs, offer premium services, foster strategic partnerships, leverage their expertise, and improve their reputation. This self-sustaining strategy enables libraries to supplement their budgets, attract new users, promote digital inclusion projects, diversify their revenue streams, and remain competitive in the rapidly changing academic market.

5. Virtual Reference Services: Mariano (2024) defined virtual reference services as a service that enables real-time online communication via email, chat, or instant messaging between librarians and library users/clients. Virtual reference services, which let users ask questions and get answers

remotely via chat, email, or video conferencing, could be provided by university libraries. By charging for different degrees of help and response times, as well as by offering tiered subscription options, academic libraries may make money from their virtual reference services.

6. Interlibrary Loan Services: Tella and Sidiq (2017) explained interlibrary loan as service that allows library users to borrow publications not accessible in their own library from other institutions, enabling collaboration and enhanced access to resources inside academic libraries. Libraries may engage in interlibrary loan programs, where they borrow resources from other libraries to meet user requests. Academic libraries can make money by charging users for borrowing items from other universities through interlibrary loan services, with prices ranging depending on the type of material, loan term, or delivery mode.

7. Study Space Reservations: Study space reservations at the library can be described as a service that lets users reserve specific study areas, like group study rooms, individual study rooms, or collaborative workspaces, for a predetermined amount of time (Deyemi, 2017). This helps to maximise the use of the library's resources, lessen traffic, and improve patron experience. Users of libraries may make reservations for quiet places, private study carrels, and group study rooms. By means of this effort, academic libraries may maximise the utilisation of their physical spaces and simultaneously create cash. Libraries have the option to charge for special study places, such silent areas or group study rooms, while providing basic study facilities at no cost. Furthermore, libraries have the option to charge extra for value-added services like preferential access to popular study areas, longer reservation times, or packages that include services with other library resources. This self-sustaining project may improve user experience, ease traffic, diversify funding sources for academic libraries, and foster an innovative and entrepreneurial culture. Libraries may further enhance their users' academic performance by investing in new resources, technology, and services through the monetisation of their study areas.

8. Technology Lending: In order to close the digital divide and advance fair access to information, academic libraries may consider offering technology lending services, which would involve lending out gadgets and equipment to patrons such as laptops, tablets, and portable Wi-Fi hotspots. These services could be supported and improved by subscription-based models, late fees, and rental fees.

9. Digital Media Conversion: Afolabi, Oyebola, and Komolafe (2024) referred digital conversions as services that convert various analogue and digital media formats into complete, digital, and electronic files. The group may use a range of techniques to edit, colour correct, enhance audio, and encrypt data as needed. Academic libraries can provide digital media conversion services, which involve converting VHS cassettes, CDs, and DVDs to digital forms for preservation and accessibility. Academic libraries can generate revenue while providing users with a valuable resource for preserving and accessing obsolete media formats, such as converting VHS tapes, CDs, or DVDs to digital files. They can also charge fees for services such as video editing, colour correction, audio enhancement, and file encoding to support library operations and self-sustainability.

10. Data Management and Curation: Chapman University (2024) states that data curation is the process of a third party reviewing an already-existing dataset, whereas data management is the

process of the data's producer or user managing the data at every step of the "data lifecycle." By increasing their usefulness, repeatability, and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) qualities a set of guidelines for data management and curation, data curation seeks to add value to datasets. Academic libraries may assist users in organising, storing, and preserving research data by providing data management and curation services. Academic libraries can generate additional revenue by offering value-added services like data sharing, reuse, and reproducibility support to enhance library initiatives and self-sustainability. These services can be provided in exchange for a fee and can be implemented as a fee-based data management and curation service.

The Effects of Fee-Based Services on Self-Sustaining Library Operations

According to Okeke (2013), Idhalama and Krubu (2018), and Josiah and Patrick (2023), fee-based library services have improved financial sustainability and self-sufficiency in libraries by generating additional income, encouraging innovation, and providing value-added services, thereby diversifying revenue streams and decreasing reliance on traditional funding sources. Fee-based library services might be transformed using cutting-edge technology. There is an enhanced potential to service a bigger customer, which generates revenue for the library and information broker. It also improves the effectiveness with which library services are delivered. i.e., fee-based services can successfully become the ideal channel for addressing current user demand for library services, producing revenue for the library, and developing new library services for all users. Services will assist in reimagining and reshaping the library of the future during this process. Thus, fee-based services are essential in libraries because they will foster innovation, which will in turn encourage users and create more options for better utilisation. Other includes;

- Fee based library services would enables employers to focus on serving primary users, as well as releasing staff from the strain of responding to outside user groups at the same time.
- The demand for fee-based services indicates the importance of library services. This allows management to better prepare for future demands, and when fees are levied, services are managed more effectively. Competition enhances efficiency. Increasing costs have made user fees necessary.
- Charging fees in libraries can increase the quality of service for patrons. Furthermore, value is typically given to any service with a price tag, thus fee-based services in libraries benefit both the institution and the community of users, providing prospects for increased utilisation.
- Fee-based services allow libraries to provide services to customers and generate additional revenue, which is reinvested to improve user satisfaction.

Challenges of Fee-based Initiatives in Academic Library services

The shift towards fee-based initiatives in Nigerian academic libraries has highlighted a range of challenges that threaten the effectiveness and sustainability of these services, warranting a closer examination of the issues at play. Akidi and Chukwueke (2019) investigated the effects of fee-based services on library service delivery at federal university libraries in Nigeria, specifically at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture in Umudike, Abia State. Findings revealed Poor planning and pricing strategies, a lack of quality services, and broad antagonism to the notion of

fee-based services were all cited as barriers to fee-based library services and their effectiveness in federal university libraries, according to the research.

The study conducted by Nuhu and Aliyu (2022) examined the fee-based electronic information services provided by federal university libraries in Nigeria, their impact on library services, the difficulties encountered by the libraries in implementing the services, and potential ways to overcome the difficulties. The University of Lagos library had difficulties while providing electronic information services that were fee-based. Among the difficulties include inadequate planning, a dearth of price guidelines, library patrons' unfavourable opinions of fee-based services, and problems with accountability and reimbursement.

Odunsanya, Afolabi, Ogunkeyede and Olaseigbe (2024) study examined the impact of fee-based library services on services delivery using two private universities in Osun State, as a case study. Findings revealed Fee-based services were hindered by absence of quality services in the library, gross resistance to the concept of fee-based services, inadequate expertise and skills for marketing library products and services, negative user's perceptions of fee-based services and user dissatisfaction.

The implications of these studies are that fee-based initiatives in academic library services in Nigeria face significant challenges, including:
- Poor planning and lack of clear pricing strategies
- Resistance from library users due to negative perceptions of fee-based services
- Inadequate expertise and skills for marketing library products and services
- Lack of quality services in the library
- Issues with accountability and remittance
- User dissatisfaction

These challenges hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of fee-based library services, making it difficult for libraries to generate revenue and improve service delivery.

Conclusion

To sum up, academic libraries in Nigeria may find it advantageous to introduce fee-based library services as a means of improving service quality, expanding their sources of income, and guaranteeing their long-term viability. However, thorough planning, efficient marketing, and attending to customer issues are necessary for success. Library administrators need to take a calculated strategy in order to do this, including user education, marketing, pricing plans that are clear, accountability, and service quality improvement. Libraries may secure a self-sustaining model that upholds their basic mission and values by doing this, so overcoming the obstacles that arise with fee-based programs. Finally, this study shows that fee-based library services can ensure the long-term viability of library services in Nigeria by improving user happiness and fostering sustainable academic library growth when implemented strategically.

Suggestions

1. In order to further enhance and improve fee-based library services, efforts should be made to lower the cost of these services, foster a strong user-library connection, and implement digital services.

2. In order to set the best prices for their services, libraries should carry out market research, taking into account variables including rivalry, target market, and service value. They should also set up clear price guidelines and adequately inform users of them.

3. Educate users about the advantages of fee-based services emphasising the ways in which they improve academic achievement, learning, and research. Workshops, seminars, and promotional materials can help achieve this.

4. Libraries can create focused marketing campaigns to draw attention to their paid services through email marketing, social media marketing, and on-campus advertising. To reach a larger audience, they should also work with student organisations and academic departments.

5. To guarantee that they satisfy users requirements and expectations, libraries should constantly evaluate and improve the services they provide. This entails making investments in infrastructure upgrades, hiring qualified personnel, and incorporating customer input into the creation of new services.

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